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# A QUIET STRUGGLE

## WOMEN'S STUDIES AT BERKELEY

*Gloria Bowles*

IN 1979, RON TAKAKI, AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in the ethnic studies program, which had been founded a decade earlier through a student strike, asked me: "Why aren't you women's studies folks more militant?"<sup>1</sup> I smiled, trying to imagine, in a conservative time, our small band of supporters marching to Sproul Hall with banners and megaphones.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, I have often thought of Professor Takaki's remark. This article will trace some of the strategies used to found and develop women's studies on the Berkeley campus. At the same time, no matter one's strategies, the educated public, and even some academics, may be astounded at the barriers placed before those who would bring new studies to the academy.

### **Feminist Awakenings**

The comparative literature women's caucus focussed my nascent feminist consciousness. In 1972, I had ended my troubled marriage and passed my doctoral exams. The comp lit Ph.D. demanded four foreign languages. For doctoral exams, I was responsible for a reading list of sixty authors in German literature before the twentieth century and for "all" of German, French, English and American literature in the modern period, my specialty. I would write for seven days and then take a three-hour oral.

After my Ph.D. exams, I attended one of the gatherings of the women's caucus in a graduate student's apartment. Through the caucus, I began to realize there had been no women writers on my Ph.D. reading lists. Nor had I ever studied a woman writer in my classes or had a female professor. The graduate students who founded the comparative literature women's caucus had come to this recognition earlier than I.<sup>3</sup>

These students had persuaded the department to offer a "women's course." Beginning in 1972, the caucus held meetings to choose the instructor for the new course. Each quarter, we sat on the floor of the comp lit library surrounded by stacks of books by women writers and our proposals.



The author in her office in Campbell Hall, summer 1979.  
*Courtesy of the author.*



I had taught French and later composition in comp lit. Now my new friends in the caucus inspired me to read women writers and to think about how to analyze their work thematically and stylistically. They chose me to teach Comp Lit 40 in fall 1973.

Because there were few women's courses on the Berkeley campus, they often attracted large enrollments; sociology of women was the only other regularly offered course. Over 200 students showed up for Comp Lit 40. But I could take only twenty-five, since this was a writing course. I loved the male writers I had studied—Horace and Goethe and Ungaretti—but I realized that I felt closer to the women writers. Perhaps it was because they spoke of experiences that were familiar to me. Or perhaps they inspired me because they had managed to write down those experiences and publish them.

Moreover, teaching a class of women presented its own challenges. (Very few men took women's courses in the early years.) This class was more personal than the composition courses I had taught before; still, I did not want to consider only our personal reactions, since reading well also involves an attention to structure, language and context. But in fact this was the first time that any of us had studied women writers in a class of women.

The class, my immersion in the women's caucus, and my nocturnal reading of women writers led me to change my dissertation topic from the "decadent" poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé and Stefan George to one on American women poets. I was about to enter an entirely new field.

### Students Initiate Women's Studies

From my comp lit class came a few undergraduate women, and a few of their friends, who decided to form a "Women's Studies Committee."<sup>4</sup> Our group brought together undergraduates who were trying to do independent majors in women's studies. Together we started a newsletter to publicize feminist events on campus and to list courses on women, which were popping up in the departments. These classes were usually taught by graduate students and often only once.

Why did students, and not faculty, initiate women's studies at Berkeley? Permanent women faculty at Berkeley were scarce: the percentage of tenured women had sunk from 4.8 percent in 1933 to 2.9 percent in 1971. In 1973, we were seeing a slow trickle of assistant professors into some departments, especially English and sociology. Of a faculty of 1,480, there were 86 women, 41 of them untenured.<sup>5</sup> Of the 45 tenured women, *none* did research on women. In fact, perhaps it would have been risky to do so.

Undergraduates were more attuned to the second wave of the women's movement than were women faculty, who had been immersed in university life for most of their lives.<sup>6</sup> In 1974, the Women's Studies Committee decided to lobby for a major in women's studies. In April, we passed around the first proposal to the faculty, students, and administrators we had identified as our supporters. The proposal was signed by three undergraduates, Susan André, Marti Dickes, Lynn Witt, and myself. In it, we noted that seventy-eight colleges and universities now offered programs in women's studies. The first programs were established at San Diego State and Cornell in 1970.<sup>7</sup> We had learned something about organizing in other parts of the country through the Female Studies syllabus series from KNOW in Pittsburg and from the *Women's Studies Newsletter* published by the Feminist Press.

Our proposal set out our intellectual goals:

- to critically examine assumptions about women held by each academic discipline
- to test these assumptions in the perspective of current research and individual experiences
- to examine traditional and changing sex roles in various cultures
- to explore new alternatives for women and men in our society<sup>8</sup>

In spring 1973, several of the students who had worked so hard during the first phase



of our efforts completed their undergraduate degrees. So I began looking for more help, especially among the handful of women faculty. This was an acknowledgement on my part that students alone could not bring a new study to Berkeley. Natalie Davis, a professor of history, gave our committee some money from her teaching award. I enlisted the support of my next-door neighbor on Virginia Street, Arlie Hochschild, then an assistant professor of sociology, and later Carol T. Christ, then an assistant professor of English, who had agreed to direct my dissertation.

