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RESHAPING HISTORY

The Intersection of Radical and Women's History

Iris Berger, Stephen Brier, Ellen Carol DuBois, Jean H. Quataert, David Serlin, Rhonda Y. Williams, and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Participants

Eileen Boris, Moderator

Edited and Transcribed by Kate Weigand

This conversation, commemorating twenty-five years of the Journal of Women's History, was convened as a joint project of the Coordinating Council for Women in History (CCWH) and MARHO: the Radical Historian's Organization. Preparation for the panel discussion began with an email exchange among some of the participants. Iris Berger and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu were unable to participate in the panel discussion at the American Historical Association (AHA) conference in 2012, but their email comments are included here, as are other contributions from the preliminary conversation. The AHA panel in Chicago brought together major senior and junior scholars whose work encompasses both radical and women's history to address the intersections of the two fields. All of the participants were asked to consider questions including: How did the origins of the fields connect? How have their trajectories converged or diverged across time? What have been the crucial developments in radical history, in women's history, and in radical women's history? What might the future hold for radical women's history?

—The Special Issue Editors

Eileen Boris, Moderator: We're bringing together the unhappy marriage of radical history and women's history, or the happy marriage, or maybe it's a divorce. Maybe they're just living in sin. Or maybe they're both women.

David Serlin: They're cohabitating.

Eileen Boris: They're cohabitating. We're going to hear first from all our panelists about their histories with radical history and women's history.

Iris Berger: My experience with women's history began in the political turbulence of the late 1960s and early 1970s. At that time, not only did women's history seem an integral part of radical history, but the boundaries between historical scholarship and feminist and antiwar activism were

extremely porous. At the same time that women graduate students at the University of Wisconsin were meeting to discuss the ways we felt discriminated against and not taken seriously in the department we were also joining consciousness-raising groups, and small groups of women students were beginning to do their own research on women's history. These projects seemed integrally connected. I still have a copy somewhere of the pioneering pamphlet on American women's history written by Nancy Schrom Dye, Ann Gordon, and Mari Jo Buhle. What began as a pamphlet became a widely published article which—important for our purposes here—was first published in *Radical America* in 1971.

In these years, young historians of Africa saw ourselves through the anti-imperialist lenses of the broader movement against the Vietnam War (as part of an effort to decolonize African history that had formerly been written from a European perspective). Restoring African voices and African resistance movements to the center stage of history and (especially for many of us from Wisconsin) researching and reclaiming the pre-colonial history of Africa as proper history seemed very much a part of the radical project of writing "history from the bottom up." But at this time, although there were a few pioneering feminist doctoral students in the U.S. beginning to research African women's history (Peg Strobel at UCLA, Claire Robertson at Wisconsin), my awareness of the growing movement of women's history was mainly through the burgeoning scholarship on the U.S. and Europe.

I still recall some of the talks on women's history in the early 1970s that sparked my interest in the field: a moving presentation by Alice Kessler-Harris on three Jewish organizers of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) at a women's history conference at Binghamton University and Mary Ryan's talk on attitudes toward women in the U.S. at a Radical Historians conference at Lehman College. (Again, most of us there perceived this pioneering research on women's history as an integral part of radical history.) My own first women's history presentation, for a student audience, was not on my own research, but a comparative talk on women and revolutionary movements that borrowed shamelessly from Sheila Rowbotham's stunning new book *Women, Resistance and Revolution*.¹

My awakening to the women's history implications of the dissertation I was near finishing—a comparative reconstruction of a connected set of religious movements in pre-colonial East Africa—came upon me suddenly as one of those moments of feminist awakening that seems astonishing in retrospect. Although these groups were predominantly female, I was focused mainly on the complex historical reconstruction of how they became part of the legitimizing ideologies of a succession of kingdoms in Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. In the absence of women's history as a recognized historical field, I had overlooked the significance of their origins as grassroots public

healing rituals appealing mainly to women. Armed with this realization, I began to see my research in a wholly different way.

As African women's history developed as a coherent field during the 1970s and early 1980s, the close ties with radical history remained—in a focus on resistance and women's agency, and strong connections with Marxist-feminism, history from below, and underdevelopment theory. With the UN Decade for Women and the emergence of women and development as an academic field, African women's historians also developed a strong interest in international and transnational connections among women.

During this time, when I was deeply involved in feminist and women's studies organizing and the anti-apartheid movement, the film *Union Maids*, about three women labor organizers from Chicago CIO unions in the 1930s came out.² This optimistic, moving film had great personal resonance for me since I had grown up in a left-wing family in Chicago with strong ties to the labor movement. The inspiration of the film, part of the flourishing interest in women's labor history, launched me on a new project on women's and trade union organizing in twentieth-century South Africa—a movement remarkable at times for its efforts to transcend the country's racial divide. I began this research at a particularly opportune moment—when a resurgence of strikes among black workers forced the government to legalize African trade unions for the first time in the country's history leading to the emergence of a vibrant, politicized union movement. This project also launched me into an intellectual world of more rigid Marxism and Marxist feminism than among most left historians in the U.S.

The professional and personal connections between radical historians in South Africa and their U.S. counterparts during the 1980s converged in a special double issue of the *Radical History Review* in 1990. These South Africans, predominantly white and trained in British universities, were energized by the wave of strikes that began in 1973, and the Soweto uprising of 1976. The *RHR* volume, published in 1991 as *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices*, covered a wide range of issues ranging from popular struggles and political movements, cultural protests, state repression, and capitalism and political economy, to the transformation of peasant societies and conflicting visions of race and class.³ Curiously, however, since one of the South African editors was a pioneering feminist scholar, there is not a single article on women's history. The book came out at the turning point in African women's history. Within a few years many historians were turning away from politics and political economy to focus more explicitly on gender, sexuality, and reproduction, although the context of colonialism meant that most of these newer studies never completely abandoned the "radical" themes of earlier scholarship.

Judy Tzu-Chun Wu: I became a historian because I was arrested in college. Or perhaps, I chose to be arrested because I believed in the power of history and radicalism.

I am a member of the 1.5 Asian American generation. I was born in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, but at the age of six, I immigrated with my family to Spokane, Washington. Although I was not aware of it at the time, I was part of a mass migration of Asian people in the U.S. after the 1965 Immigration Act eliminated nationally and racially discriminatory entry quotas. And like other immigrant families, mine experienced downward mobility but utilized ethnic and kinship networks to survive. I grew up helping my parents run labor-intensive businesses, first a Chinese restaurant, then a hamburger joint, and finally a convenience store. When I left to attend college at Stanford University, my parents wanted me to major in pre-med. I became a student activist instead.

It began with a racially motivated attack against the African American theme dorm, a residence hall where students of all backgrounds could learn about black history and culture. Even though I was not living there, the attack reminded me of the harassment and discrimination that my family experienced in the predominantly white community of Spokane. I decided to do something that could help change the racial environment at Stanford. I worked with people of varying backgrounds—white, black, Chicano/a, Native American, Asian American, and international students—to advocate for more courses that examined race and inequality. We also called for more institutional support for ethnic student service centers so that students of color might feel more at home on the college campus. I believed that if *all* students were exposed to the diversity of American society, they might learn to treat each other with more respect and hopefully work towards creative solutions to remedy inequalities. We met with numerous faculty, staff, and administrators, submitted petition after petition, organized rallies, and eventually decided to occupy the president's office as an act of civil disobedience. We were arrested. And as a result, we succeeded in persuading the university to hire the first professors in Asian American Studies, conduct a review of the African American Studies Program, provide more funding and a full-time dean for the Chicano Student Center, and reexamine the eligibility of Native Hawaiians for affirmative action programs.

My baptism to student activism occurred in the late 1980s. This decade could be viewed as an era of conservative ascendancy, dominated by the presidencies and politics of Ronald Reagan and the first George Bush. However, it was also the time of the Rainbow Coalition, the anti-Apartheid movement, the debates about whether western civilization should form the core of cultural literacy, and the final push for Redress and Reparations for Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II. One of

my strongest memories from this time is that of one of my friends, a petite Japanese American woman, sitting daily in the university plaza, sometimes by herself and sometimes with others, gathering signatures to petition Congress for an apology and financial compensation for racially designating a group of people as enemies of the state. All of these movements inspired the political activism that I engaged in at Stanford. The same activists who taught me and encouraged me to protest had worked together in these campaigns, forging ties of trust, building coalitions, articulating critiques of racial injustice and intransigence, and developing mass mobilization strategies. Even though gender was not an explicit part of our political dialogue, I recognized that the leaders and supporters of our movements tended to be women, particularly women of color. They not only organized behind the scenes but they also occupied the podium and took the mike. They were political visionaries and movement activists. They taught me that even though our movement had no real power, we had the might of right; we had moral justice on our side.

