

Introduction



At this time, when I look back on my life and my work, I see patterns and connections that were not so clearly visible at an earlier stage of my life. The impact of outside political and social events that I experienced in childhood and as a teenager shaped my connection to history: I was a victim of terror and persecution; my life was deeply affected by historical events. As a witness to terrible events, I early learned that history matters. On the other side, a childhood in which artistic creativity and expression were cherished and in which learning was considered not only a practical means of career building, but a means of finding equilibrium and meaning in life well equipped me for survival as a refugee. The life of learning and thinking would always be connected for me with teaching others and with finding a way of applying what I knew to the problems in society.

This book combines essays written over a period of several decades that touch upon the highlights of my practical work as a teacher and as an agent of social change in and out of the academy, and others, recently written, that focus on some of my main concerns as a historian and a political thinker. In this book I want to show how thought and action have been connected in my life; how the life I had led before I became an academic affected the questions I asked as a historian; how the social struggles in which I engaged as an academic woman informed my thinking. I want to explain how a decision to change the content of historical scholarship and knowledge so as to give women just representation became a challenge to develop new teaching methods and to create alternate models of academic discourse. I want to trace how feminist teaching led to the development of “outreach” projects that influenced a large number of people, far beyond the reach of the academy.

Social change is made by strategic analysis and by consistent and continuous organizational work. An adequate strategic analysis—that is, one that can be proven successful by pragmatic application—needs to be based on deep analysis that takes many factors into consideration, and on an

understanding of what can be learned from historical precedent. It relies on the building of coalitions and it encourages a lifelong commitment to social action in its participants.

Growing up under a fascist government as a young girl, I wanted to change the world. Antifascism was real to me, a ray of hope in a hopeless environment—it meant democracy, free elections, equal rights for all citizens, freedom of thought. During a short stay in a Nazi jail, from which at the time I had no hope of ever escaping, I learned from my cell mates that political action meant working with others. One could not survive alone.

Later, in America, as an unskilled immigrant worker, I learned firsthand what it meant to be poor and without a support network. I had lived my childhood and adolescence in middle-class comfort; now I was on my own in a labor market in which women were restricted to only the most undesirable jobs. I worked as a domestic, as an office worker, as a salesgirl, and, after a year of training, as a medical technician—always at minimum wages and without job security. During job searches and on the job I experienced discrimination against women—pervasive, sometimes subtle, often open. At times it was mixed with other forms of discrimination. I applied for a job as a switchboard operator at the New York Telephone company. I never made it past the first interviewer. “We don’t hire Jewish girls,” she informed me. “Why?” “Their arms are too short to reach the switches.” That was a new one . . .

Jobs were offered in gendered listings—jobs for men, jobs for women. All required previous experience. If you did not have that, you could not get an interview. If you claimed it, you had to provide written references. If you admitted to being an immigrant, you were not considered fit for an interview. It took four months of such hopeless job searches for me to learn that lying was essential. I got my first paid job by lying about my ethnicity, my religion, and my experience and by providing fake references. My employers were Jewish refugees from Vienna, like myself, only they were rich and I was poor. I was required to wear spike-heel shoes and stand on them forty-eight hours a week (sitting down was not allowed), in order to provide an elegant and glamorous look to their 5th Avenue store. With my feet painful and damaged for life, I learned that gender mattered. After a year of working for these employers, I reported them anonymously to the Department of Labor for paying below minimum wages to their factory workers, all of whom were Jewish refugees from Europe. Anony-

mous or not, I immediately got fired, without a reference. Thus, I learned about class the hard way, and I have never forgotten it. When I became an academic, it was natural for me to consider class and gender as categories of analysis in all my work.

During two decades as a mother, housewife, writer, and community organizer I gained much practical wisdom that would later influence my academic practice and thought. When I organized neighborhood women for child care centers and better public schools, I learned that I could accomplish nothing by myself. It took a neighborhood organization to get a stop light in front of the public school. It took years of patient, small-scale organizational work before a corrupt and authoritarian school principal could be restrained from running his school like a private enclave, in which elementary school children were treated as recruits in an Army boot camp.

