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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3qd4123g>

Journal

JOURNAL OF WOMENS HISTORY, 29(1)

ISSN

1042-7961

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Publication Date

2017

Peer reviewed

Whiggish Thinking about Transnational Women's History and Queer History
Leila J. Rupp

Thank you all. I am incredibly honored and, to tell the truth, a little embarrassed. I even feel like a fraud, something that I expect is more familiar to women than to men in our profession. There are so many people, even just in this room, who deserve this honor more than I. Nevertheless, I want to thank Leigh Ann for organizing this session, Francisca, Joanne, Judy, and Susan for such deeply smart, moving, funny, and kind words, and everyone in the audience for coming.

I am really happy that the panelists took the opportunity to say so much to say about important developments in the field of women's history. I am reminded of a story I told in my inaugural lecture as a full professor at Ohio State. A Germanic dean instituted the practice of requiring a celebratory public lecture on the occasion of promotion. Mine was called "Outsider as Insider: The Challenge of Women's History," borrowing my title from Peter Gay's book on Weimar culture and subtitle from Gerda Lerner.¹ (As an aside, the most memorable thing about the event was that, at the end, the dean said, "Thank you, Verta." I guess being a lesbian is never far from some people's minds.) Anyway, I talked about what I called my first feminist protest. It was in second grade, when we were celebrating Thanksgiving by dressing up as pilgrims and Indians. I was in the Indian group, and girl Indians were supposed to make dresses out of brown paper dry cleaning bags, which those of you old enough will remember preceded the clear plastic ones. Before anyone called me "stylish" (thank you, Joanne), I was a tomboy used to wearing my brother's hand-me-downs, and I had a full brave outfit at home. So I insisted that I should be able to wear it. Leaving aside the settler colonial aspects of the occasion, which I didn't complain about or even notice during my protest, what struck me as a grown-up feminist is that I didn't insist that we should all be able to come in our preferred gender of presentation, although

in 1987 I wouldn't have used that language. It was a very individualistic protest, and the point I made in my lecture was that feminism was much more than that.

So in the spirit of feminism as a collective effort to remedy systemic injustice, I want to make this a celebration of the women's movement and the queer movement, without which we would not be here today. I also want to acknowledge some of the people who have shaped my career: my mentors at Bryn Mawr, Barbara Miller Lane and Mary Maples Dunn; colleagues and friends at Ohio State, UC Santa Barbara, and beyond; my students, so well represented here by Susan Freeman; and especially Verta Taylor, my partner—as Susan says, my family—who couldn't be here today but who in our collaboration across history and sociology has taught me how to be a historian of the present and who has brought joy to my life for 37 years. If she were here, she would probably insist that I call her my “wife” just to see me wince.

The things I am most proud of being a part of that the panel has talked about today are the development of transnational women's history and the burgeoning of queer history, both of which are grounded in social movement activism. When I was applying for jobs in 1976 with a dissertation in comparative German and U.S. history, my rejection letters would say “comparative history is wonderful but we are looking for a German historian” or “comparative history is wonderful but we are looking for a U.S. historian.” I feel fortunate that, in 1976, Ohio State advertised for a women's historian working in either European or U.S. history, not to mention that I got the job. As Susan alludes to, the women's history program at Ohio State was comparative by definition from the beginning, something that I think set us apart at an early date. I have been saying for years that comparative and transnational history is the wave of the future, and I think now the wave is really coming ashore, as the work of Francisca and Judy attests. Francisca is right about the quite astonishing development of research on transnational feminism in the last decades, and she's right, too, about the importance of the Women's International

Democratic Federation as the leading transnational women's organization in the immediate postwar period. In fact, it now strikes me as ironic that, in the sentence Francisca quotes about linking pre-1945 activism to what seems the emergence of transnational feminism in the 1970s, I glossed over the very decades that Verta and I recovered for the U.S. women's rights movement.

Queer history, too, has come into its own since my first forays in that field, both in the sense of an explosion of research and the gaining of legitimacy within the university. I think we all remember Marc Stein's survey that found that historians writing dissertations on queer topics were not getting hired in tenure-track positions in history departments in the U.S.² I know we are suspicious of Whiggish progress narratives, but I think things are beginning to change on that front. For a long time, women's historians had little chance to be hired in non-women's history positions, and that is no longer the case. And now there are actually queer historians in some history departments! (Please note, Joanne, that is my one exclamation point. And let me also take this opportunity to set the record straight: Joanne did a lot more to make *Sapphistries* a better book than dampen my enthusiastic punctuation.) The field of queer history has contributed so much to the discipline, and I am heartened by the fact that Susan's and my book, *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*, is eliciting such positive responses from those teaching U.S. history at both the high school and university levels.³ And even from general readers.

These developments represent real change, I think. I am an optimist, as Joanne points out, but in order to disrupt the progress narrative, I want to end on a more sobering note. As someone working in a department of feminist studies, I am concerned, as are others, that history is not foundational to the field in the ways that I think it should be. If asked what the central texts in the field are, I fear that scholars and students would not come up with works of historical scholarship. I'm not entirely sure why this is, but I hope it can be remedied. I hope we can

ensure that the new generations of women's/gender/feminist/sexuality studies scholars see history as fundamental to their work. We have so much to offer those seeking to understand the intersections of gender, race, class, disability, and other vectors of difference in the present and working on behalf of social justice in the future. I take heart from the fact that everyone on this panel does what Judy describes so well: "foregrounding the importance of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship for historical research and the importance of historical scholarship for feminist theorization." So maybe I have no reason to worry.

Thank you all again. Since Susan has outed me as a Tina Turner fan, let me just end by saying, you're simply the best.

¹Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); “The Challenge of Women’s History” was, if I remember correctly, the title of Gerda Lerner’s contribution to a mimeographed series of papers produced and sold by Sarah Lawrence. The catalogue of Lerner’s papers at the Schlesinger Library indicate that it was the title of an Aspen Institute lecture in 1977.

² Marc Stein, “Committee on Lesbian and Gay History Survey on LGBTQ History Careers,” June 2001, <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2001/0105/0105aff1.cfm>. See also Marc Stein, “Crossing Borders: Memories, Dreams, Fantasies, and Nightmares of the History Job Market,” *Left History* 9 (Spring/Summer 2004): 119–39, and Marc Stein, “Post-Tenure Lavender Blues,” 2006, <http://hnn.us/articles/19941.html>.

³ Leila J. Rupp and Susan K. Freeman, eds., *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).