These events, which occurred over half of my lifetime ago, fundamentally shaped my intellectual, political, and personal development. As I was learning to challenge the university as an institution and question the given canon of knowledge, I became interested in becoming a scholar myself. Specifically, I was attracted to history and wanted to help recover the experiences, voices, and consciousness of previously understudied people. This entailed not just conducting research at existing archives but also creating archives by conducting oral histories and requesting access to personal papers that were often squirreled away in closets, attics, and basements. Influenced by feminist studies scholars, particularly Estelle Freedman, I embraced what is now conceptualized as intersectionality, a form of analysis that recognizes how categories of social difference and inequality (like race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) are constructed, interconnected, and mutually defined.

These methodological approaches combined with my experiences as a 1.5 generation Asian American and an activist to influence my current study on the international travels of American anti-war activists during the U.S. War in Viet Nam. This work, titled *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism in the Vietnam Era*, seeks to contribute to the scholarship on radical history and women's history in three main ways.⁴

First, I am interested in emphasizing the contingent and deeply personal process of politicization and coalition formation. What inspires people to become political activists? Why do they believe that their actions can make a difference? And how do diverse individuals negotiate their differences and join in a common cause? A focus on politicization and coalition formation as a result of international travel during the U.S. War in Viet Nam contributes to

the recent efforts to reinterpret the long decade of the "1960s." Early scholarship on social activism of the 1960s tended to celebrate the civil rights and student movements during the beginning and middle years of the decade as the "good sixties." In contrast, these works portray the end of the decade as the "bad sixties," characterized by violence, fragmentation, and decline as racial, gender, and sexual separatist movements emerged.⁵ However, more recent studies by Max Elbaum, Daryl Maeda, Lorena Oropeza, Laura Pulido, and Cynthia Young point to the rich political fermentation and coalition building efforts during the latter part of the decade with the emergence of a "Third World Left."⁶ This formation developed mainly among people of color in the United States who built alliances with one another and turned to socialist movements in the Third World for political role models. My book illuminates how fragmentation coexisted with fermentation. The process of forming coalitions across various boundaries was a difficult one. I try to examine both the hopes and the frustrations of this process, believing that the pain of conflict and divisiveness does not negate the power of political inspiration and community.

Second, I attempt to foreground the role that Asia played in inspiring American forms of radicalism during the 1950s through the 1970s. I originally conceived of this project in three parts: the first focusing on the role of Gandhi and the non-violent anti-colonial movement in India on the Civil Rights movement; the second on the infusion of Asian spirituality among the Beats and the American counterculture; and the third on socialist and decolonizing Asia on the New and Third World Left. Although I decided to focus the study eventually on Viet Nam, I still hope that my work will help illuminate how Asian culture, politics, and individuals inspired American political imageries. Too often, the American racial landscape, in popular as well as scholarly depictions, is conceived dichotomously in black and white. I hope to help expand this vision both racially and geographically by considering how Asian nations, movements, and individuals fostered internationalism among Americans of varying backgrounds.

Finally, my study utilizes both gender and women's historical methodologies to analyze the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of both male and female activists. I examine how intimate interactions, including romantic and sexual encounters, affected relationships among American activists and with their Asian hosts. I also analyze how concepts of gender served as powerful metaphors to understand the relationship between nations and between people from diverse backgrounds. Lastly, I explore how women of varying nationalities, generations, political ideologies, and racial backgrounds worked together and against one another to foster a global female antiwar movement. The concept of international sisterhood

has been heavily criticized for reifying cultural, class, and racial differences in the name of female universalism.⁷

Instead of focusing on the power and misperceptions of white middle-to-upper class women from the “West,” I examine instead how “Third World” women, particularly those from the global South as well as women in the United States, fostered and deployed female internationalism in order to cultivate a global anti-war movement. An analysis of the dialogue across geographical, racial, and cultural borders reveals that a rich and diverse array of political discourses could be transmitted and debated between women of varying backgrounds.

Even as I study the past, I look forward to the future. The current economic downturn, the resurgence of the right, and the never ending war against terrorism have generated imaginative and unexpected forms of protest. Even though my activism today mainly takes place in the classrooms and through scholarship, I enjoy finding new ways to communicate to a new generation intrigued by activism. During the last several years, I have given students the option of creating digital narratives for a class assignment, and I have even learned how to do this myself. These digital narratives are short multimedia stories that utilize narration, visual images, and music to tell meaningful stories. In my pieces, I interweave personal experiences, historical analysis, and political perspectives. As a historian of gender, race, and radicalism, I hope that these stories of the past will help inspire the imagination of those seeking to create a better future.⁸

Jean H. Quataert: I am probably among the oldest of the colleagues on the panel. In fact, I’m a pioneer in German women’s history. When I studied history there was no women’s history, and now, as the co-editor of the *Journal of Women’s History*, I find myself coming full circle. And it’s been a real pleasure. I enjoy tremendously the work I do with my colleagues for the *Journal*. Even though it’s a lot of meticulous work, it’s exciting and rewarding.

What I wanted to do was to start somewhat more personally, and then I have perhaps an overview and substantive points to make. But I wanted to talk a little bit about my own experiences, since I studied history when there was no women’s history, and address what led me to become a women’s historian. Some of it is relatively self-evident, and I don’t have to repeat it in great detail. But when I studied history it was in the late 1960s and these were extraordinary times. I think we have to always bear in mind—and I would hope we do this here on the panel—that we need to take into account the kinds of broader contexts within which we work. We historians are engaged individuals, engaged in the world, and I think as the wider

political/geo-political context changed, the kinds of work we do changed. But for me, I was at Columbia in 1968; I closed Wilshire Boulevard in 1970. These were some of the highlights of my political life, let me tell you. They stand indelibly in one's heart, and I have watched much of this social ferment move from the United States to other places in the world. I don't speak now, necessarily, of the local level. There's a lot of very interesting radical work and organizing going on locally. But certainly until very, very recently, much of this kind of major social protest migrated outside of the United States. Now with the Occupy movement this might be changing. That certainly has been quite heartening.

So I was very much involved in early feminism and I spent my first decades of my career at the University of Houston—Clear Lake where, it may surprise you, the campus had the first women's studies program in Houston, Texas—the only one in Houston, Texas—for more than a decade. Rice University wouldn't have anything to do with the new emerging field and the same was true at the central campus of the University of Houston. But at the University of Houston—Clear Lake these were wonderful exciting times because I was able to develop and sustain tremendous and deep ties with women in the community. These community women were extremely interested in women's history and all of the academic work that was giving rise to the field. It's one of the few times that, instead of speaking to a group of academic as we do typically, I was interacting frequently with committed activists. Mostly, interestingly in Houston at the time, there were a good number of lesbian women and gay men who were active and involved in campus life, attending workshops, lectures, and events. There was a way in which this community enthusiasm, this community commitment to feminism and the challenges of the feminist perspectives, really impacted my work. It was sustaining. I understood that there was an audience which was extremely interested in the particular project of feminist revisioning of history.