Some staff members also offered their expertise. On the advice of Betty Jones, an administrator in the College of Letters and Science, we decided to ask for a "group major," which groups together existing courses and does not cost the university any money. I wrote several drafts of our proposal, submitting them to the remaining members of the undergraduate committee and to Arlie Hochschild and Carol Christ for suggestions. Our student committee visited a dean of Letters and Science, Professor Anne Kilmer (Near Eastern studies), to learn how to route our proposal through its executive committee, since students did not generally appear at these meetings.

Our first proposal was turned down in October 1974; we submitted another in April 1975. The executive committee sent it back, advising a biology requirement, so that our students "would hear the other side." They seemed to suggest that differences between women and men rooted in biology should "naturally" extend to social roles. I wrote yet another version.

Carol Christ was now on the executive committee and thus present in the meetings to respond directly to concerns about the proposed new major. In the fall of 1975, a group major in women's studies was approved. We would be stuck with a biology requirement and have to wait another year for our major to go into effect. But we had prevailed.<sup>9</sup>

Now we needed money to coordinate the major. I went to see Ira ("Mike") Heyman, then the vice chancellor; he seemed to understand our ideas and quickly routed my proposal for funds through the Council on Educational Development (CED). In June, the money came through. We opened the first women's studies office in July, 1976. At the age of thirty-three and with a new Ph.D., I would become the first coordinator. I could not have had any idea of what lay before me.

### **Working within the System**

Albeit slow, our labors within the system had been successful so far. Our strategies seemed to fit the times and the situation of our supporters, all relatively powerless—students, untenured women professors, and myself, now a coordinator and lecturer who was not even on the tenure track. And that seemed to suit Berkeley, which was hesitant to accept new disciplines until they had been tested elsewhere, especially in prestigious institutions. In 1976, I felt a stage-by-stage development and testing would eventually bring women's studies academic respectability and a permanent place in the university.

My own past had offered examples both of working through the system and militancy, which in the sixties we thought of as actions to force change upon moribund and recalcitrant institutions through external action. At the university, militant tactics included demonstrations, going public, and appealing to the highest levels of the administration, thus "jumping over" the administrator assigned to manage an issue or a program.

I had grown up in Plymouth, Michigan, where my father had brought together the few Democrats in our small Republican town to create the first Democratic Club. When my fourth grade class cast its votes for president in 1952, I was the only one to stand up and speak for Adlai Stevenson, armed with a campaign pamphlet provided by my father. I watched over the years as my father, a lawyer, ran for office, campaigned for the governor, and spoke at labor rallies. What I saw as a young girl was a group of women and men working together effectively within the



system to create change. Michigan politics in the fifties was clean; and the Democrats were extremely effective.

In 1960, I was more than ready to leave Plymouth High School for the intellectual challenges of the University of Michigan. I also wanted to work on the *Michigan Daily*. Tom Hayden was editor during my first year in Ann Arbor, when civil rights ran on the front page. In the fall, one of my friends held on to my bicycle as I stood up on its seat in front of the Michigan Union in the wee hours of the morning to hear John F. Kennedy propose the Peace Corps. During my undergraduate years, we witnessed the success of militant action to promote equal rights for black citizens. The assassination of the president in 1963 was the first blow to our political idealism. At my 1964 graduation on a hot day in the enormous Michigan stadium, Lyndon Johnson delivered his "Great Society" speech, attempting to rekindle our beliefs in equality and justice.

At Berkeley, I turned my back on politics for several years, immersing myself in marriage and graduate school, having decided I wanted a private life. My father and his friends had been politically successful, but now I was more sensitive to what they had sacrificed and suffered. The escalation of violence, especially the assassinations, sickened me and made me feel that politics was just not worth it. I watched antiwar activity from a distance and was not aware of the original stirrings of the women's movement.<sup>10</sup>

When I resurfaced to begin organizing for women's studies in 1973, I relied upon what I had learned both from my father and my years in the university. From him, I had learned something about politics—building alliances, identifying detractors. As a graduate student at Michigan, and then at Berkeley, I watched how slowly change came to a prestigious institution. And I watched people who were not politicians, but academics, contemplatives, writers—people who were not comfortable dealing with people or skilled at management or conflict resolution—as they tried to run a massive bureaucracy. Often secretaries and administrators knew more about university politics than the parade of faculty deans moving in and out of office. I learned, too, that academe was inherently conservative. And my years as a graduate student had taught me patience. Then the average time to the Ph.D. in comp lit was thirteen years. It took me nine.

Political protest dominated Berkeley when I arrived in 1967 until the end of the Vietnam War in 1973. By the mid-seventies, the institution had settled down into a comfortable academic remove from social issues, even as the outside world, ironically, retained a radical image of our campus.

### **Building a Program**

Women's studies was housed under Special Programs in the gray corridors of Campbell Hall. "Special programs" were all those new studies the university didn't know what to do with—film studies, environmental studies, religious studies, and the interdisciplinary humanities and social science field majors. In fact, we all shared an interdisciplinary bent. From our vantage point in Special Programs, "interdisciplinary" seemed to have little respect at Berkeley, where departments ruled. In the seventies several innovative programs had been eliminated.<sup>11</sup> And, even more than environmental studies, women's studies, like ethnic studies, was regarded as "political," that is, not academic.

All of the Special Programs were staffed by lecturers paid out of budgets of soft money approved on a yearly basis. All of the programs were regarded as temporary by the powers that be. I wanted women's studies to be different, to work toward permanence, even though I, too, was a lecturer. Moreover, we had been granted only *one year* of "soft" money from CED. That one year stretched into four. Each year I wrote a comprehensive funding proposal, which documented our progress and was scrutinized by a faculty-student committee, including the chair of the Council of Educational Development, Donald Riley of psychology.

