

Preface

Finding one's voice, a familiar refrain of 1970s feminism, takes a new twist in recently published memoirs and movement histories. Casting a retrospective eye in order to gain a more expansive vision, Sara M. Evans begins the discussion in our special cluster of articles reassessing Second Wave feminism in the United States. Is our task, Evans asks, to weave a coherent history from the many strands and trends of this "massive, dynamic, thrilling, angry, and incredibly diverse movement"? The authors of the volumes she reviews wrestle with current stereotypes faulting "the" movement for its narrow preoccupations and for its many rifts and conflicts. They do so by relating some of the fundamental questions of feminist radicalism to the broader context of Cold War international politics; by exploring questions of race, class, motherhood, and sexuality; and by examining the connections between various elements of women's liberation and other struggles and movements. While recalling moments of high drama and pivotal events in the early movement, the authors also come to new insights about its contributions, motivations, and limits by historicizing their own lives.

The conversation continues in the three articles written by a new generation of feminist scholars who were not active participants in the early days of the movement. The articles by Premilla Nadasen, Anne M. Valk, and Becky Thompson take up in turn those sensitive issues and domains of contention flagged by Evans in her review. In "Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights," Nadasen discusses the unique brand of feminism developed by welfare rights activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Neither allied with feminist organizations of the time, nor self-identified as members of the Second Wave, activists fighting for welfare reform, particularly black women in the National Welfare Rights Organization, developed acute analyses of the relation between marriage as an institution and the patriarchal character of state welfare policies. This critique, Nadasen argues, grew out of the lives and struggles of poor black women. Although many of these activists did not self-consciously identify with the women's liberation movement, their griev-

ances and political analyses must be counted within an expanded view of women's issues and contemporary feminist theory.

Anne M. Valk's article on the Furies, a lesbian separatist collective based in Washington, D.C., explores the influence of the Black Power movement and other revolutionary and anti-imperial struggles on the theory and practice of lesbian feminism. Imagining a "Federation of Feminist States" governed by a lesbian feminist party fifty years in the future, members of the group saw their collective as a short-term strategy wherein women living and working together (separated from men and heterosexual women), would fashion a revolutionary program to mobilize masses of women. In contrast to current conceptions of sexuality and politics, lesbianism for the Furies involved a politically motivated rejection of heterosexuality. This was the central institution, in their view, buttressing the patriarchal ordering of race, class, and sexual domination. As the members of the collective struggled over motherhood, inequities in education, skill and pay, personalities, and other issues, the misalignments between political ideals and everyday life led to schisms and ultimately to the demise of the collective. Although the Furies was short-lived, Valk argues that its influence was extensive. Moving away from the vanguardism of the collective, former members devised new means to spread feminist theory and culture through a variety of media and institutions in the now more heterodox women's movement. An example is the work of collective member Joan E. Biren (JEB) whose photographs of Second Wave activists are included throughout this issue.

Becky Thompson's article retells the history of Second Wave feminism from the point of view of multiracial feminism. Characterized by its international perspective, attention to interlocking oppressions, and its support of coalition politics, this liberation movement, spearheaded by women of color and white antiracist women, was neither an adjunct nor merely a response to white radical feminism. Emerging in the early 1970s from the mobilization women activists in such organizations as the Chicana Hijos de Cuauhtemoc (named after a Mexican women's underground newspaper during the 1910 Mexican Revolution); the Asian Sisters from the Asian American Political Alliance, the Native American women's organization, Women of All Red Nations (WARN); and the National Black Feminist Organization; multiracial feminism claims its own history and trajectory. For example, mass mobilization among antiracist women both straight and lesbian begins in the very period that scholars typically consider Second Wave feminism in decline. In the early 1980s, on the heels of difficult political struggles waged by activist scholars of color, groundbreaking essays and anthologies by and about women of color reshaped U.S. feminism.

Angela Davis, for instance, cites 1981 as the year when women of

color developed as a "new political subject" with the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*. Accordingly, multiracial feminism gains strength in the 1980s and 1990s. Thompson's essay argues effectively that changing the chronology and periodization necessarily changes the phenomenon described. Including the trajectory of multiracial feminism within the formerly dominant characterization of Second Wave feminism, suggests a very different understanding of the radicalism of the movement. Rather than a wistful look back to the days when we dared to be bad, we might look forward to the possibilities of gender, class, and racial equalities not yet realized.

Denise Bauer's essay on artist Alice Neel combined with a selection of Neel's portraits of women further highlight the complex dynamics and chronology of Second Wave feminism. A young bohemian with Communist sympathies in the 1920s and a single mother living in Spanish Harlem in the 1930s, Neel painted prominent activists such as Mother Bloor and ordinary people such as her Latino and African American neighbors. She explored class and racial differences among women, and men, and exposed the effects of poverty, abuse, and domestic violence on her subjects even as she captured their dignified humanity. Although Neel worked in relative obscurity over the next three decades, she was rediscovered by feminists in the 1970s and became a vocal and artistic advocate of women's causes. "Marxist Girl," the painting on the cover of this issue, is a portrait of Irene Pesliskis, a radical feminist artist and activist who founded one of the first feminist art journals. Neel's portrait captures Pesliskis's politics in her person. Donning the "women's liberationist" look of the period, clad in jeans and a tank top, with no make-up, her hair tussled, and one arm over her head, highlighting her unshaved armpit, Pesliskis's pose is "aggressively undemure." Neel's motivation in her portraits of women, as Bauer points out, was not necessarily to champion women, as was the case for many feminist artists. "Rather, it was part of her larger effort to give expression to a common humanity that included diverse women."