So having anchored women's history in the wider social ferment and in the emergence of feminism around the United States, I want to do something else. It's one of the themes that I'd like to sustain as we move along, and that is to speak as a *historian* because we all ended up being historians. I think that's a very critical point to bear in mind. In my case, however, it wasn't at all clear. I studied international relations. I was planning to enter the Foreign Service until I recognized that there was no way I could represent the United States government given my hostility to much of U.S. policy, and specifically the Vietnam War. So that was out. And what happened to me is that I was increasingly drawn to the study of history and, in thinking about this panel, I was trying to figure out why that was. I certainly know what I did not like. As an undergraduate, I read a lot of political science and inter-

national relations theory, and the model-building didn't appeal to me. I'm speaking now simply on a personal level. But there was something about the openness of history, the fact that you could ask a whole range of questions that was personally appealing and, I think, has remained so. Even its narrative structure, which more recently has come under sustained theoretical critique, even if now it is being slowly rehabilitated, appealed to me at the time. Many of us who were part of that exciting era were simply enthralled by history as a discipline, its questions and purview, and sustained by its relevance to social movements and change outside the academy. But it was the limitations of the discipline, its omissions and unrealized claims that became increasingly evident to us. So my moment of conversion came as a historian. And I'll never forget it. I was in the New York Public Library; at the time I was a graduate student at Columbia University, and I was doing a master's thesis on the so-called German revolution (1918–1919). And I went to read contemporary newspapers. I delved into the primary sources and I saw references to the women's movement—*die Frauenbewegung*. And I thought "What? I'm a diligent hard-working graduate student. I read every single historical study of German Social Democracy and had never heard of the women's movement." So what I understood was this stark discrepancy between the primary sources and publications in "history." I mean we now know it—but this was a moment of awakening for me. It was that particular moment when I understood the biases and limitations of history-writing. I spent, as I just indicated, my first decade and a half addressing these issues in Houston, Texas. To write women's history at the time you had to confront the dominant conceptual framework of history and the way history was structured. You had to take it on. You couldn't write it otherwise.

This is where the audience was so sustaining. The women and men who came to the events at Clear Lake were equally enthused about the kinds of conceptual issues we were dealing with. So this wasn't just talking to my colleagues in Clear Lake but rather bringing up the new history writing at public lectures, seminars, and events. Much of the early discussions involved precisely debates about matters of what constitutes significance in history, of notions of turning points, of chronology, of finding and reading primary archival evidence, of agency. I remember my colleague Marilyn Boxer—we were talking about what are the great inventions of the world—and she said to me, "Vulcanization of rubber in the 1840s because that allowed for condoms." Absolutely! It was the beginning of women taking control over reproduction. But it's not the steam engine! [laughter] You know that no one talked about the vulcanization of rubber. So the point always stayed in my mind. These discussions were also serious business. These new realizations were connected to a sense of change, a commitment to the possibility of change, and history became one critical medium to begin to think about

and bring about change that would impact contemporary society and shake up power and material and cultural relations.⁹

There was a lot at stake, too, because many historians in the profession (both men and women working across time and space) found the questions and propositions raised by women's historians novel and a challenge to established historical research practices. At the outset, it was not at all easy for women's historians to find jobs or get tenure or feel able to write on topics that were meaningful to them. There were lively but heated debates and much was at stake—personally and professionally.

I still maintain that the first phases of women's history and radical history were pretty much intertwined. Both inquiries radically challenged the dominant interpretations in the field and continue to do so but the point has to be historicized—that is, it has to be analyzed at distinct moments of time. I have thought about some of the major chronological markers, which I hope to bring up as we move along. I would say, over time there has been a separation of the two fields. But I want to stress the radical strands—this is my main argument—that the radical strands of women's history have continued to radically challenge the dominant interpretations in the field of history. These projects remain committed to fundamentally democratic, feminist, and egalitarian principles. And I can trace out—even if there has been a lot of changes in the field—that history. I would even argue there has been a consistent strand of radical challenge by women's historians in light of what I see as the mid-1980s gender challenge to the field. I am not here to rehash the early tensions between women's history and gender history. As I understand it, although not the first to call for an historical study of gender, Joan W. Scott's mid-1980s article in *The American Historical Review* tapped a serious unease among many women's historians.¹⁰ The field was in an epistemological crisis; the great expectations for radical change in researching and writing history in many ways were not happening. In her historical moment, Scott helped explain this stasis in light of what seemed to be the self-evident validity of the insights, the exemplary empirical research, and the success in grappling with new methods of doing history. Yet all of this work was not really changing the field; it was creating parallel fields of inquiry. The cumulative effect of the launching of gender, however, was an extraordinary vibrancy in the field (eventually of women's and gender history), advancing the methodological challenges in reappropriating agency within discursive and institutional constraints, and rethinking fundamental categories of analysis, such as "women" and identity, among others.¹¹

I think we have to be historians in making the argument and recognize that there were phases in which women's history was at the forefront of, and other times when it has taken a backseat in, radical critique. Women's history pushed radical critiques in its early phases for sure. In one of the

later phases, for example, the recent trend toward transnational history, the methodological challenges of women's and gender history have helped contribute to this paradigm shift, which works to erode all manner of borders and boundaries—geographically and conceptually. Gender challenges were part of the disciplinary ferment that has helped propel transnational and global history to new prominence. Equally true, there has been less of an intersection between research on women, gender, and sexuality and the new work on global interconnections that challenges the older Eurocentric world history narrative than one might expect. And I think it is very important for women's and gender historians now to interject our own theories, methods, insights, and interests into transnational and global inquiries, which is beginning to happen.¹²

Stephen Brier: When I got the email asking me to join this panel somewhat late I thought that the person who sent me the email had meant to communicate with my daughter Jennifer Brier, the acting chair of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Being the second best women's historian in the family, and maybe not even the second, I'm going to try to draw some connections to some of the things that Jean spoke about. Jean and I went to graduate school at the same time and in the same place, so I can attest to the fact that there was no women's history at UCLA in the late 1960s and early 1970s in terms of the way graduate students were taught. I was trained as a classic sort of labor historian. And as a labor historian I actually worked on and in a very male-dominated sub-field in labor history, which I still do: coal miners. There were not too many women even close to, let alone in, the coal mines until the twentieth century, other than as wives and daughters of male coal miners on strike. And so my connection to women's history, which didn't exist when I was a graduate student, was very much a product of coming to New York City in the mid-1970s and joining the *Radical History Review* and the MARHO editorial collective. And what's interesting to me in looking back at that early history of the *Review* (it started out as a newsletter in 1973) is that it was very much put together in part to challenge the kind of dominant ideology that controlled the history profession. People defined themselves as radical historians in large measure because they wanted to see themselves as doing something other than history that, as someone at the time noted, reeked of "bourgeois professionalism." [laughter]

And that was the kind of thing we said we were fighting against. But, that said, I think that what was interesting about *Radical History Review* in those days was the focus on the first word in the title. What made the *Review* radical? And I think it's really worth remembering what was, in fact, radical in the mid-1970s. I think it was radical for three reasons. One,

because the *Review* and all the things we did around the *Review*—including forums, lectures, and presentations—privileged popular experience and agency within the historical process. We were looking to change the subject of history, which is very much what radical history is about and what women's history is about. Second, it was radical because it was committed to finding non-traditional forms and venues, including non-academic ones, for the presentation of historical ideas and information. And finally, it saw historical inquiry as needing to serve the larger cause of human liberation. And it seems to me that those three core principles, which is how I define what was radical in the mid-1970s, very much built a connection between the women (and some men) who were doing early women's history, and those of us who were doing radical history. So from the very first issue of the *RHR*, which included a poem by a radical feminist, to the second issue which had a long essay by Mari Jo Buhle on the sad and far too gradual ascent of women's history in the United States, the *Review* has always at least touched on issues related to women's history. It didn't do it consistently. It hardly saw itself the way *History Workshop* did in the U.K., which defined itself very actively as a socialist feminist organization. *RHR* didn't do that. And yet there were always connections being built. That project of radical history—those three particular approaches and beliefs that I described earlier—opened the *Review* and its editors in these years to lots of new and innovative approaches to changing the subject of history, and to changing the way it was presented within the academy and beyond.

One of the things we did early in the *Review* was build theme issues, and those theme issues had particular names. One of the theme issues that I first worked on was the public history issue, and that became the first publication that Roy Rosenzweig, Sue Benson, and I did in our *Critical Perspectives on the Past* series at Temple University Press.¹³ The second *RHR* theme issue was on sexuality and history and that became *Passion and Power*, published originally in 1989, which, I would argue, remains one of the most important collections on gender history and on women's history that has come out.¹⁴ It's well over twenty years old. So the *Review* has had a kind of an abiding connection to women's history, even when it hasn't always, as I noted in looking through the first three years of *RHR*, published that many specific articles on women's history. That lack of women's history articles changed after the mid-1980s. I think the editorial collective started to be much more sensitive to questions of gender balance and racial balance in terms of how the collective was constituted and what we were publishing in the *Review*. We became aware of the dominance of radical white men, like myself, and that really lessened from the mid-1980s on. And I think what happened is that the *Review* has continued to evolve over the past two decades, and it celebrates its almost thirtieth anniversary now in part because it has always

been relevant to these kinds of larger questions and issues. I think there is a kind of inevitable and important connection between women's history and radical history, and I think it's one that continues to this day and will continue in the future.