We began to develop our own core courses to complement the departmental offerings



required for the major. Our seniors took a two-quarter thesis seminar: we insisted on a thesis because we believed in the processes of writing and thinking and we wanted our students, who had been taking classes in many different departments, to have a chance to choose their own topic. This was a labor included only as part of an honors program in other departments. In the second year, I worked with undergraduates to create a large lecture version of "Introduction to Women's Studies," which drew over 200 students. (Carol Christ had taught a small "intro" in our first year.) In the third year, we added a course in Feminist Theory, a methods course in the humanities, Feminist Literary Criticism, and Theories of Women's Studies.

Our path was not easy. Those of us who, in the early seventies, taught courses on women and then initiated women's studies programs were animated by a sudden discovery of the complete absence of the study of women in every discipline. I felt angry when this realization finally came, especially after satisfying the requirements of a degree which purported to be so much more complete than the simple study of a single literature. Our sixties consciousness was rekindled: we really believed we could create change. But few of us realized what we were getting into. I thought I would do women's studies for a few years and then return to my original discipline. Feminist scholars began with a strong sense of *absence* but, in fact, we were only beginning to discover the potential *presence* of women in all fields. Because our discipline was so unformed, it was easy to attack us.

Around the country, feminist academics did bring into our programs ideas from the feminist movement. In this sense, we experienced an internal militancy at Berkeley. In the second year of our program, 1977-78, our faculty decided we would try an egalitarian governing board of students and faculty. In the end, the board was at once a failure and an important learning experience. Among the mix of students elected to the board were a few who did not want to share power but aspired to control the program. The meetings to achieve consensus were endless. And we were attempting a non-hierarchical structure in a hierarchical university. When our faculty felt the board's policies were threatening the viability of the program, I insisted on veto power, keenly aware that I was advocating a more conventional form of governance. Students decided to resign from the board but they did not publicly attack it, which showed, finally, their fervent commitment to the idea of women's studies, even if it did not operate exactly as they had envisioned.<sup>12</sup>

I was always grateful that in our second year students did not go public about our internal divisions. As a former student journalist, I knew that we would lose control of the story once it appeared in the papers. I never wanted to see women's studies splashed across the headlines. In 1977, such publicity could have sunk us.

The disappointing experience with the board tempered the idealism of our faculty and made me realize that, although I was a lecturer-coordinator with a year-to-year job, I was still held responsible for the success or failure of women's studies at Berkeley. And, while we aspired to be less impersonal than the average undergraduate program at Berkeley and had closer relationships with our students than most faculty, I came to understand that women teachers, too, need to establish boundaries and limits. The role of students in the program was a constantly evolving one at Berkeley. This was true for every women's studies program in the country.

### **A Revolution in Knowledge**

It soon became clear that women's studies was deeper and broader than we had originally imagined. At the same time, the women's movement was proving to be as revolutionary as the earlier civil rights and antiwar movements. With other women around the country, I began to dream of a women's studies which would become a permanent part of the university.

At Berkeley, departments are the locus of power. And while disciplines are not the same as departments, I also felt that we had to define more closely the nature of our discipline. In a new



seminar in 1978, "Theories of Women's Studies," we read every article we could find about women's studies and feminist research in the traditional disciplines. For the first national meeting of the National Women's Studies Association, a group of us organized a panel addressing for the first time the question, "Is Women's Studies an Academic Discipline?" In 1980 and 1981, a former student and I edited *Theories I* and *Theories II* and in 1983 Routledge published *Theories of Women's Studies*, the first text on feminist methodologies and women's studies as a discipline. It was widely used by feminist scholars to craft intellectual arguments for programs around the country.<sup>13</sup> The thinking and writing I did for *Theories* helped me over the years to make the case for a department of women's studies to house our unique interdisciplinary discipline.

New programs at Berkeley are reviewed time and again. We underwent a comprehensive review each time we submitted a grant proposal in the spring to the Council on Educational Development. I spent long hours and long weekends preparing each proposal, which normally yielded a tiny stipend of about \$30,000, but whose acceptance also gave us a certain academic imprimatur. It was rare for CED to fund an innovative program for four years but the support gave us time to strengthen our program. In our fourth year, I began negotiations with Letters and Science to take us on, supported by the dean of Special Programs, William B. Slottman, a professor of history, and by our Faculty Advisory Board, which we had formed in 1979 to serve as an advocate of the program.<sup>14</sup>



Women's Studies graduation, Haas Clubhouse, 1980. *Courtesy of the author.*

Women's studies needed an academic review in order to change our temporary, soft money, status. The Faculty Advisory Board asked the provost, Roderic B. Park, to appoint a committee. In the summer of 1980, I got word through Dean Slottman that Park was considering the abolition of the post of women's studies coordinator, thus effectively putting an end to the program. Over the years, I had taken on more and more responsibilities. I was conscientious; there was simply no one else to do the day-to-day work of the program and to strategize for its future. Women faculty played major roles in their departments and, while generous with their time, could



give it to women's studies only intermittently. Thus, the coordinator post was crucial to our survival. Arlie Hochschild suggested that I go to see the provost alone, since I was the one who had taken on the major responsibility for women's studies. I do not know whether it was my argument which persuaded him, but, at the end of the summer, the provost agreed to let the program continue with Letters and Science funds and to review it.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, I had heard about the Academic Review Unit of the Associated Students and asked them to add our program to its forthcoming evaluations. Subsequently, Jeff Koon, coordinator of the ASUC Academic Review Unit, wrote to me that his report "presents student assessments for the effectiveness of various aspects of their academic major program in Women's Studies. We are pleased to report to you that the findings of the survey suggest that the Women's Studies program is among the top five undergraduate programs of the 50 thus far evaluated by the ARU."<sup>16</sup> In spring 1981, the provost finally appointed a review committee, chaired by Marian Diamond of anatomy. I prepared voluminous documents, gathered together members of our Faculty Advisory Board, and told students they might be called before the committee.