When, in the 1950s, I worked in support of United Nations' activities in a neighborhood PTA, in which it was considered "un-American" to urge that, together with candy, donations to UNICEF be collected at Halloween, I learned that I needed to make the work of UNICEF concrete and comprehensible as a neighborhood welfare effort on a larger scale. Abstractions, moral principles, and high-sounding resolutions would not convince my working-class neighbors.

In that period, with Communist witch-hunting and the blacklisting of "subversives" a national pastime, it was still possible to win support for blacklisted individuals by inviting them to present their work, their music, their films at a house-gathering. People might not be ready to fight the system of blacklisting, but they would respond to an individual in need. Also, the display of courage needed to organize such a gathering could make the invited guests question their own actions and, perhaps, serve as a model.

The women who organized peace committees in Queens, New York, during the Korean War exercised similar courage, persistence, and vision. The vision was the firm conviction that small, local organizing efforts would, in the long range, influence policy and lead to social change. In my decades as a historian I was able to confirm that vision as an actual organizing principle for several generations of women reformers.

When, living in an integrated neighborhood, I worked with black women in progressive women's organizations fighting for housing and school integration and for racial justice, I learned to appreciate their effec-

tiveness, their leadership, and their strength. I saw mothers who combined paid work and family obligations and yet found time for neighborhood activism. Their style and culture was different from that of their white neighbors, but their long-range commitment to lifelong activism was unquestioned, grounded in self-help necessity. Having myself been victimized by racist oppression, I felt close to them and shared their long-range vision of a better future. Without these practical experiences of organizing and living with black women I would never have undertaken my research and work on black women's history.

In 1967, all the experts, white and black, assured me that trying to do a book on the history of black women in America was a useless undertaking. Unfortunately, most black women had been illiterate and thus left no records, I was told by a leading historian of African American History. Tragically, due to their oppressed condition they had not been able to make major contributions to American life and culture. And so on.

But I had worked with black women and seen what they could do. I found it inconceivable that they had not so acted in the past. And, in my researches on the antislavery movement, I had found numerous sources on black women activists. My life experience, contradicting conventional academic wisdom, convinced me to edit and publish in 1972 *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, the first collection of historical primary sources by and about black women.¹ I continued to do scholarly work in that field and am happy to say that the field of Black Women's History is today well established and generally recognized.

These and my experiences as a radical, the wife of a blacklisted film editor and the friend of many blacklisted people in Hollywood and in New York, shaped my mind and thought prior to my embarking on an academic career.

I trace, in rather broad strokes, my intellectual development from adolescence on in Chapter 1 of this book. I intend this chapter to serve as a framework for the rest of the book. In that chapter I deal with the development of my feminist thought only as it relates to particular books I have written. I intend, in this book, to deal more fully with the development of my historical thinking as it related to women's history and to let the various chapters illuminate certain steps along the way, steps taken either in practical or in theoretical work.

My earliest approach to dealing with women in history was, like that of most of the early practitioners, compensatory. What had women done,

experienced, thought in the past? And how did their actions contribute to history? While I already questioned the male focus and male bias of traditional history, I then still thought that simply filling in the forgotten stories about women would be a large enough challenge and would of itself rectify the distortions of past historiography. About a decade after doing and teaching “complementary and contribution history,” the shortcomings of this approach became clear to me and to other Women’s History scholars. We understood by then that women’s actions in their own right and women’s work in association with other women changed the discourse and the course of history in ways not well understood previously. How did women’s separate organizations affect the historical outcome? Did women have a separate culture, different from that of men? For me, these questions became urgent during the early years of teaching in the Graduate Program in Women’s History at Sarah Lawrence College (see Chapter 3). Team-teaching with anthropologists and literary scholars made me aware of the complexities of defining women’s status and position in society and, at the same time, be sensitive to the way women’s consciousness of self and their dependency on familial interaction and demands were pulling them in different directions. How did women negotiate this complex terrain? Under what circumstances did they find the courage and necessary strength to put self-interest over familial responsibilities? How did they compromise between the two? The three-volume *Notable American Women*, a compendium of 1,359 biographies, offered one answer to these questions.² It showed that most women who were active in behalf of women’s issues up to the 1930s chose not to have families and that those who did began their organizational work after having raised families.