David Serlin: I'm going to follow from what Jean and Steve introduced, but I'm going to move the conversation along by roughly twenty years. I was a graduate student beginning in the early 1990s, and I took up the torch from those of you who were graduate students in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I'm now teaching graduate students who are twenty years down the line from me. This is the way that generations work. So it's a tremendous honor to be able to talk about the *Journal of Women's History* and the *Radical History Review*, both of which have become deeply intertwined with and connected to my professional career. As a graduate student, I was familiar with both of these journals. Little did I know then that these were journals to which I would not only be contributing work but communities in which I would take a leadership role.

I didn't begin my life as a radical historian per se. I went to the University of Michigan in 1990 to do nineteenth-century Victorian literary studies. But I faced a kind of personal crossroads. I wanted to study Victorian literature and culture but, while I was committed to this professional degree, I hadn't quite figured out how to reconcile the fact that in my personal life I was doing a lot of political activist work, especially after having just spent about a year and a half doing AIDS/HIV education and prevention outreach with ACT UP in Philadelphia. I felt extremely bifurcated, and my situation seemed utterly irreconcilable: I saw myself doing political activism over here, and pursuing a professional degree over here, and not finding a way to merge the two together. In fact, I was told point blank by the department chair that I would have to make a choice if I wanted to succeed.

It wasn't until I started to read the kind of work that was being published in places like *RHR* and *JWH* that I found historians that were deliberately using scholarship as a form of activism, which enabled them to bring those two ostensibly polarized worlds together. The journals seemed to say, "You don't have to be an academic during the day and an activist at night. You can actually merge those two identities and create a new hybrid identity." I also began working with Alan Wald, the preeminent scholar of twentieth-century U.S. proletarian literature, and Alan introduced me to the joys of unearthing literary and historical artifacts that had been, and continue to be, ignored by the canon. He also introduced me to journalism and reportage as expressive forms.

In 1992, I made the pilgrimage to New York City to pursue a Ph.D. in American Studies at NYU, leaving the nineteenth century behind and

instead embracing the twentieth. I found a very hospitable new home at NYU, which included people who came to be my advisers: Andrew Ross, Danny Walkowitz, Lizabeth Cohen, Robin D.G. Kelley, and the late Dorothy Nelkin. These were people who were saying, in effect, "You can use the historical archive to make sense of the contemporary world. And there is no reason why you need to pretend there's an illusion of historical objectivity. The myth of objectivity is over." That was a very empowering thing to hear as a young graduate student. The idea that the radical past is a resource to be used as well as a professional vocation to be learned was, for me, deeply moving. By the time I published my first article in *RHR* in 1995, someone like Danny Walkowitz had been involved in the *RHR* for twenty years, and he continues to be an active part of the editorial collective. In fact, Danny just finished editing a new issue of the *RHR* after thirty-five years of involvement.

From 2004 to 2011, I served as the co-chair of the *Radical History Review's* editorial collective. And in describing my title—co-chair of the collective—I want to underscore that the *RHR* does not have a traditional editorial board. The deliberate decision to have a collective is one of the many legacies of the folks like Danny who started the *RHR* in the 1970s. The structure of the journal was never meant to flow from top-down leadership. It was meant to be democratic, horizontal, and transparent, reflecting the unsettling of traditional scholarship that the collective was invested in publishing. The two co-chairs of the collective are more facilitators than traditional editors-in-chief. They guide the collective through the brainstorming and editing of journals and also deal with organizational and financial issues. But it is the collective that makes decisions about every dimension of the journal's editorial process: from the theme of a given issue, to the administrative minutiae that I wouldn't even begin to bore you with. That is the stuff that makes and breaks a journal in terms of what constitutes the daily life that goes into it. But that's a very important part of what makes the *RHR* and the *JWH* special. These journals grew out of a sense of a political commitment—not just an intellectual commitment—to challenging the hierarchical structure of the profession of historians because they saw the profession implicated in the very power structures that they were seeking to challenge in their scholarship. I'm sure that's one of the primary reasons why I gravitated to the *RHR* so early in my career and one of the reasons I remain a part of the editorial collective today.

I'm extremely proud to have been part of the *RHR* over the last decade and a half. Like the *JWH*, the *RHR* has helped to usher in and give institutional support for major shifts in radical historiography that have literally remade women's history, gender history, history of sexuality, postcolonial history, queer history, and the various iterations that now encompass trans-

national women's history over the last quarter century. More than that, however, the *RHR* and *JWH* have been and continue to be instrumental for those of us who want to radicalize and radically interpret the terms by which we understand the historical profession. And that not only means engaging radically with the people or events or institutions or artifacts that constitute the past. It also means constantly reconstituting the radicalism in at the core of doing history itself in order to maintain our professional commitment to social welfare and political change. I think that's something that these two journals we're celebrating today are profoundly good at.

Rhonda Y. Williams: There are two things I'm going to try to do. I want to try to give you a sense of what I call "When I Enter Where," and the second thing I want to try to do is to kind of give you a sense of the intersections, as I've seen them emerge, in my professional and political experience of women's and radical history, and what that has looked like on the very practical, on-the-ground way, given when I enter where.¹⁵

So my passion to tell different stories, collectives stories, oppositional stories that would challenge the existing perceptions and narratives and paradigms was first manifested for me as a journalist. I didn't come to history in a traditional way or with a traditional perspective, whatever that means. For me, I entered through the door of journalism, through a circuitous route. That was the first stage of my professional life and my life's journey. It was then that I became—I would say, as a journalist, a "radical historian" of the present day. I was one who, from the beginning, paid attention to, and centered gender, race, and economic conditions in the way that I tried to do my job as a journalist. I aimed to actually begin to craft a different kind of narrative that would eventually, hopefully, be used by those who went back to the archives to use journalistic articles—and I did this without knowing much about the history or historiography. In fact, I didn't even know that such a word (historiography) existed when I was an everyday historian-journalist entering graduate school. I didn't even really know about the fields of radical history or women's history per se. I knew people wrote history, but there was this whole deep understanding of history and bodies of historiography, these things were not in my experience. Three years after becoming a journalist I would embark upon the next stage of my path—to become a historian of the past in order to understand the present day and, idealistically, seek to transform the inequalities that existed all around me. So it is, with my path to becoming a journalist, that I must begin my discussion of the issues before us right now, which is the question of radical history, women's history, radical women's history, and the intersections and change over time of all of those things.

In the late 1980s I was an undergraduate major in journalism who took classes in black history. I knew then that I wanted to make an impact on how the media portrayed black people in society. I joined the black student magazine, *The Eclipse*, which had a motto of seeing things in a different light, at the University of Maryland. Eventually I became an intern—and was an intern many times over as a journalism major—first at the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. And it was there that I had my first assignment—actually I was a gopher, but I had my first newspaper assignment—covering a teenage parenting enrichment program in the “inner city” of Baltimore. And I also did my first story in a public housing complex there. Those newspaper assignments were the building blocks for the kind of work that I would eventually do, and the questions that I would eventually have about how people are presented, and what are the qualms and nervousness people have about those who are differently positioned from themselves. At the University of Maryland, as a journalism major, I also participated in the Black Student Union’s activities. I went to the national conference of the NAACP, and I joined anti-apartheid protests with fellow students, including taking a seat in the administration offices to call for divestment. As a student I also took Afro-American Studies classes, and it was in those classes that I was first introduced to black women scholars, not just teachers, who stood at the intersection of black women’s history and women’s studies. I enrolled in Dr. Sharon Harley’s “Black Women and Work” class, and it was there that I began to really learn about black women’s labor as domestics, as industrial workers, and their historical struggles against subjugation. Upon graduation from the University of Maryland, I became a newspaper journalist in the sunny southern city of Charlotte, North Carolina. Journalism, I thought, would be my actual career. Not so for various reasons. Three years later I entered graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania where I would have the opportunity to learn from Mary Frances Berry (my major adviser), Carroll Smith Rosenberg, and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, among others.