In August 1981, I held in my hands an overwhelmingly positive report on the program, which recommended tenure-track faculty, including positions for which the lecturers of the program could apply. Besides myself, this included Dorothy Brown, a Berkeley Ph.D. in English, who had taught our senior thesis seminar for four years. The program was praised for its "esprit de corps." When asked what they had gotten out of the program, students had replied "Confidence."<sup>17</sup>

### Internal Conflict

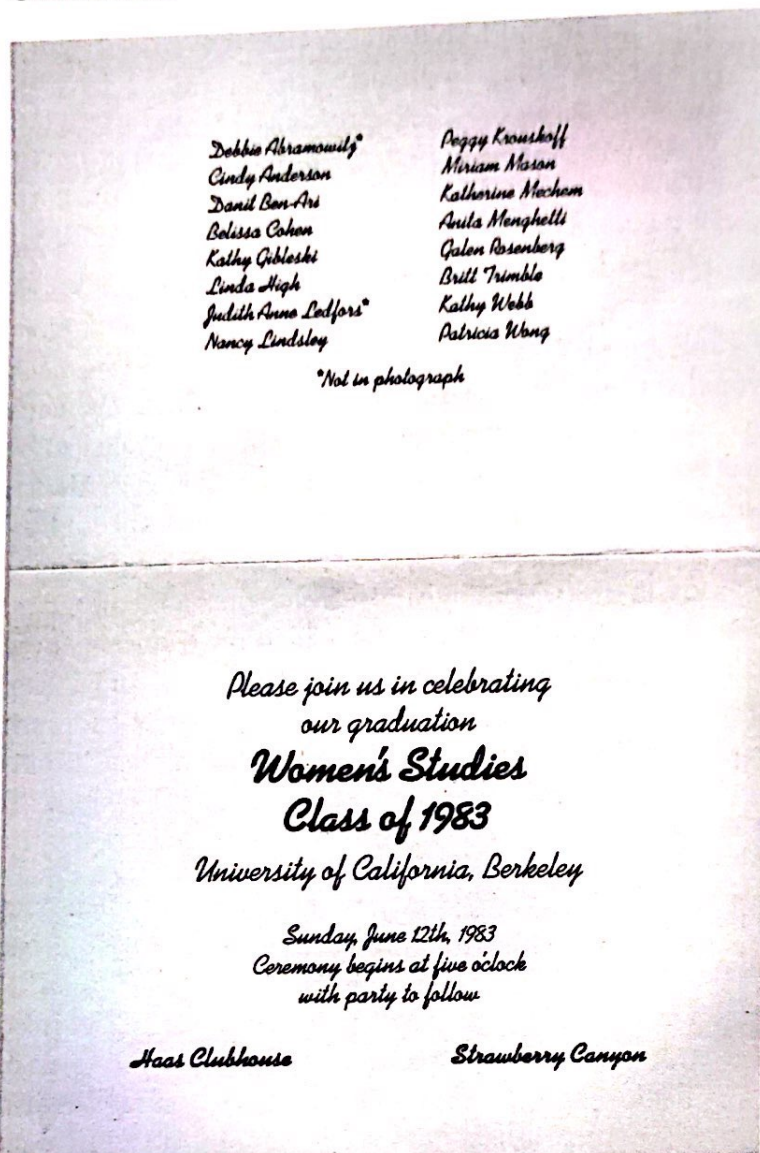
In our second year, 1977-78, we had experienced intense conflict between students and faculty as we attempted egalitarian governance. In our sixth year, conflict would arise in our Faculty Advisory Board.

The favorable academic review put us in a position to ask for permanent faculty. I had also been talking with the provost, Robert Middlekauff, an historian, about the intellectual goals of our field. I gave him articles in women's history and *Theories of Women's Studies*. Middlekauff had been instrumental in establishing the African American studies department in 1975. I thought he might be favorably disposed to us. Finally, our work to establish a permanent program was fortified by the rapid growth of feminist scholarship in the early eighties. Women's studies was truly coming of age.<sup>18</sup>

But the foundation we had carefully laid over the years was quickly swept away by a letter from two members of the board who wrote to Provost Middlekauff, expressing their support for the idea of women's studies but not for the personnel of the program. These two, women faculty in the English department, had listened to the criticism of some students in the senior thesis seminar, and had not been satisfied with the response of the rest of the board.<sup>19</sup> So, without telling their colleagues on the board, they wrote the provost, criticizing the lecturer of the senior thesis course, Dorothy Brown. They extended their disapproval to me and to the governance of the program even as they expressed their support for the existence of a women's studies program. In July, we had looked forward to a summer potluck intended to celebrate our favorable review. But I could not attend, since at it board members had to respond to what one called that "awful letter."<sup>20</sup>

Because she felt she was being treated unfairly, Dorothy Brown resigned. Now, the program would be held hostage for four years in an attempt to gain control of it and to remove me, considered the major obstacle to that control. Barbara Christian, chair of African American studies, who had become a good friend and advisor, pointed out to me that, with the prospect of ladder positions, the board now had something to fight over. This was power politics, university version.