In the first decade of doing Women’s History I became more and more intrigued with basic questions: How to define women as a group. How did this group differ from other oppressed groups in history? What are the historical preconditions for the formation of feminist movements? My daily work in carrying graduate education in Women’s History forward forced me to improvise answers or to take educated guesses and finally impelled me to focus my theoretical work on answering these basic questions. Chapters 4–8 deal with specific problems in that quest for theory.

Organizationally, the 1970s were a period of intense activity for women historians. We were preoccupied with winning equity for women in academic institutions and professions and in establishing a new field of in-

quiry, Women's Studies. In each of the specialized academic fields we challenged the omission of women and worked toward getting women-focused courses into the curriculum. Activity erupted spontaneously on every level of the educational establishment; advances in one area inspired and influenced struggles in another. In this work, some of what I had learned in my past as a community activist served me well.

In Chapter 2 I describe the way women historians changed the profession and the professional organizations. I trace the decades of effort by women historians to gain equal access to career ladders, to win equity in compensation and career advancement, and to raise awareness about the pervasive sexism in academic institutions. We needed to break the isolation of women in the academy and convince them that their individual grievances were not their own fault, nor were they personal matters—they were built on historic foundations of exclusion and discrimination against women. We built networks of support among graduate students, junior faculty, and women established in academic positions, many of them administrators. As we advanced concrete demands—open hiring procedures, equal pay, no sexual harassment on the job—we began to trust in each other and to experience that women could and would help each other. This simple insight was an enormous step forward for many of us, who had always assumed that we were dependent on the help of men to advance our careers.

The organizational struggles I describe in this chapter took place over four decades and involved not only the two major history societies, the American Historical Association (AHA) and the Organization of American Historians (OAH), but many smaller and regional groups. The Coordinating Committee of Women in the Historical Profession (CCWHP) was founded in 1969 by seventeen historians, but nearly a hundred attended our first public meeting. Today there are twenty-one regional or local Women's History groups affiliated with the organization. The status of women in the historical profession has certainly improved, and we have made great gains in salary equity and career development. The most visible and dramatic gains have been the institution of a democratic, open, and unbiased hiring process, which has benefited men as well as women and minorities; democratization of the electoral process for organizational leadership; and equal access to program and other committees as well as equal representation of women in all functions of the organizations. As the chapter

explains, these achievements were not easily won. The goal of economic equity for women was advanced, but is, as yet, far from fully achieved.

I wrote Chapters 2 and 3 not only as part of my autobiography, but in order to set down a historical record. I used not only my memories and those of other participants, but ample documentation as well. The transformation of academic disciplines by and through the efforts of women academics was widespread and encompassed all aspects of academic life. It has proceeded at an uneven pace—for example, in the sciences, issues women historians fought for decades ago are still embattled and controversial. I believe that women's struggles for equal access and for equity in the professions profoundly altered academic institutions. They not only led to practical and institutional changes, but also profoundly affected the content of education.

The promotion of Women's History as a respected subject matter and as a core part of any curriculum has always been my central concern. The struggle for that transformation is still ongoing and incomplete.

In Chapter 3 I describe the development and growth of the Sarah Lawrence College Graduate Program in Women's History. I deal with it largely in a descriptive manner, again, in order to establish a historical record. Yet this program, the first of its kind, was a pioneering effort, whose impact was felt far beyond the small group of students we were able to train. It was here that I was challenged to answer basic theoretical questions about the nature of Women's History and here that I learned and helped to develop a feminist pedagogy. The constant organizational and theoretical outreach of this program to the general population provided our theoretical work with a solid foundation. We not only asserted and taught that women's thought could be grounded in women's own experience; we actually practiced it and constantly learned in the process.

