

PREFACE

The articles in this particular issue of *Feminist Studies* work together to challenge us on several fronts: as a group they ask how far we have come, and they urge reflection on the complex ways in which women are constantly visible and invisible, always the same as men and always different. Despite the apparent prevalence of "gender" study as a research paradigm within many academic fields, exactly what is the nature of and how established is feminist historiography within the humanities? In what ways does the apparently commonplace visibility of white women and women of color within the public sphere shape current debates about equity, power, and labor? How are these issues articulated among women themselves, in the context of power differentials produced by race and class identifications? And how, both at home and abroad, do we understand the nature of feminist interventions in the political sphere?

The first two articles, "Cherished Classifications: Bathrooms and the Construction of Gender/Race on the Pennsylvania Railroad during World War II" by Patricia Cooper and Ruth Oldenziel and "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class" by Nancy MacLean, each bring a fresh historical perspective to the subject of American women, race, and work during the second half of the twentieth century. In examining the neglected records of a white middle-class female supervisor hired during World War II by the Pennsylvania Railroad to monitor bathroom conditions for (and thus the "hygiene" practices of) Black and white women laborers, Cooper and Oldenziel focus our attention on the crucially effective ways in which management attempted to enforce gender, class, and racial boundaries in the face of social transformations in the workplace that followed the outbreak of the war. Turning to the 1970s, Nancy MacLean locates women in the struggle for affirmative action via the forms of collective action that involved female workers in a variety of job settings. MacLean's goal is to recover "women's relationship to affirmative action . . . because women . . . are so often [mis]cast . . . as passive beneficiaries hiving off the labors of others."

From these essays, we move to a cluster of commentaries on the labor activism of white women and people of color in the academy. The cluster begins with Erik Ludwig's questioning of

Duke University students' current nostalgia over a 1968 campus demonstration to pressure the institution into recognizing the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 77 and his assertion that that nostalgia threatens to erase the considerable leadership role taken specifically by Black women food workers during the strike. Recounting the events leading up to the 1968 protest, Ludwig centralizes the direct political action of women such as Shirley Ramsey and Iola Woods, who demanded that Duke University adhere to fair and humane labor practices. The story of the Black women food workers at Duke makes clear that labor issues in the university are very much within the raced, classed, and gendered settings of the "real" world. As such, Ludwig's piece provides a correctly sobering note for the remaining three commentaries on the effects of California's Proposition 209 on faculty activism on the campuses of the University of California; on the 1997 faculty strike at York University in Toronto; and, on the video project "Through My Lens" initiated by woman of color activists among the faculty of the University of Michigan to bring attention to the workplace struggles of an often-invisible segment of the professoriat. Each of these commentaries, by Ula Taylor, Linda Briskin and Janice Newson, and Frances R. Aparicio, speaks of the possibilities of coalition building and the challenge of articulating workable agendas that bring together the interests and strengths of faculty and students. These commentaries represent a collective meditation on current faculty activism that must stand in conversation with the past and present grassroots activism exemplified by the Duke University Black women food workers. As a further meditation on work, gender, and class, two witty and incisive poems by Judith Strasser, "48" and "First Day," cast a hard, unromantic look at wearying encounters of women's office work.

Following upon these discussions, Glenda Gilmore's "But She Can't Find Her [V.O.] Key" helps us shift vantage point from the details and conditions of women's work in a variety of contexts to the theoretical question of how we (especially those academics in Gilmore's field of history) can make stories of everyday struggles for existence matter in our conceptualization of the world. Taking issue with traditional constructions of southern political history and indeed with American historians who often fail to recognize their own investments in the status quo, Gilmore calls

for an urgent recognition of the ways academics continue to ignore the ways race, class, and gender shape "mainstream" history. By bringing to readers her grandmother's fears and desires, Susan Thomas uses her poetry to remind us not to homogenize the past or to erase the complex history of immigrants to this country. Similarly, in describing the foundational ideas behind her work, Chinese American artist Joanna L. Kao talks about how her prints emerge from the need to rescue the deeply felt but often ignored experiences of Asian American immigrants and their children.

Shifting from the politics of the everyday to the politics of the state, the essay by M. Grazia Rossilli brings sharply to the fore the dawning realization that despite the progressive, if not revolutionary, activity around inclusion and community building in Europe, the category of "woman" still lies uneasily beside the category "citizen." In her essay on the European Union, Rossilli notes that the European community legislation on gender equality tends to level down such that the standards fall between the countries with the most progressive and most regressive policies. The most effective legislation is to be found in the field of "equality in the workplace"; on the other hand, issues of childcare remain at the level of recommendations, while many of the more challenging suggestions for women's rights are relegated to the national level. Rossilli's discussion of the troubling issue of women as an "interest group" coincides with Danielle Haase-Dubosc's focus in her essay on the equality/difference debate in France today. Haase-Dubosc analyzes the "parité" movement which calls for equal representation of women and men in all elected offices and which has served as a catalyst for French feminists. Despite the watering down of the final resolution (which is now in the hands of the French president), argues Haase-Dubosc, the movement has reopened the productive tensions between the "essentialists" and the "egalitarians" (even though both were to be found in pro-parity and anti-parity camps) and has thus reconnected the French people with feminism.

While the essay on France shows us that in politics women as agents have yet to be fully accepted, Tessa Bartholomeusz's article on the Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaranatunga presents one way in which women do make themselves culturally acceptable as state leaders. Drawing on Buddhist traditions of motherhood and relational notions of morality, Bartholomeusz

argues that by promoting a strategy of cooperation with Tamil separatists in a country torn by over a decade of bloody ethnic strife, Kumaranatunga came to be seen during the elections as a Buddhist "mother" willing to sacrifice herself for all the "children" of her nation. Thus her gender functions as an asset rather than a liability in Sri Lankan politics.

From discussions of political incorporation we move, finally, to the effects of global economic incorporation on women, with Joy Parr's review essay on homeworkers. Drawing a distinction between privileged home entrepreneurs and the majority of homeworkers who are economically and politically disenfranchised, Parr argues that for most homeworkers there is no flexible specialization but only capital's expectation of women's "sense of obligation to family. . . and their tolerance for hard work yielding limited returns."

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for the editors