Invitation to Women's Studies graduation, June 1983.  
 Courtesy of the author.

June and then "sealed" it. At the end of that month, I wrote in my journal that "The review is mixed—clearly the result of a split committee. What is missing is context, how difficult it is to bring new ideas to an elite university, how what we have done here compares to other institutions." I had hoped for a jury of my peers, the evaluation of women's studies founders from other universities.

Nonetheless, the committee again recommended ladder faculty, this the third such recommendation in two years. It asked that one position be defined so I could apply for it, and that in the meantime I be appointed a full-time lecturer. It suggested that a tenured person serve as chair, a recommendation with which I concurred.

Surely one of the more painful board meetings I attended was the one in which the Faculty Advisory Board sat around a big table trying to come up with names of women who might direct the program, as if women's studies did not by now, like other disciplines, have its distinct nature and forms of expertise, as if in 1982 anyone could become a women's studies person overnight. By July, we had no volunteers. The provost asked me if I wanted to continue as coordinator. I said no—and that heartfelt answer came from one who had tired of politics and wanted to write. My book on Louise Bogan had remained on the backburner too long.

The provost had no choice but to respond to a letter from tenured faculty. In our seventh year, instead of awarding us ladder positions, he appointed a committee to review both me and the coordinator position.<sup>21</sup> At times during that review in winter 1983, I felt exhilarated: finally someone is reviewing my work, I thought. Lecturers at Berkeley were not systematically reviewed at this time. But, of course, it was not easy to evaluate the post of coordinator, which was unique on the Berkeley campus.

Alas, the review ended abruptly when Provost Middlekauff accepted an offer to head the prestigious Huntington Library. I was sympathetic to his desire to complete the review before his departure—I always felt he had the interests of women's studies at heart—but the committee had not yet achieved a comparative view by talking with coordinators and directors from other schools. The provost read me the review in



### Denouement

Finally, Carolyn Porter of English, who had not previously been involved with the program, agreed to take on the tough job of director of women's studies. In 1983-84, I met with her regularly and did all I could to orient her while respecting her need to be in charge. In the meantime, I felt like a real faculty member for the first time, even though I was still a lecturer, because I only had to teach and thus had time to work on my book. Carolyn Porter began writing a document for the new provost, Leonard Kuhi, to make the argument once again for ladder faculty. Her report was eloquent and effective in part because it was written from the point of view of a stranger who had entered the new land of women's studies and found it to be rich, fruitful, and vigorous. The report pointed out that Berkeley could not take advantage of the new knowledge of feminist scholarship unless it made a permanent commitment to the program.<sup>22</sup>

Summer 1984 was quiet. In the fall, Carolyn Porter called a meeting of the Advisory Board, a meeting to which I was not invited. She had added two new members to the board and decided to conduct a nationwide search for a new lecturer, with a degree in social science, thus effectively excluding me, a comparative literature Ph.D., from the competition. The tactic was to replace me by using a new lecturer to cover the core courses and advise students while the program hired ladder faculty.

Carolyn Porter rebuffed my attempts to talk with her about this turn of events. In her office one day she waved the job announcement in the air: "You can apply for this." She began to take a new path down the corridors to her office to avoid passing mine.<sup>23</sup>

I wondered if I wanted to take on this fight, too. I told my friend, Maresi Nerad, a graduate student in education, that I was going to apply for other jobs. "You can't let them off that easily," she said. One day, I tried to explain the serpentine procedures of academe to my father, who was now a judge. He listened and then asked: "Whatever happened to due process?"



Graduates of Women's Studies, Class of 1983. Front row: Linda High, Danit BenAri, Cindy Anderson, Patricia Wong, Belissa Cohen (in polkadots); Second row: Miriam Mason, Kathy Gibleski, Galen Rosenberg (first man to graduate with a B.A. in Women's Studies), Kathy Webb, Peggy Krouskoff; Third Row: Nancy Lindsley, Annie Mac, Anita Maeghetti, Katherine Mechem. *Courtesy of the author.*



Alarmed by the new secrecy enveloping the program, students had organized a Feminist Student Caucus, led by Barbara Cruikshank, who had been working for Carolyn Porter as a volunteer secretary; Jennifer McNulty, a women's studies major, and Maresi Nerad. They were allowed two seats on the Faculty Advisory Board and chose Daphne Beletsis and Sarah Lutes to represent them. Thus, students would have a role in the hiring process.