I experienced the transformative power of women learning about their own history not only in seminars and workshops, but in the several summer institutes I organized at Sarah Lawrence College. Becoming aware that women had a history, that they had not only contributed to, but vitally shaped culture and social institutions, imbued women with new self-confidence and with a strong urge to do likewise. The political dynamic and resourcefulness of the women's movement of the '70s and '80s inspired many of our students, and many came to graduate study already committed to feminist goals. But many others neither were feminists nor

wished to become such. What studying Women's History did for them was to give them a long-range perspective and to teach them how women of the past had solved their problems. They could learn about doing coalition work in the present by studying the nineteenth-century woman's suffrage movement and by analyzing its strategy and tactics. They could learn how to test theoretical formulations on the past experience of women, and in so doing, they could learn to value their own experience as a testing ground for future action.

I learned from my students that changing institutions not only meant curbing obvious abuses that led to discrimination, but that it also meant experimenting and modeling other forms of educational structures. In creating and maintaining graduate programs in Women's History at Sarah Lawrence and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I had to unlearn much of my previous reliance on established academic structures and conventions. Students insisted on helping to shape the programs and on taking their own initiatives to change institutional practices. Adjusting to these changes did not come easily to me, but I learned. And as I became more open to student involvement in administration, I was pleasantly surprised by the sense of responsibility and the good judgment of the students, and I came to admire their organizational skills. I became looser and less directive, both in my teaching and administrative style, which was all to the good for my personal human development.

As a writer and a historian I have learned to stand aside as an outside observer who can and must encompass more than one viewpoint, more than one consciousness. I have learned the benefits of looking at events from a long-range perspective, of seeking multicausal explanations for events and of exploring patterns and recurring themes. My fascination with recurring themes has often led me far afield, both in my research and in my teaching. In trying to understand the world my students and I live in I have sought for connections to events of the past, to long-range causes, and to the effects of decisions made centuries ago that limit the choices citizens can make in the present. It is difficult to understand the major problems in the history of women without references to the distant past. The institutions and customs that affect the lives of men have undergone many changes over the centuries. By contrast, women's primary role as unpaid providers of domestic services and as the nurturers and rearers of children has hardly changed over the centuries. The educational disadvantaging and deprivation of women spans several millennia and has changed only relatively

recently. The control of women's sexuality by men and male-dominated institutions began 4,000 years ago and remains in force in much of the world, although somewhat changed in form. Why were women, of all groups oppressed in society, so slow in coming to a consciousness of their own situation and in organizing to remedy it?

The oppression of women being the oldest form of oppression, it became incorporated in the ideologies, myths, religions, and philosophies of Western civilization and thus was perceived as natural and God-given, something that could not be resisted. Since the subordination of women was assumed to be natural in all explanatory systems, a new conceptual framework was needed in order to properly understand the past of women and conceptualize an alternative future to patriarchy. I spent the next decades trying to define such a conceptual framework in personal discussions with other feminist scholars and in my writings, first in articles, then in my two major works. In *The Creation of Patriarchy* I historicized the long process of the institution of patriarchy as the dominant form of social organization and offered a multicausal explanation for its establishment.³ I then spent nine years researching the development of women's thought about their own situation and set down my findings in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to 1870*.⁴ Part of the answer is that individual women did resist patriarchy for far longer than has been recognized in historical studies and that women's organized feminist efforts were often trivialized, misinterpreted, and misunderstood. And much of what women actually did and accomplished was forgotten and lost to history.

In 1994 I was invited to write an article in *Dissent* magazine about the meaning of the Seneca Falls convention. It appears in this book as Chapter 4. In it I sought to point out the neglect of women's historical agency as compared to historical turning points initiated by men, such as the foundation of Marxist theory and practice and the French Revolution.

In Chapter 5 this theme is examined based on a large oral history research project I initiated and directed at the University of Wisconsin between 1988 and 1992. It encompassed twenty-two interviews with Midwestern women who had played leading roles in organizing the modern women's movement. Their important contributions to the growth of that movement had not been recorded or recognized and might have been lost to history were it not for this project. In a like manner, the history of the first fifty years of the nineteenth-century woman's movement omitted

the significant contributions of many women, among them black abolitionists, who had differed with Elizabeth Cady Stanton in later years, and were therefore ignored or mentioned only briefly in Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's foundational sourcebook, *History of Woman Suffrage*.⁵ These omissions distorted later interpretations of that movement and could not be corrected until twentieth-century Women's History scholarship offered a corrective. Those who control the sources often control the judgment of history.

