FOREWORD

International Women's Day is March 8. It's meant to celebrate the social, political, cultural, and economic achievements of women around the world, which are innumerable. But it's also a day when I think about the challenges women continue to face. Each year, in my reporting at CNBC, I tackle different issues on International Women's Day, and in 2019, I spent weeks reporting on board representation of the Russell 3000—the 3000 biggest publicly traded companies based in the United States. Parity by sex is a rarity. I was simply looking at the most baseline question: Do these companies have a single woman on their boards of directors?

We found that a whopping 457 of the 3000 companies had no female representation on their boards. Even well-known brands that often cater to female shoppers had no female representation on their boards.

The explanations are numerous, and the reasons aren't often satisfying. But one thing's for sure. Boards are, at the risk of sounding too colloquial, the usual suspects. Many retired executives take a board seat, then take on another, and their inclusion on a third, fourth, and seventh board becomes a self-perpetuating reality. These board members are mined from the highest ranks of government and business, corporate roles that are filled by men promoted from slightly more junior roles that are still, predominantly, filled by men.

The lack of women on major corporate boards is troubling. The absence of women in CEO roles is no better, and it isn't improving. These realities won't change unless we try to understand the societal context more deeply and find bold leaders who are willing to agitate for change.

Barbara Hackman Franklin is one of those leaders, and she knows the challenges women face better than anyone. She lived them in the 1960s, when the problem was more acute and a woman's role was, almost exclusively, in the home.

Barbara was brought to the White House by President Nixon and became the key figure working to follow his directive to recruit women for

high-level policy making positions in the federal government.

No president had ever done this before. For Barbara, this was a high-stakes endeavor, and she was operating without a net. She was expected to succeed where others had failed. Barbara was enlisted to break down the “women’s work is at home” thinking of numerous presidential advisers. In the end, she defied expectations and proved that she had the necessary fortitude to make this effort a success. She became visible, punched above her weight, enlisted many others to help in the effort, and traveled the country making speeches about the recruitment program and the need to advance women’s rights.

Barbara’s work in the White House created a watershed in terms of advancement for women. President Nixon’s initial assignment was to double the number of women in top jobs, which Barbara accomplished—and then went on to triple and nearly quadruple it.

This story resonates with me as a woman in the workforce, as a commentator on corporate America and politics, and as a working journalist. In fact, President Nixon’s focus and determination on this issue started with a simple question from a journalist at a press conference.

On February 6, 1969, Vera Glaser of the North American Newspaper Alliance rose and asked, “Mr. President, in staffing your administration, you have so far made about 200 high-level Cabinet and other policy position appointments, and of those only three have gone to women. Can you tell us, sir, whether we can expect a more equitable recognition of women’s abilities, or are we going to remain a lost sex?”

Powerful. Going directly to the nation’s top leader and asking a matter-of-fact question that would ultimately change the trajectory of hundreds, if not thousands, of women’s careers.

Glaser later recalled, “I had qualms as a journalist asking the President the kind of question that I did. And yet in simple justice, you had to ask it.” What followed was a series of efforts by the administration to focus on the issue that ultimately led to Barbara’s appointment and her momentous work.

I got to know Barbara through my work covering global business news for Bloomberg and CNBC. She has always been at the top of my list when seeking commentary and insights on topics shaping the market. She makes complex corporate governance issues and U.S.–China commercial relations accessible to business news audiences. Plus, as one of the first female graduates of the Harvard Business School, where there were just a dozen women in her class of 650, she has been a personal inspiration for me as well as countless women business leaders across the nation.

Barbara served as an original commissioner for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and as Secretary of Commerce in the administration of President George H. W. Bush, when she led a special mission to China in 1992 to restart commercial relations and was the first cabinet officer there following the events of June 1989 in Tiananmen Square. Additionally, she has served on the board of directors for fourteen public companies, often as the lone woman for years; as chair of the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD); as chair emerita of the Economic Club of New York; and as president of her own international business consulting firm.

Even with such a rich and global business career, it is her work at the White House that stands out to me. Barbara was at the forefront of advancing women's rights and opening numerous doors to women working in business and government.

It is not a stretch to say that her groundbreaking work in the Nixon White House helped my career.

Barbara's story deserves a bigger platform and more exposure. More young business and government leaders should know what their world was like in the past and appreciate that a lot of pioneering work was undertaken to create an environment where women can and do seek a range of opportunities and senior leadership positions. Thanks to the efforts of Barbara and others, the cultural, economic, and political accomplishments of women are many. And yet, as my reporting on corporate boards shows, there is much more work to be done and many barriers to break.

The year 2020 marks the hundredth anniversary of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which guaranteed and protected women's constitutional right to vote. It is fitting that The Pennsylvania State University Libraries should be reissuing *A Matter of Simple Justice: The Untold Story of Barbara Hackman Franklin and a Few Good Women* not only to commemorate the Nineteenth Amendment but also to ensure that the next generations know her trailblazing story.

I believe that this story of Barbara Franklin and a few good women will connect with dynamic global business leaders and young women and men interested in women's history and will, most importantly, keep us moving forward in pursuit of equality.

Sara Eisen
CNBC Anchor