In 1992, as a prospective student, I met Evelyn and she signed for me and gave me a copy of her newly released article in *Signs* entitled “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” and, remember, I didn’t even know there was such a thing as historiography.¹⁶ I was so excited. I met this black woman scholar and received this fantastic article, and this was my introduction to a certain manifestation of the emergent debates and critiques and level of theorizing about intersectionality that were unfamiliar to me. And here (by reading Evelyn’s article) I met a person who I would come to know as Foucault, and I learned about the dialogic process, and the expression of interracial politics shaped by gender and class and sexuality and color and privileges and power and hierarchies of all kinds of different persuasions. Now, mind you, I was also a first generation Ph.D.-

seeker in my immediate family, and so not only were some of the concepts new to me, not just words like historiography and the concepts of Foucault and the dialogic and all that, but also the actual discourse and references themselves. So, in fact, the very language in which the article was written exposed me to not only new thinkers and new thoughts, but also hierarchies of power, if you will, at that very moment of my entering graduate school. For the way this article, and much other scholarship, were written was a far cry from the language of journalism that I was engaged in. This article also exposed me to what it meant, for me, to be a radical historian of the present moving into becoming a radical historian of—I wasn't even using those words, but looking back—a radical historian of the past. So, this isn't a critique of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham at all, I love her article, I can navigate it like the back of my hand these days. It's not a critique of the article as much as it is asking us, even in this moment, in this discussion that we're about to have about radical history and women's history and radical women's history to really consider how the "radical" work, and power of that work, actually *translates* into what we're trying to do, and how we see ourselves as radical, and in what particular spheres and spaces.

Almost from the beginning of my introduction to the academy, to professional scholarship as such, both as an undergraduate and as an amped up graduate student, I was significantly impacted by the stewardship of women's scholars and history, and particularly black history and black women's history, and black women scholars, who provided me with diverse working critical lenses of analysis. These critical academic lenses overlaid the experiences that I witnessed as a journalist. Imagine my excitement when I began to learn more about the work of Ida B. Wells or Ella Baker or Angela Davis, these women who merged, in their different ways, theorizing and praxis and desired, again, to produce a broad "political voice" for a particular transformative end through, what I would call something like, a politics of accessibility. We have politics of everything these days—politics of this and that. So I'm going to say a politics of accessibility, we might call it.

Critical for me as a graduate student were also some other titles like *But Some of Us are Brave*, Fran Beals's "Double Jeopardy," Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, and it extended into women of color feminist frameworks such as Chandra Talpade Mohanti, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres's *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* and Francesca Miller's *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*, which had chapters focused on "Women, History, Creating a New Historical Record" and "Women, Social Motherhood, Democracy, and the Search for Social Justice."¹⁷ So my trajectory into the academy and my intersection with these various ideas that we're talking about today—concepts and ways of engaging history and transforming history and historical fields—really came through a lens of

black history, black women, black feminist politics, and opened up more broadly as I began to meet other women like Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Eileen Boris, who has been a great mentor, Annelise Orleck, and others. But it's through that path of black women's history, and through my journalism path, that I enter into this conversation. It's not through the path of knowing the history of radical history, or the *Radical History Review*, even though I'm a part of that collective. It's not through the path of knowing in depth "women's history" except to the degree that it was black women's history that introduced me to trying to better understand how to navigate the world and the academy in numerous kinds of ways.

I had four things I was going to say. I'm just going to give you the "headlines" and then maybe we'll come back to them in the conversation.¹⁸ Okay, so the four things. Part Two was called "Intersections Given When I Enter Where." The first headline is scholarship and a focus on black low-income women's experience and struggles. This is where I focus my attention as a radical women's historian, as a black women's historian, a scholar of every day people's experiences and how that really begins to help us think about the domestic geographies that we still need to attend to even as we move into the international global and transnational world around us. The second headline is "Women, Transnationalism and Human Rights," which is the actual title of one of the *Radical History Review* special issues, and why those three categories are important to really understand the connections between political and spatial geographies.¹⁹ The third part that I was going to talk about is the future of the scholarship, where I see black radical history, radical history, women's history, the imbrication of all of these things emerging in terms of the relationship between topics, ideologies, and interventions. For instance, Erik McDuffie's work on black radical women, Barbara Ransby's new work on Eslanda Robeson, and some new and old ongoing concerns that I have about how we women's historians, as radical historians, as black women historians, all that stuff together, still seem to marginalize, demonize, forget, or obscure some of the most demonized and marginalized citizens of our society.²⁰ The third headline was called "Sister, How Are You Welcome In This House: Meditations on Democratizing the Past."²¹ And the fourth headline is how do we do radical work across categories that we traditionally talk about, and move them into categories that create the framework for forcing us to engage in a multi-disciplinary, multi-issue focus, and institution-building at the same time—and that's the social justice lens. So I'll stop there.

Ellen DuBois: I begin by congratulating *Radical History Review* for its incredible achievement. After decades, it continues to provide a home to research that isn't or can't be published anywhere else, but will eventually become

canonical. The organization of this panel manifests the great tradition of radical history, even if the phrase is oxymoronic. Recalling the early days of women's history is extremely pleasurable. I have been organizing my own correspondence from the 1970s when my friends were my sisters and my colleagues. My letters with virtually everyone in that first generation were a mixture of personal, political, and professional questions and answers. Even our intense disagreements did not break from that sense that we were collectively engaged in a common project of rediscovery and analysis. Although I consider myself to be greatly blessed by having been a young woman and historian at the moment when my field was being built, today I am nonetheless going to resist the pleasures of nostalgia.

For my generation of U.S. historians, the point of radical history was to change the national narrative and to make it not one of the perfect (and exceptional) nature of American democracy but the continual (and never achieved) battle for democracy's complete realization. Initially there were two streams of radical history. One emphasized the hegemonic quality of American power and the other emphasized this tradition of popular struggle necessary to realize democracy's promise. The question of hegemony basically fell by the wayside, and was not at the core of what would become the *Radical History Review*. Instead, the other approach, captured in the omnipresent term "agency," became—oh let us go for the irony!—"hegemonic." Radical historians concentrated on broadening the scope of who constitutes active historical characters.

What does radical history constitute now? Again, radical history has two meanings, one predominant in the academy, one outside, neither of them the same as *RHR*'s foundational understanding. For academics, historians and non-historians alike, "agency" is no longer the watchword, but "discourse." The focus on popular agency—on action—has come to seem too naïve and insufficiently ironic for the political atmosphere at the turn of the millennium. Young historians have picked up the discarded hegemonic strain in late sixties radical history, but moved it from the political and economic into the cultural. To the degree that there is still a concern with agency, it is profoundly constrained by the limits of ideology—you might even say of an ideological consensus—and is usually not the focus of the radical historian's concern. Whereas my generation's major emotional register was one of heroic struggle, the current one is more of ironic distance.

Radical historical interpretations outside the academy are very different. Those who broadcast themselves as purveyors of an insurgent historical narrative in the larger culture are on the right. They are Tea Partiers who are trying to create their own disruptive version of American history. They are reacting to and dissenting from the achievements of seventies and eighties U.S. historians who brought social/radical/multicultural perspectives into

the teaching mainstream. I'm not saying Tea Partiers meet our standards for good historians, but I'm saying [laughter in the room]—you can laugh, but history is crucial to them. And the narrative they want to tell, the radicalism they want to proclaim, involves returning to the original principles of American society—small government, individualism, opportunity, mobility. [Overlapping voices] What? Slavery. No, No. We can all giggle at this, but we will ignore these themes at our peril, not only at our political peril, but at our intellectual peril. These are important arguments to grapple with. And to me these people are on the cutting edge, not in terms of moving historical understandings forward, but in terms of proposing ideas that are shaking people up.

Where does this leave women's history? The students of the sixties and early seventies generation and the students of those students made the movement from "women's history" to "the history of gender." This is a much discussed intellectual development which I believe has multiple causes, including the gradual disappearance of all forms of feminism except liberal, and the desire of younger historians to experience the cutting edge thrill of new frameworks and new ideas. Our students understandably want to do something other than follow the directions we charted. The anxiety of influence is particularly strong among feminists.