WOMEN'S STUDIES GRADUATES 1984			
<u>Graduates:</u>	<u>Thesis and Adviser:</u>	<u>Graduates:</u>	<u>Thesis and Adviser:</u>
DEBBA J. ABRAMOWITZ	"Feminism and Corporate Women" Adviser: Rebecca Blair, School of Business	DEBBA J. MORGAN	"The Haitian Woman Refugee: Imprisoned in the Promised Land" Adviser: Charles Henry, Afro-American Studies
ANN BEN-PORAT	"Making the Transition: From Welfare to Economic Independence" Adviser: Judith Gruber, Political Science	AMY D. PRINCE	"Exploding the Myth of Woman: Monique Wittig's Demystification" Adviser: Friederike Hassauer-Roos, Comparative Literature
KATRINA L. COOMBS	"Women: The Residual Effects of Sexual Assault" Adviser: Carol Huffine, Sociology	Yael SILVERBERG	"The Medicalization of Female Culture: Midwifery to Obstetrics" Adviser: Lynne Withey, History
JULIE GERMAN	"Alice Paul: A Political, Historical Analysis of a Militant Suffragist" Adviser: Lynne Withey, History	DEBORAH LYNN STEINBERG	"The Dialectics of the Anorexic Mindset" Adviser: Robin Lakoff, Linguistics
MITSI A. HUGHES	"Why Women's Studies?" Adviser: Robin Lakoff, Linguistics	KAREN WEINSTEIN	"Voices and Visions: Feminism in the Lives of Egyptian Women" Adviser: William Brinner, Near Eastern Studies
LYNNETTE D. JEROME	"The Impact of Feminism on Mother-Daughter Relationships" Adviser: Laurie Wermuth, Sociology		
EVE LIVINGSTON	"Love and Marriage As a Double Edged Sword in Virginia Woolf's <u>The Voyage Out</u> and <u>Mrs. Dalloway</u> " Adviser: Carol Christ, English		
JENNIFER MCNULTY	"Women in a Suicide Culture: On the Social Acceptability of Self-Destruction" Adviser: Cregg Thomson, Afro-American Studies		

Mimeographed list of Women's Studies graduates, their advisers, and their thesis topics, 1984.

A large number of applications for the lecturership began to arrive. I had to make some basic decisions of strategy. To call upon the contacts with feminist scholars I had made nationally and internationally was obvious. But should I also go public, thus violating my previous stance to keep women's studies out of the papers? I finally decided that I did not particularly want that kind of attention. While I had been a public and visible feminist on campus, I was also a private person. Nor did I want to endanger the existence of women's studies because of it.

I did not anticipate the depth or the breadth of my support in 1984; years as a besieged lecturer had not allowed me to feel it. Nor would I have ever been able to imagine the response of the director as this support emerged. Applicants were told that the search had nothing to do with my position. (Midway through the proceedings, I received a contract for my second book from Indiana University Press, the pre-eminent publisher of feminist literary criticism.<sup>24</sup>)

As it turned out, I placed my good faith efforts to present my credentials against a process that was basically and consistently unfair. Though never articulated as such, the issue was power and control of women's studies. There was no open discussion of "theories of women's studies," the strategies we might use together to create a strong program. Given this reality, it was perhaps an error to keep internal conflicts within the program. Perhaps a change of strategy was called



for. Going public (with the support of all of the students of the program and many faculty), going over the heads of the principals (a no-no in academe) to the chancellor, Mike Heyman, who had been an original supporter of our ideas, were two possible strategies I rejected in the winter and spring of 1985, deciding instead to present my credentials to the board and to give them the opportunity to look at my work.

Given the composition of the board, and the support I knew I had, it is hard to understand how I "lost." But the job had been tagged for a social scientist. And the outcome was predetermined.<sup>25</sup>

I refused the director's offer of a half-time lectureship. Women's studies did, finally, make the papers. On May 9, 1985, the *Daily Californian's* front page headline announced "Well-known feminist scholar isn't rehired" and "Embattled women's studies program is shaken; future is questioned by many." An editorial in the same issue took the view that "If you're a woman trying to establish a curriculum that deals with women's issues, you're likely to be treated rather roughly."<sup>26</sup>

### Coda

The program hired a historian, Lois Helmbold, to teach core courses while they searched for the ladder faculty they had finally been awarded in exchange for my departure. Dr. Helmbold was let go after three years and replaced by another temporary lecturer, Ellen Lewin. Thus the women's studies program used three lecturers as it searched for permanent faculty. Five scholars were hired with joint appointments in other departments as full professors. The idea was to find "stars." Each of those hired was a fine scholar and professional in her own right. But missing was an overall vision of women's studies; and, indeed, several of those hired had no experience in the field. Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien made women's studies a department in 1991, with Irene Tinker as its first chair.<sup>27</sup>

But as women's studies grows and thrives in other universities, it is today in a scaled-down state at Berkeley. This is perhaps not a surprise since, in 1985, over a decade of history and expertise were swept away. In my view, a denial of history—the casting away of years of experience, the breaking of a bond between faculty, students and alumnae established over twelve years—is part of the reason for the department's current lowered expectations. Another rupture occurred when five full professors left the department.<sup>28</sup>

At this writing, the department is in its third stage. The university expects to keep it small; nonetheless, Caren Kaplan, the present chair, is working valiantly to consolidate the department's scholarly strengths by focussing on the interdisciplinary study of women and gender in an international context. There are also plans to add emphases on the impact of new technologies upon women.<sup>29</sup>

I regret the diminished state of women's studies at Berkeley.<sup>30</sup> And I regret that the interdisciplinary vision was abandoned after the mid-eighties.<sup>31</sup> Nor do we have any easy answers for the students of today who might ask: shall we hit the streets or work gradually through the system or try to do both? Though founded through militancy, ethnic studies struggled for stability and, ironically, found that it had to return to the barricades thirty years after its founding when, in the spring of 1999, it appeared that the university was no longer committed to its programs. A hunger strike was the drastic action chosen by students, who did, finally, win more faculty positions and a research center.<sup>32</sup> In the end, many of us have learned that no matter what one's strategy, it is tough to establish new areas of study at Berkeley.