Neel's complicated relationship to the women's movement reminds us once again of the various trajectories that converged to form the Second Wave. As Neel puts it, "They think I'm a big women's libber. I am, but I stop short of them. I don't stress it every minute." Indeed, she tended to view capitalism, rather than patriarchy, as the primary form of oppression. Yet she also reminded her younger colleagues that "I was women's lib before there was women's lib."

These articles and images, combined with other recent work in the field, necessitate significant changes in the way that many of us teach women's movements in the United States. They challenge dominant narratives about the chronology, cast of characters, and movement connections of Second Wave feminism. They demonstrate the centrality of

women of color and lesbians within feminist movements and highlight economic, aesthetic, and lifestyle issues in the theory and practice of women's liberation. In conjunction with Deslippe's book on working-class feminism and the documents collection edited by Baxandall and Gordon—both reviewed by Evans—these articles contribute to a critical reframing of the origin stories of the U.S. women's movement. So, too, does Denise Bauer's essay on Alice Neel, which suggests some of the connections between the Old Left and women's liberation. Becky Thompson asks that we rethink the trajectory of the Second Wave as well, extending our analyses into the late 1970s and 1980s by following the activities of multiracial and anti-racist feminists. Taken together, these works offer students and teachers an even more complicated and contested history of twentieth-century politics and society, and redefine the place of the women's movement in that larger narrative.

The rich and variegated portraits these authors present generally leave intact the linear tale of our nineteenth-century feminist foremothers. As Evans notes in her essay, the First Wave continues to be cast as a singular struggle for woman suffrage. Even more than Second Wave feminism, the First Wave is thought of primarily as a white middle-class movement bent on achieving legal and political equality for white women. The standard story claims that the movement was born at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 and ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, mandating woman suffrage, in 1920. Yet the nineteenth and early twentieth century also spawned multiple notions of, and movements for, sex advancement. The two articles that close this volume explore recent works that open up debates about the origins, trajectory, and teaching of woman's rights in the United States and in the larger transatlantic world. In a wide-ranging review essay, Lori D. Ginzberg evaluates a coterie of recent books that recast First Wave feminism through attention to race, religion, and politics in the United States and to revolutionary and technological transformations across the Atlantic. In the introduction to her essay, Ginzberg suggests the dangers of relying solely on Ken Burns's documentary version of the Seneca Falls-to-suffrage tale. This is a necessary caution given the likelihood that many faculty, especially those outside the field of women's history, will find the video an easy way to incorporate women's issues into courses on U.S. history or social movements. Although none of the works reviewed here provide a coherent synthesis to replace the more traditional story offered by Burns, together they introduce a range of concerns that disrupt his narrative of a movement sprung full-blown out of the heads of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

The three most important interventions made by the authors under review involve the interplay of race, racism, and woman's rights in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century movement; the development of

vibrant transatlantic feminist networks; and the efforts of pioneer feminists to transform religious, familial, and economic as well as political institutions and relations. Rather than a simple trajectory from Seneca Falls to suffrage or a movement defined by the ideas and priorities of a few charismatic leaders, this First Wave demands that we teach feminism as an ongoing struggle over conceptualizations of rights, strategies for change, and legacies for action.

Shawn St. Jean shifts the focus from movements to texts, highlighting a now classic work in late-nineteenth-century feminist literature. Engaging debates over the integrity of the text and the intention of the author—debates relevant to a range of feminist writings—St. Jean evaluates competing editions of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wall-Paper* and reflects on their value for scholars, teachers, and students. Examining four recent editions of the text, and comparing these to the earlier and widely-used Feminist Press edition, he highlights the choices made by editors and publishers—in the past and present—so that "teachers, critics and scholars might identify which of the many available texts of 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' fit their needs. . . ." St. Jean notes, for instance, that the only edition explicitly directed at classroom use, edited by Dale Bauer, provides an array of supplemental documents. Yet the documents locate Gilman's work almost solely in feminist controversies and celebrations rather than in a wider array of contemporary discourses and debates, such as those related to gothic or horror tales. Although this perspective may seem appropriate for faculty who teach this book as part of a feminist literary tradition, new works on the First and Second Wave caution us to avoid defining this tradition too narrowly.

The poetry and short story presented in this volume, like Gilman's writing and Neel's artwork, remind us of the critical role that creative work has played in documenting women's lives and expressing feminist visions. These pieces are mingled among the scholarly articles and review essays to highlight the way they reflect and elaborate on common themes. Eileen Moeller's "Circus," and Elizabeth Crowell's "Handstand," for instance, capture the sense of possibility that girls discovered in the everyday experiences of post-World War II America, and that for some opened up spaces for reimagining the world. In "Family Ghosts," Mulaika Hijjas explores the ways that memories, rituals, and generational connections and disjunctions shape life choices. Susanna Rich's "Grandmother Sausages" also excavates women's ties to the past, but in a more erotic mode. Significantly, Melissa Kwasny opens her poem, "Iris," with a passage from Louise Glück, "whatever/returns from oblivion returns/to find a voice." The concept of emergence and rebirth with its complex ties to past forms, future expectations, and delicate relationships forged through time is elaborated in this poem. These themes are also explored in Kwasny's other poem, "Fern," although here she focus-

es on the limits of resurrection, of how we become captured in time, or, as she writes, "[t]he frozen earth denies."

Elizabeth Rees's poem, "Early Intifada," with which we open this volume, like the "News and Views" section that now closes each issue, reflects one of the most important contributions of feminist movements in the past and the present: the recognition that daily life, political struggle, academic scholarship, and creative expression are deeply intertwined. *Feminist Studies*, which emerged out of the Second Wave, is especially concerned to both reflect upon and carry on the movement's diverse visions.

Nancy Hewitt and Tessie Liu,
for the editors