

PREFACE

In "The Just Price, the Free Market, and the Value of Women," the lead article in this issue of *Feminist Studies*, Alice Kessler-Harris eloquently reminds us of our responsibility as feminist scholars to address public issues and demonstrates that a knowledge of women's history is crucial to assessing policies that affect women's lives today. By tracing the historical roots of the concept of comparable worth, Kessler-Harris shows the continuity of the contemporary pay equity movement with earlier efforts by women workers to achieve equity and social justice. Her analysis of why the comparable worth movement is so strongly resisted today reminds us of the ways in which gender affects the ways work is assigned value but also that such evaluations are always historically specific.

Like Kessler-Harris's essay, many of the other articles in this issue underscore the importance of women's history to an understanding of contemporary women's lives and work. The title of Judy Aulette and Trudy Mills's essay, "Something Old, Something New," explicitly captures the relationship between the past and present. In comparing the public role of the Morenci Miners Women's Auxiliary (MMWA) in the 1983-86 copper strike in Arizona with the roles of early women's labor auxiliaries, Aulette and Mills demonstrate how ideologies introduced by the second wave of feminism contributed to the formation and political activity of the MMWA. Although the group fulfilled the traditional role of supporting families on strike, it also engaged in activities that challenged conventional gender roles. Yet, because the mass media defined the domestically oriented work of the auxiliary as something distinct from and outside "politics," the MMWA's contributions were largely ignored.

Leslie Moch's article on French teachers in the pre-World War I period also examines the relationship between women's public and domestic roles. Moch explores the reasons that in France—unlike the United States, England, and many other industrialized countries—women teachers were encouraged to marry and to continue their careers, rather than forced to leave their profession upon marriage. Although most French teachers of this era remained single nonetheless (as a result of the specific training and working conditions they faced), Moch's analysis reminds us of the flexibility with which societies can accommodate the participation

of women in the workforce, at least under certain economic and political conditions.

Judith Bennett's review essay, "History That Stands Still," examines women's work in a much earlier period of European history, namely, prior to the industrial revolution, and as its title suggests, has a more sobering message. Bennett warns against the tendency of some feminist social historians to see the preindustrial period as a golden age for women, a view that cannot be sustained in light of the recent scholarship she reviews. Feminist historians, she suggests, may be more comfortable with change than with continuity and thus may be more inclined than others to search for a golden age. But her essay reminds us once again that the devaluation of women's work is one constant of women's history and one that will not be easily overcome.

One contemporary challenge to that devaluation is the campaign of the "Guerrilla Girls" described in the words and images of Josephine Withers's art essay. These women artists' posters highlight sexism in the art world and present various renditions of "public service messages." Withers discusses their tactics and the response they have evoked and evaluates the effectiveness of this kind of opposition in the context of the contemporary art market.

This issue also includes two pieces that use the form of reverie to evoke the effects of gender on the authors' own personal history. In "Make Way for What People Say," Renate Dorrestein sardonically juxtaposes *why* she writes to what people say about *what* she writes. Although she writes "to have a say in a self-created cosmos [where] only the work itself may talk back," she also relates how people do not believe what women say, a perception that strengthens her own desire to write.

Andrea Rushing's story, "Hair-Raising," also uses memory as a device of exploration. She delves into the ways in which black women have related to their kinky hair, sometimes a visual representation as to whether they accept their racial identity and history. Yet, in juxtaposing memories of her mother's and aunts' pride in their art as beauticians who straightened hair with her own effort to raise her daughters to take pride in their natural hair, Rushing emphasizes the resilience of Afro-American women's communal traditions.

The interaction of community, culture, and gender is also a major theme in Ellen Umansky's review essay on Jewish feminism,

which completes this issue. Umansky analyzes the ways in which feminism and Judaism have critiqued one another. Like other writers in this issue, she shows that neither history nor feminism is monolithic and that cultural identity, as it interacts with gender, is a critical element in evolving definitions of feminism.

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for the editors