## ENDNOTES

- 1 He asked the question as we gathered for an interview. See "Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies at UC Berkeley: A Collective Interview," by Debby Rosenfelt, *Radical Teacher* 14 (Special California Issue), December 1979, 12-18. The interview, which also included Clara Sue Kidwell of Native American Studies, provides an excellent summary of the foundings of these programs. African American Studies became a program with its own degree in 1973 and a department in 1975 under Letters and Science; the other programs (Asian American, Chicano, and Native American studies) were not placed under any of the usual "divisions" of the Berkeley campus but were answerable directly to the chancellor. The departure of African American studies from ethnic studies disappointed many who had dreamed of a college of third world studies.
- 2 Ruth Rosen's history of the contemporary women's movement provides a helpful chronology of events. In 1978-79, she illustrates one step forward and two steps of backlash for the U.S. women's movement and civil rights. In 1978, Proposition 6 failed "to prohibit gays and lesbians from teaching in California schools" and in that same year Laura X began collecting clippings and documents on the women's movement in her home on Glen Street in Berkeley. The collection is now on microfilm and widely used by scholars. It is catalogued as the "Guide to the microfilm edition of *Herstory*: supplementary set from the *International Women's History Periodical Archive*, 1976. In 1979, Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority and a year later a former California governor was elected president. See *The World Split Open, How the Modern Women's Movement Changed the World* (New York: Viking, 2000), xxvi-ii. Rosen takes her title from a poem by Muriel Rukeyser. She received her Ph.D. in history from Berkeley in 1976, with one of the first dissertations in women's history.
- 3 In 1969, Marsha Hudson, a graduate student in comparative literature, organized a salon, which met at her apartment to discuss women writers and conditions for women in the department. This group blossomed into the caucus, which then demanded courses on women writers. Several members of the salon also formed a translation group, which went on to publish *The Other Voice: Twentieth Century Women's Poetry in Translation* published in 1976 by W.W. Norton with an introduction by Adrienne Rich.
- 4 I discuss these origins in "From the Bottom Up: The Students' Initiative," *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from 30 Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe (Feminist Press, 2000), 142-54.
- 5 Numbers are from Sheila O'Rourke of the office of Academic Compliance at Berkeley.
- 6 The suffrage movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is considered the "first wave." Many events signaled the beginning of the second wave; surely two important ones were "A Kind of Memo" in 1965 by Casey Hayden and Mary King addressing the sexism of the antiwar and student movements and the founding of the National Organization of Women in 1966. See the chronology in Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open*.
- 7 Marilyn Boxer, a major force in the department at San Diego State, has written the only history of U.S. women's studies: *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- 8 I typed the first proposal for a major and ran it off with the help of the staff of the comparative literature program on their mimeograph machine. The purple and white copies include a letter dated April 15, 1974, to "Dear Friends" from the "Undergraduate Committee on Women's Studies," asking supporters to comment on the draft proposal. This document, as well as others I cite in this article, is a part of the author's personal files on the history of Berkeley women's studies.
- 9 I worked with Patricia Cooper, then a lecturer in zoology, to develop a course in human development that would be appropriate for our majors. When she left the university, Professor Richard Strohman of zoology suggested students could enroll in one of his courses, where feminist perspectives were respected. We eventually got out from under this requirement. In the eighties, a new field of thought emerged: feminists began to uncover the gender biases of scientific thought. There are now many books, and many new courses, in this area.



- 10 In reading histories of the movement, one realizes how little activists knew of contemporaneous work in other parts of the country. Organizers had neither answering machines nor e-mail; among graduate students of my milieu, long distance calls were rare because too expensive. I did not have a television until the late seventies.
- 11 Women's studies entered the scene at a difficult time for nontraditional perspectives. The School of Criminology was dismantled at the end of the 1975-76 school year, a few months before women's studies opened its doors. From 1975-77, I taught at Strawberry Creek College, or the Collegiate Seminar Program, which offered team-taught seminars for ten students. Among the instructors at Strawberry were many pioneering scholars writing feminist dissertations and books in their fields. The interdisciplinary program was founded in 1974 by Professor Charles Muscatine of English and funded by FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education). Strawberry was expensive; but the university did not take it on in any form after the end of private funding in 1980. Likewise, in the summer of 1982, when few were around to protest, Field studies was eliminated. (Phone conversation with Jon Wagner, former director, July 25, 2001.) Field studies was an excellent program which women's studies depended upon to give our students work experience to complement their courses.
- 12 I recently completed and have submitted for publication *Living Ideas: Women's Studies at Berkeley, 1973-85*, which considers in greater detail this and other chapters of our history.
- 13 The first version of *Theories of Women's Studies* came out in 1980 and was purchased by programs around the country. It included articles on women's studies as a discipline, feminist methodology, and an annotated bibliography of articles on the new field. It was followed by *Theories II* (1981), which focussed on feminist methodologies. A book including the original two publications, with additions, was published by Routledge & Kegan Paul in 1983. My co-author, Renate Duelli-Klein, a biologist from Switzerland, received a Berkeley B.A. in women's studies in 1979. She is currently the director of women's studies and the Feminist Research Center at Deakin University in Australia.
- 14 Members of the board over the years were Dorothy Brown, Carol T. Christ, Barbara Christian, Susan Ervin-Tripp (psychology), Robin Lakoff, and Elizabeth Scott (statistics). Other members at intervals were Julia Bader (English), Robert Blauner (sociology), Carol Clover (Scandinavian/comparative literature), Geraldine Clifford (education), Arlie Hochschild (sociology), Francine Masiello (comparative literature), and Charles Muscatine (English).
- 15 I have kept personal journals since 1961, when I studied at the Sorbonne. My women's studies' journals are voluminous. In August 1980, we had not yet received a budget for the coming school year. (We were then on the quarter system.) On August 14, I wrote: "I am preparing for a meeting with the Provost, who wants to remove the Coordinator position. These crises always come in the summer when few are around to help. Arlie [Hochschild] from the Advisory Board urged me to go alone since I am the one who formed women's studies and must argue for its continuance. "Is she supporting my autonomy or withdrawing her support, letting me sink or swim?" On September 18, I wrote: "School has started again. I am so assaulted by the University, it feels like violation. The Provost decided to rehire me as Coordinator. We will finally get the academic review I have been begging for. It's the next stage toward permanence."
- 16 The letter written on April 14, 1981 is among the documents in the author's files.
- 17 The "Review of Women's Studies Program," dated June 9, 1981, was addressed to Geoffrey Keppel, dean of social sciences, from Marian C. Diamond (physiology-anatomy), chair; Susan Ervin-Tripp (psychology); Karl Jackson (political science); William Z. Lidicker, Jr. (zoology); and Michael Rogin (political science). Author's files.
- 18 See "California Q & A, An Interview with Gloria Bowles," by Lisa Harrington, *California Monthly*, 92, no. 3 (January-February 1983), 8-11, 30, as well as Walter Goodman, "Women's Studies: The Debate Continues," *New York Times Magazine*, April 22, 1984.
- 19 My as yet unpublished memoir, *Living Ideas*, includes an entire chapter on our experiments with feminist pedagogy, which included attempts to foster a greater collaboration between students and faculty. In retrospect, we set the bar too high, thus arousing expectations among students which faculty could