Given what I have suggested above about the dual pathways away from the "agency" character of early radical history, what are the implications for women's/gender history? Put another way, to what degree and in what way is women's/gender history still radical? On the plus side, it still functions to open up worlds of possibility to students, especially undergraduates. I find that teaching women's/gender history to young women is still very, very inspiring. And women's/gender history is still illuminating new aspects of American history. It has brought the history of masculinity down to earth. It has taken the history of sexuality much further than anything my generation ever could have imagined.

But what has been lost, and I am not the first to say this, has been the focus on women as historical actors. Women are no longer agents; rather womanhood is performance. It is as if being a woman is insufficiently dissenting and off-center to generate society-changing action unless leavened by other social characteristics, most often race. I believe one can see this in the growing gap between women/gender studies as a field and women/gender history as a practice. From my experience, the latter is not in good odor in the scholarship of the former. Women/gender studies graduate students tend to have a simplified notion of women's/gender history as mindlessly empirical and "untheorized." These scholars tend to regard history as something that carries the smell of the past rather than the promise of the future. At my university, you can get a Ph.D. in women's/gender stud-

ies without much familiarity with the richness of women's/gender history. (I think my colleagues in women's/gender studies would say something similar: that Ph.D.'s in women's/gender history are similarly unfamiliar with developments in their fields.)

I am not the first to make these observations. However, what I want to suggest here is that turning away from the focus on "agency" may cede important political ground in women's/gender history to the rightwing version of radical American history flourishing outside the academy. I remember many years ago hearing Ronald Reagan sing the praises of the historical tradition of the brave frontierswoman. This figure is easily amalgamated into the neo-exceptionalism so prominent in the 2012 campaign. Was Sarah Palin an anomaly, or a harbinger of things to come? Her use—in the campaign in her Alaska television show—of the image of the strong publicly active woman identified with the vitality of the American spirit can easily become part of the radical history narrative of the right; meanwhile they will characterize our practice of women's/gender history as victim-mongering and whining. I hope I am wrong but I can imagine that women's history may appear in this form on the right. At least, we should not to be taken by surprise if it does.

Eileen Boris: Well, you all have brought a lot for us to think about. I think of epistemology, methodology, politics, archive, and definition. Those are the kind of terms that came to me. What is radical? What is "women" by our ways of knowing, our methods, the politics behind it—which could be of the right, and many, many lefts? What constitutes the archives and how those are created and formed?

Jean H. Quataert: It's a very provocative idea, the Tea Party and the radical. My response on the one hand is that we're always in struggle, so if not Sarah Palin then it is somebody else.

Ellen Dubois: "It" meaning what?

Jean H. Quataert: Your arguments.

Ellen DuBois: Okay.

Jean H. Quataert: I do appreciate that the U.S. is powerful. I've always sought out and tried to reinforce the radical potential of women's history to challenge and, at times, transform the wider discipline. I do agree with Ellen, however, that a narrowing of research perspectives and questions accompanied the ongoing professionalization of the field and its incorpo-

ration into departments of history and related disciplines. However, I am optimistic, as she is, about the "transnational turn" in women's and gender history. As new editors of *JWH*, both Leigh Ann Wheeler and I have encouraged authors, reviewers, and one another in our editorial notes, to address the broadest contexts and range of historiographies that are appropriate for each submitted article.

This transnational turn may indeed reflect, as Ellen posits, the spread of radical feminism around the globe although I think the interconnections of scholarship and activism need to be examined in their specificity. Those ties take us back to the explosion of women's history as a field in the early 1970s in many parts of the globe. But I see the "turn" somewhat differently, and my perspective provides an assessment of historiographical shifts in their own historical moments and times, and the many journal articles and books that demonstrated the new research agendas in the field. Acknowledging the key role of social historical research and methodology is important in the European context but I would put it this way: in my own scholarly trajectory, social history in the later 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s was linked to the big pictures of historical change. These were the now nearly fully discredited (and rightly so!) grand narratives of modernization, industrialization, and working-class formation; they turned historians' attention to census data, statistics, and demography, large and small scale economic changes, family forms, as well as the political movements and popular mobilizations (that is, women's and men's activism) that were assumed to be products of these changes. The particular was thus set in these wider contexts. Today, of course, these narratives no longer dominate historical research. While no one should bemoan their demise, there was a cost, as I see it—a loss of the wider purviews and interconnections inherent in the earlier theories and, thus, a narrowing of research agendas in the field. The new turn to the global with its embrace of contingency, polycentric developments, and overlapping levels of agency is a real departure from earlier limitations.

In this work of dismantling the grand narrative of modernity, the radical challenges of women's history as method and episteme were key components (although at the time this was not necessarily self-evident). Think about women's labor history: its practitioners launched a sustained and significant critique of the biases in activist and scholarly understandings of working-class formation, for example, that helped rewrite labor history and shape other big questions, such as the effort to understand the limitations of social democracy, in specific, and the European left, in general, in the twentieth century. It added gender, neighborhood, and cultural components to class formation, which had been rooted in material contexts and focused on male labor identities and politics.²² But I would also add the challenging research agenda in the 1980s in European history—work on the nature of

protoindustry (small-scale rural manufacturing) and its household gender division of labor. While a product of social history, its findings, paradoxically, worked to undermine the big assumptions of European industrial development because of the empirical nature of the research in archives and trade and demographic statistics, probate records, and travel accounts. These materials revealed patterns of working class formation and gender relations overlooked in the social science and historical literature. Perhaps even more importantly, the work encouraged some European historians to envision collaborative research projects with historians working in other regions of the globe or with contemporary sociologists and anthropologists.²³ Thus the early modern rural household might fruitfully be juxtaposed with more contemporary patterns of craft production in developing regions of the world. In other words, these queries encouraged comparative and collaborative projects as well as the reading of the burgeoning monographic literature from “area studies.” Its cumulative evidence challenged the unexamined claim to a set of “unique” characteristics that explained British and continental European industrial takeoff and thus key European states’ unmistakable global power. With women’s historians as part of the debates, these are examples of the disciplinary changes that have helped propel new research in global and transnational themes.

When gender appeared, of course, it was seen as a massive threat because what happened was that women’s history and women’s studies transformed themselves from feminist studies to gender studies. And this shift seemed to have eroded agency. With the displacement of the active subject, it seemed to have really undercut feminism. But I think that what I have seen over time is not what I would have said in the mid-1980s or even in the early 1990s. What I’ve seen over time is that this fragmentation provides openness. It provides us the opportunity to rethink the very nature of our politics. What is possible? What is your commitment? I think the historian plays a role, and that’s why I’m speaking as an historian—we can envision change on the transnational level as well as on the local level. But the only way that we—that is in the U.S. with our geopolitical position and with our privileges—the only way that this can happen is to begin to really take on the major feminist issues, the feminist theoretical issues of whether or not transnational coalitions are inclusive, and how to make them inclusive.²⁴ Because otherwise what happens is that we replicate the imperial feminism which we, as historians, have already uncovered. I’m unhappy to hear this charge that women’s studies students and curricula are bypassing research in women’s history—that it has a “bad odor.” That’s not my experience at Binghamton, but I have not been centrally involved in it. I think it’s an error. I think that empirically the field of women’s/ gender history has made its rich contributions precisely because of its epistemology and the theorizing

about what we have observed empirically in the sources and documents. But the real challenge is, then, to begin to confront whether, and to what extent—and I think Rhonda you said it—to what extent we can, in fact, really organize across these differences.

