PREFACE

This issue's art essay profiles the work of Joyce J. Scott, noted craftsperson and performance artist, whose work struggles with the images, conceptions, and contradictions African American feminists face in interpreting our lives. In her art work and in Terry Gips's art essay, we see both playful and painful commentaries on conventional portrayals of Black women. Scott's work illustrates the convergence of degrading and threatening experiences–the ways that Black women have always had to disguise the truth of their desires. For example, the contiguity of beauty and violence comes through in the delicately wrought "necklace" piece (which replicates the recent South African form of gang killing) and in the peaceful composition of some of her saddest works. Scott's work vividly shows how the oversimplification of Black women in the arts parallels their erasure from history. Many of the contributions to this issue confront, as Scott does, this faceless and voiceless location and offer new paradigms for a different portrayal.

Many feminist scholars and activists–especially women of color–recognize the significance of Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill's work in feminist thinking over the past decade. The article which appears in this issue offers a new interpretation of the tensions in contemporary feminism disclosed by the ways we theorize difference. Baca Zinn and Dill outline their critique of the mainstream feminist project's approach to questions of difference. As an alternative, they synthesize an enormous amount of new theory and practice delineating interlocking and varying hierarchies of domination, outlining a position which they call multiracial feminism, one in which difference can occupy center stage in women's studies today.

The framework advanced by Baca Zinn and Dill is brought to life by the issues raised in the review essay by Francille Rusan Wilson on Black women's history. Many of the authors whose work she surveys argue theoretically for and practice in their own work a view of race in dynamic relationship to class and gender, Black in an exchange with white. In her consideration of six new books from the mid-1990s, Wilson comments on the growing methodological maturity of investigations into Black women's past and on the richness of the histo-

rians' recoveries of the past lives of Black women, both well known (Ida B. Wells) and unknown (domestic workers in Washington, D.C.).

In her account of the trial of two North Carolina Black men accused of raping a poor white woman in the 1860s, Laura F. Edwards gives us a case study in the interplay of race, class, and gender in the politically complex Reconstruction years. The case of one of the men, Henderson Cooper, attracted significance as it went along. It crystallized conflicts between state authorities and Freedmen's Bureau officials; it made statements about which strata of white women and men were worthy of state protection; it demonstrated public support for "virtuous" womanhood; obviously, also, it demonized–and in this case also victimized–Black men and proscribed sexual contacts between the races.

As Estelle B. Freedman shows in her contribution to this issue, the walls of prison have, at least in this century, enclosed a different kind of racial and sexual space than in the world outside. Although evidence is sketchy, prisons have long been settings in which women formed love relationships, partnerships often between Black and white women or girls. What has changed a number of times is the way prison administrators, criminologists, and experts in penology have discussed these ties. Before World War II, most observers took only the mildest interest in prison lesbianism; among female sexual deviants they most feared prostitutes. By the 1950s, however, the prison was the scene of a number of *True Confessions* tales of "love-starved girls in reform school" and even a 1950 film, *Caged.* Miriam Van Waters, superintendent of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women from 1932, was dismissed from office in 1949 for her tolerance of prison lesbian relationships and then reinstated the same year.

Other pieces in this issue explore meanings and contexts of lesbian communities, the familylike networks lesbians have organized in so many cities and towns. Anna Wilson's "Death and the Mainstream: Lesbian Detective Fiction and the Killing of the Coming-Out Story" draws surprising conclusions from her observation that publishers and readers of lesbian fiction have, since the mid-1980s or so, been turning away from the coming-out story in favor of lesbian detective novels. Coming-

out stories, often published by lesbian presses for lesbian readers, have functioned as emblems and creators of lesbian community. Wilson quotes Bonnie Zimmerman: "The coming-out story is one of the fundamental myths of lesbian origin, the first basic tale of all lesbian communities." If the detective represents a community's distinct and often oppositional sense of justice, as some critics argue, she also works alone and is often portrayed as isolated, friendless. Tough, solitary, and competent, she works with the police and the mainstream society to solve its mysteries. The lesbian community is alluded to only through the detective's "determination to judge and in her insistence on the margin as the ground of knowledge."

In this issue, Barbara Wilson, one of the best known of the lesbian detective fiction writers, has contributed a short story describing a lesbian/gay community ritual event through the eyes of an outsider, someone who has only joined the community recently, who is awkward with the talk and the ready tears of the other members of a memorial brunch. The dish she brings to the potluck event is not appreciated. Yet Cory, who withdraws from the party, contributes significantly to the day through her back-door route; she retreats upstairs to play with the dead man's little daughter and to help her remember her father.

At the risk of revealing our substantial East-Coast tilt, we proudly announce a cluster of two articles on the U.S. Southwest. James F. Brooks, in "This Evil Extends Especially to the Feminine Sex," looks at the meaning of "the traffic in women" in the complicated mix of Native American, Spanish, and Mexican societies of the New Mexican frontier over a hundred-year period beginning in about 1750. Most of us (via Levi-Strauss or even Gail Rubin) have tended to view the women being trafficked as ciphers in the male exchanges that cemented men's networks and power structures. But Brooks brings to life many of these women–sometimes kidnapped in raids by the Apaches, Navajos, and Comanches, or literally purchased in towns under Spanish control. He shows how, once freed, these women not only survived and ensured the welfare of their often multiracial and multicultural families but also connected these cultures and created the new southwestern culture, whose polyglot character, stifled after 1848, is now being rediscovered and reemphasized.

Emily Honig takes stock of the lives of several of the Chicana women who, nearly twenty-five years ago, were active in the strike against Farah Manufacturing Company in El Paso, Texas, a strike watched closely by feminists all over the country and often viewed as an example of the impact of feminism among blue-collar workers. Interviewing several of these workers in 1992 was a sobering experience for Honig. She found that the narrow "women and work" category into which so many feminist observers fit the strike did scant justice to the varied trajectories of the subsequent lives of the strikers (most of whom are now in their forties). As the plant (and indeed the whole industry) closed down, the women went their separate ways, some into service jobs, some into clerical work, some out of the work force. Honig thought she found that all the women had been changed by their activism–many were more confident, clearer-headed. But only a few were still politically active in the 1990s.

Our issue also includes Su Fidler Cowling's "Soldiers and Sailors," a story of a woman's recognition of her full belonging to a new hometown. Her acceptance is achieved through an act of defiance toward a well-heeled lawyer lounging at the end of a downtown peace demonstration, and another act of generosity toward an old man playing the saxophone in the hopes of some donations.

Beth Richie and Ellen Ross,
for the editors