- not meet. For example, the students of the thesis seminar expected their instructor to be constantly available even as they asserted that the class did not meet their sophisticated intellectual needs.
- 20 The letter to Provost Middlekauff is dated May 19, 1982, and is one of the documents in my files.
  - 21 Paula Fass of history was chair of the committee, which also included William Nestrick, an associate professor of English and founding director of the film studies program, and Barbara T. Christian, chair of African American studies.
  - 22 Carolyn Porter, "A Report on Women's Studies," June 1984, was directed to the new provost, Leonard Kuhi of astronomy.
  - 23 In the spring semester, I asked for a meeting between myself, Dean Slottman and Carolyn Porter, hoping against hope for some form of mediation. Carolyn indicated that the die was already cast and said that "some people have been trying to do this for a long time."
  - 24 My book, *Louise Bogan's Aesthetic of Limitation*, was published by Indiana University Press in 1987.
  - 25 This vote was full of surprises. Among board members, I felt I could count on the support of six; three would vote against me. I had worked amicably with one, but I did not know how she would lean. Later I learned that two did not attend the meeting; that one changed her vote upon seeing my dossier and letters of recommendation. One, on the other hand, apparently decided it would be better for me to relinquish and voted against me.
  - 26 The news story appeared in the *Daily Californian* on May 9, 1985, 1, 8 and the editorial on 4.
  - 27 "Head of Cal's women's studies begins with world of experience," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 8, 1991, F3.
  - 28 Irene Tinker retired; Evelyn Fox Keller, who had taught at Northeastern, left Berkeley for MIT. Those who decided to leave women's studies for Berkeley departments or schools were June Jordan (African American studies); Mary Ryan (history) and Carol Stack (education).
  - 29 Caren Kaplan is the only full-time appointment in women's studies. Other faculty have joint or triple appointments and administrative assignments: Norma Alarcon is one quarter time in women's studies; her other appointments are in Chicano/a studies and Spanish and Portuguese. Half-time appointments include Wendy Brown (political science); Evelyn Nakano Glenn (ethnic studies), who headed the Beatrice Bain Research Group and has recently been appointed the first director of the Center for the Study of Race and Gender; Barrie Thorne (sociology), who is co-director of the Center for Working Families. Trin Min-Ha is 75 percent time in women's studies and 25 percent in film and rhetoric. In fall 2001, the department conducted a search for a scholar specializing in the "transnational and global politics of gender and feminism." (E-mail from Caren Kaplan, 26 August 2001.)
  - 30 Over a decade later, Carol Christ, who was vice chancellor at Berkeley from 1994-2000, publicly articulated her preference for the study of women within the traditional disciplines over independent women's studies in "The American University and Women's Studies," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 16, no. 1 (1997), 13-24: "In the early days of women's studies, women often debated the question of whether women's studies should be located in the various departments that it could hope to transform. That form of the question no longer makes sense...the use of gender as a focus for analysis has become so pervasive...that I occasionally wonder whether the idea of a discipline that bounds the study of women is adequate to the wealth and variety of work being done." *Tulsa Studies* (24). Her article is interesting for its summary of the contributions of disciplinary research, however, it contains a number of factual errors and omissions about the genesis of Berkeley women's studies.
  - 31 Sandra Coyner, director of women's studies at Kansas State, who wrote the state-of-the-art article on women's studies as a discipline for *Theories of Women's Studies*, lost her post and eventually left the field. Since there are now a number of Ph.D. programs in women's studies, it is possible that the interdisciplinary tendency will grow stronger with a new generation of scholars.
  - 32 Irum Shiekh produced a documentary entitled "On Strike! Ethnic Studies 1969-1999." It is available in the ethnic studies library and in the Media Center at Berkeley. Several articles on Berkeley ethnic studies and the field in general appeared in *Colorlines* 2, no. 2 (summer 1999), 15-27.