I was thinking about the Tea Party and I was thinking Arab Spring. I'm thinking Uganda, with its "Egypt" moment. I'm thinking Somalia food price unrest. All the same, really, coming out of the same neoliberal policies that have reshaped global economic and financial inequalities since the 1970s. And then I was thinking, so how do you bring it together? How do you make those connections? And that's the issue. How do we prevent groups from becoming colonists—I know that the Occupy movement did it by the way its participants spoke, so they tried not to have any one person dominate. But the question is, what kinds of transnational coalitions can there be? How can we envision change? What would be the basis for coming together across these geopolitical, cultural, and economic divides? That is both a theoretical question and, to some extent, an empirical question. Certainly in my work in human rights, that's what I'm committed to. I'm also committed to bridging divides through dialogues especially since it is such a challenging task. Speaking more recently to Middle East feminist historians, I realize that many don't want anything to do with human rights, because it's so tied in appreciably with the "war on terror" and the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq beginning in 2003. So there are big divides among feminists. Even to talk you have to begin to bridge these divides. So I think the disintegration of the subject, if you wish, was very uncomfortable for us, but I think ultimately it provides something possible that maybe didn't exist and the question is: to what extent are these human rights/transnational feminist alliances—the ones that I've worked on but the many others as well to combat, for example, violence or defend migrant rights—something distinct and potentially transformative and different from the historical patterns of transnational organizing that we see at the turn of the twentieth century and in the 1920s? And I know that there's controversy about this topic, and I know there are no simple answers. But you need to know the question so you can begin to struggle for gender equality and work against the barriers. This once again returns us to the intertwining of scholarship and activism; it also mobilizes the radical potential of human rights as a transformative project.

Stephen Brier: I would be surprised if any of these issues were settled. I think the hallmark of radical history is precisely the unsettled nature of what radical history is about and how we approach the questions it raises. *Radical History Review* hasn't survived for thirty years because it had some orthodoxy which it legitimately stuck to. It's adapted and changed over

these three decades and has multi-generations of members of the editorial collective. And I think David is absolutely right. The fact that it's an editorial collective should not go unremarked upon. I just started a new online journal with my doctoral students and fellow faculty at the Graduate Center, the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, and I consciously said to my fellow editors, "we're setting this up as a collective and not as an editorial board."²⁵ They didn't get it at first. They'd never heard the phrase. But I explained to them why an editorial collective was still such a vital concept.

I think you don't settle these issues, if you embrace the notion of radical. I think what happened with the *Radical History Review*, early on in its history, was that it decided to stay with the slightly amorphous, slightly undefined, slightly flexible term "radical" rather than calling itself—as a number of us called for at one point, because it was MARHO—we thought Marxist historians organization made more sense.²⁶ And those of us who supported that position were overruled. I think in the end that was the right and good thing, because it's kept the *Review* open and flexible. I think the same thing will be true in women's history and in gender history. The questions aren't settled. They need to be debated and it's only out of that rich argumentation and confrontation that you get new forms. You get a new synthesis that will lead you to something else.

David Serlin: I want to just very briefly talk about a different kind of legacy of radicalism that comes out of the intersection of radical history and women's history that I didn't address earlier but that seems relevant here. The *JWH* and the *RHR* were instrumental in providing a forum for revolutionary and expansive ways of thinking about history of science, history of technology, and history of medicine, which culminated in the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of science and technology studies in the 1970s and 1980s.

I'm thinking of the legacies, now taken for granted, of scholars like Donna Haraway, who brought an analysis of gender to bear on areas like history of biology, information technology, racial science, cybernetics, and even the politics of museum exhibition. Haraway published one of her earliest essays, on sociobiology, in the *RHR* in 1979. This was years before her work got traction in the kinds of science and technology studies journals where she would publish later. I think this says something about the risk that *RHR* was willing to take when it saw something in her work that was really provocative, which might not be published elsewhere. But it also shows that the editorial collective recognized that Haraway's work brought together many different strands of radical critique, and that in and of itself was worth taking a risk on.

So we can talk about what's radical about radical women's history within the historical profession. But I think that—not to be too heterosexist in my metaphor use—there are lots of ways in which these radical critical tools, offered through these journals, planted seeds that have germinated in unanticipated ways and unexpected places.

Eileen Boris: Botanical?

David Serlin: Botanical, right. Generative. My point is that those critical analyses, which one might say came from a Marxist-feminist perspective, also came out of an environment provided by our journals, where radical women's engagement with the past was emboldened by calling out patriarchy and gender inequality but also by critiques of the military-industrial complex and Big Science from the height of the Cold War through Vietnam to the Reagan era. Radical gendered critiques of science and technology and medicine are now simply normative in professional disciplinary circles, and are ubiquitous in much humanities and social science scholarship.

Rhonda Y. Williams: I actually have a question, and then maybe a comment. I'm not sure if I heard Ellen right when she said that gender history—is it radical or not, yes and no—and that what came with the “no” was that it was not taken seriously unless it's leavened by class and leavened by race.

Ellen DuBois: What I said was the agency of women is not taken seriously—

Rhonda Y. Williams: The agency of women is not taken seriously?

Ellen DuBois: It's not considered inherently progressive unless it's leavened by class and race.

Rhonda Y. Williams: Okay. So it's not taken seriously unless it's leavened by class or race. The agency of women?

Ellen DuBois: Well, you respond and then we'll see if we're talking about. . .

Rhonda Y. Williams: Well, I want to make sure I have what you said right first, before I respond. Because one of the constant concerns I have as a black women's historian, a black woman walking the world every day in the body I walk in, a woman of color in the body I walk in every day, first generation college student, first ever to get the degrees I have, all of these things are around class and race. One of the things which I think has made women's history more radical and provocative is its leavening, and taking seriously

agency, based on class and race. Such leavening, then, doesn't diminish but only expands and enhances radical women's history. So I wasn't sure if what I was hearing was the opposite of that, or was a reification of a stance that actually acknowledges that that is important, or whether we were trying to go back to some kind of normative all-enhancing, all-encompassing universal woman's stance.

Ellen DuBois: What do you think from my own work I was saying?

Rhonda Y. Williams: I was responding to what you said now, not necessarily the body of the work you've produced, because we're in this conversation now about reshaping, rethinking, and hearing and talking about radical women's history. So people's stances can change from the work they've actually published to where they are today, which is the whole point about talking about how we think, what we think radical history is.

My potential concern is based on what I thought I heard, and what that means in terms of the positioning of radical feminist politics that takes seriously these other identity positions that, for me, only enhance and expand the conversation in a way that some of the literatures, for me, did as I was coming through the academy—literatures on Third World Women, Latin American women, Latino women, and others—that, in some ways, white feminist scholarship did not do for me. So, anyway, you'll respond to that.

But the other thing that I wanted to say is that one of my four headlines, the third one was this question of "Sister, How Are You Welcome In This House." That constantly remains a concern for me, which is really tied to this as well. And the meditations on how we think about what democracy means, and how we democratize the past, how this relates to questions of women's rights versus social justice, and is there a "versus"? Or how does it all manifest itself, not only when we're theorizing and talking about it intellectually, but when we're in the real moment, on the ground, trying to do work in communities, working with community people, and seeing the kind of political machinations, as well as the potential political opportunities that emerge in communities? How do we actually make ourselves relevant, given these kinds of conversations that we're having, and how does that manifest itself, for me, circling back around, to the kind of journalistic ethos and perceptions, as well as the ways in which that's translated into policy, for instance around low income women of any hue, but in particular the use of black and increasingly Latino women to really gut social entitlements and to continuously have an onslaught against that? I think there's a way in which—and I'm trying to work on this myself—we have to figure out how we engage in politics in real time on the ground—given the theories we believe in, and the stances we believe in—as well as in the academy. What I

find is that low income women, and the history of low income women—and these are the demonized and marginalized women I'm talking about—is still very much absent from the “mainstream.” Not just mainstream U.S. history or global history but radical history and women's history and black history and black liberation and freedom struggles. In all of these areas of scholarship, some of these women are missing. And so one of the phrases for me is—using the words of James Baldwin—I discuss my concern with this by saying, “There is a dangerous and reverberating silence” that has created historically hypervisible low-income women and at the same time, reinforced the marginalization of low-income women, and particularly subsidy reliant women, who do the cultural and political work of the U.S. state. But there is also a dangerous and reverberating silence *within* these various histories that position themselves in a more radical stance, and then do not deal with some of the most marginalized, demonized people in our society.

Some of the work that we do in the academy does not really deal with this—if we're doing radical history, or women's history, or black freedom struggles, liberation struggles—and yet these are the more radical fields of history. Right? Even transnational feminism or transnational global feminism are the more “radical” fields of history and taking radical stances, but at the same time, some of these histories are still engaged in the work of marginalization by leaving some of the most demonized and economically marginalized and racially marginalized women out of the picture.

Ellen DuBois: Look, I can follow this through on two levels. The issue that you've raised is an important one and I expect my phrasing was not great. But I actually don't want to focus on it. So I will stand by my work—everything I've done, all my synthetic work—*Through Women's Eyes, Unequal Sisters*, it's all clearly dedicated to multiplying the viewpoints of women as active and progressive agents in the world.²⁷ But I'll give you an example of what I mean: it is now virtually impossible to talk about Elizabeth Cady Stanton without saying she's a racist. There's something wrong with that. I'm not saying that there isn't racism there, but this is not her fundamental historical legacy. At least, you have to nod in that direction.

Let me try another way to make my point, and in the process to return to some of our earlier conversation. I am not by nature a pessimistic person. I am, by DNA, a person who always inclines to hopeful historical meta-narratives. Somewhere, somehow, sometime, things will get better. I believe history constantly changes. I hope I will be here when it does; maybe I'm living through it. These days, I'm looking abroad, past national borders, for those kinds of inspirations. But when I work on *Through Women's Eyes* and get to the last chapters, or when I teach U.S. women's history, I'm stuck in a

meta-narrative that peaks with the 1960s, and this is wrong. It's not helpful to our students. It's not helpful to ourselves. That can't have been the high point of history and let's remember it with great warmth, or the high point of history and it's all downhill from there. I do not know how to represent the last forty years of history, given the premises with which I work. And that's what I'm asking us to try to do.

Stephen Brier: It's happening all around us right now.

A brief question period generated conversations among listeners. The audience raised questions about what and who were the subjects of radicalism, pointed to difficulties with translating these histories to the classroom, worried about backlash in light of the deteriorating political economy of higher education, and recalled the public history mission that radical historians engaged in a quarter century ago through documentary films and museum exhibits that introduced wider publics to the lives of ordinary people.

The exchange between Rhonda Y. Williams and Ellen Dubois sparked additional comments in terms of race, essentialism, and universalism. A senior scholar drew upon her experiences to reinforce the observation that women and gender studies students were presentist, holding a habit of mind that the constant search for the next hot topic or identity category reinforced. She charged that the field moved from gender to race to the transnational by casting aside rather than building upon previous research. The consequence, this speaker insisted, was that the "oppression of women" went missing, so white middle-class students could not understand the structures that limited their own lives since oppression existed elsewhere, projected onto the other. Another commenter from the floor claimed that a truly radical history would interrogate the very terms by which historical figures, like Cady Stanton, understood the world—that to ignore her use of race obscures the kind of society in which she struggled and the limits of her actions. We must, he argued, question our own radicalism as much as those of the past.

A number of people asked for or offered advice. A few taught in community colleges or large public universities, in adjunct and untenured positions, where normative beliefs problematized the meaning of "radical" in ways that suggest that we don't necessarily know what students mean by the term. No consensus emerged. One person underscored how her undergraduates rejected established facts; another found her students accepting whatever was said, so the challenge was less having the courage of her convictions but more getting them to think critically. Making the political, personal, and exemplifying themes in individual lives served this teacher well. Another speaker, who taught at an elite private university, offered the model of the residential college where, by inviting these privileged students into her living space, she engaged them through film and speaker series. The conclusion of a woman from a denominational college reflected frustration: generational communication

was vexing, but worth trying. Through such comments, the audience addressed questions of audience, archives, and activism as essential to radical history and women's history projects.

—Eileen Boris, Moderator

NOTES

¹Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution: A History of Women and Revolution in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 1972).

²*Union Maids*, directed by Jim Klein, Miles Mogulescu, and Julia Reichert (Franklin Lake, NJ: New Day Films, 1976).

³*Radical History Review*, no. 46/47 (1990); Joshua Brown, Patrick Manning, Karin Shapiro, and Jon Wiener, eds., *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

⁴Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism in Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

⁵Examples include Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987) and James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Touchstone, 1987).

⁶Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (London: Verso, 2002); Daryl J. Maeda, "Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen: Constructing Asian American Identity through Performing Blackness, 1969–1972," *American Quarterly*, 57 (2005): 1079–1103; Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Lorenza Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁷Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (Autumn 1988): 61–88 (earlier version published in *Boundary 2*, special issue: "On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism" XII, no.3/ XIII, no. 1 (Spring/Fall 1984): 333–358, actual pub. date 1986).

⁸To view some of my digital narratives, please see: "The Takeover: May 15, 1989," A Digital Narrative, May–April 2009, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=417325787835&l=3625091853836887713>; "Dr. Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards," A Digital Narrative, May 2009, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=417466287835&l=4389440489386871662>; "A Trip Down Immigration Lane," A Digital Narrative, October 2010; <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=457086952835&l=498812460643779536> (Accessed August 13, 2013).

⁹These debates made up the fabric of the early publications in women's history. Among many others see, for example, Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977); and Renate Bridenthal, "Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women at Work," *Central European History* 6, no. 2 (June 1973): 148–166. Also, John C. Fout, ed., *German Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984); and Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert, *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World 1500 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁰Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053–1075.

¹¹The literature also is large but for a critically acclaimed effort to rehabilitate experience and agency, Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) and also her earlier article "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19, no. 2 (1994): 368–404. For the tension in the field, Joan Hoff, "Gender as a Postmodern Category of Paralysis," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 149–168.

¹²Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "World History and the History of Women, Gender, and Sexuality," *Journal of World History* 18, no. 1 (2007): 53–67. For two quite different thematic studies which nonetheless share a transnational gendered focus, Jean H. Quataert, *Advocating Dignity: Human Rights Mobilizations in Global Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) and Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, C. 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹³Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essay in History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

¹⁴Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert Padgug, eds., *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

¹⁵This title is a "riff" on and pays homage to Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984).

¹⁶Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 251–274.

¹⁷Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women are White, All the Men are Black: Black Women's Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982); Frances M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: New Press, 1995); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984); Chandra Talpade Mohanti, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991).

¹⁸In written form, my presentation is structured in "parts" with "headlines" or subcategories of focus.

¹⁹Karen Sotiropoulos and Rhonda Y. Williams, eds., *Women, Transnationalism, and Human Rights*, a special issue of the *Radical History Review* 101 (2008).

²⁰Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of the Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013). On the questions that I reference in my comments, see, for instance, Rhonda Y. Williams, "'Something's Wrong Down Here': Poor Black Women and Urban Struggles for Democracy," in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe William Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); "Obscured Lives, Hidden Histories (Take 2): Or, Narratives Which Otherwise Have Yet to be Told," Talk presented at the "Long Civil Rights Movement: Histories, Politics, Memories" Conference, Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, North Carolina, April 2009, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLToLh4HUf8> (Accessed August 13, 2013).

²¹I presented a talk with this title at the "From Black Modern to Post-Blackness: A Retrospective Look at Identity" Conference, Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, Rutgers University, Rutgers, New Jersey, November 2011.

²²For the older paradigm, Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). For challenges, Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History," *History Workshop* 17 (1984): 125–154; and Kathleen Canning, "Gender and the Politics of Class Formation: Rethinking German Labor History," *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 736–768.

²³Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, Jürgen Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism*, trans. Beate Schempp (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Douglas R. Holmes and Jean H. Quataert, "An Approach to Modern Labor: Worker Peasantries in Historic Saxony and the Friuli Region over Three Centuries," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (April 1986): 191–216; Jean H. Quataert, "Combining Agrarian and Industrial Livelihood: Rural Household in the Saxon Oberlausitz," *Journal of Family History* 10 (Summer 1985): 145–162; and Gay Gullickson, *Spinners and Weavers in Auffay: Rural Industry and the Sexual Division of Labor in a French Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²⁴For feminist theorizing about the possibilities of non-ethnocentric transnational coalitions for gender justice, see the influential postcolonial feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), which charts changes in her thinking. Also see the women's studies theorist Niamh Reilly, *Women's Human Rights: Seeking Gender Justice in a Globalizing Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) and

the philosopher Brooke A. Ackerly, *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁵See the *Journal of Interactive Technology*, <http://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu> (Accessed March 8, 2013).

²⁶MARNO is The Radical Historians' Organization.

²⁷Ellen DuBois and Lynn Duménil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (New York: Bedford St. Martin's, 2005); and Vicki Ruiz and Ellen DuBois, eds., *Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive Reader in U.S. Women's History* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