This is an obvious, but not a trivial matter. In U.S. historiography, as in American popular culture, historians have tended to over-emphasize the role of the individual in history. Great men are identified as founders and leaders; they become the virtual representatives of the movement: William Lloyd Garrison for abolition, Eugene Debs for the socialist movement, Martin Luther King Jr. for the civil rights movement. In fact, no mass movement of any significance is carried forward by and dependent upon one leader, or one symbol. There are always leaders of subgroups, of local and regional organizations, competing leaders representing differing viewpoints, and, of course, the ground troops of anonymous activists. And, as can be shown in each of the above cases, emphasis on the "great man" omits women, minorities, many of the actual agents of social change. In so doing it gives a partial, an erroneous picture of how social change was actually achieved in the past and thereby fosters apathy and confusion about how social change can be made in the present.

As was to be expected, the same distorted historiography would be applied to the nineteenth-century woman suffrage movement. By elevating Stanton and Anthony to the great and unique leaders of the movement; by omitting Lucy Stone and most of the New England activists; by downplaying the role of radicals like Frances Wright, Ernestine Rose, and labor movement activists; and by disregarding the parallel struggles of African American women for suffrage and equal rights the movement's breadth and depth were lost and the complexities of its tactics were obscured.

It is ironic to observe the same pattern of omission and distortion in regard to the twentieth-century feminist movement. In historical accounts, in the media, and in popular culture the emergence of the movement is credited to Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, and her leadership of the mainstream movement, with the more radical sections of the movement described as the product of discontented young women coming out of the civil rights and the student movements. While these descriptions

are true, they are not sufficient. They have led to endlessly repeated stereotypes of the modern feminist as being unmarried, white, middle-class, and living in a big urban center. While I do not wish to diminish the importance of Betty Friedan's work, nor the creative energy of the young women coming out of the civil rights movement, I want to argue that up to now we have insufficiently realized the breadth and depth of the movement and the contributions to it made by other groups of women, such as those represented in the Midwestern leaders oral history project. Chapter 5 demonstrates one case of such omissions.

In Chapters 6 and 7 I deal with problems of teaching. Chapter 6 offers some general strategies by which women's history can be added to textbooks that are entirely androcentric and organized in traditional ways. I developed the analytical questions I use in this chapter in the 1970s. Textbook editors and traditional historians, wanting to add "women" to the textbooks, thought in terms of whom to add and whom to omit. I was often approached with such attitudes by publishers and teachers. I encountered the same question when I was asked to contribute a "brief entry" on the Grimké sisters to various encyclopedias. My first response usually was to ask how many women they had already included. The numbers were pitiful and did not even amount to respectable tokenism. When I declined to contribute unless there were a representative number of important U.S. women added to the work, I was challenged to say which men should be omitted to make such a new balance possible. Such discussions, over a number of years, convinced me that merely adding a few women here and there, even though this was a necessary first step, would not do justice to the major challenge women's history represented to the profession. It was necessary to question the conceptual framework whereby decisions of selection were made. As long as military and political issues were considered by historians to be more important than the lives of people and of communities, the activities of men would always emerge in the narrative as more significant than those of women. What was needed was to rethink the criteria by which encyclopedias and survey textbooks were organized, so as not to perpetuate exclusionary categories.

In the 1970s I was asked to write a pamphlet on Women's History for the AHA. I sent a questionnaire to thirty teachers of the subject and asked them to share their best strategies and approaches. I also asked for their suggestions on what to include in such a pamphlet. The answers were generous and very interesting and enabled me to base the pamphlet on a consensus

of practitioners, rather than just on my own experience. Still, I concluded that the field could not be developed quickly and effectively unless teachers would challenge the traditional mode of selecting what was deemed historically important and what was deemed trivial. I developed some simple analytical questions that would accomplish this purpose. I got very positive feedback from teachers about the AHA pamphlet, which became the best-selling pamphlet published by the organization. Nearly a decade later, when I was invited to speak to historians on the topic of the inclusion of women into courses on World History, I decided to use the same analytical questions I had developed for U.S. Women's History to promote discussion and a new conceptualization of the subject. Chapter 6 is based on that lecture.

When I undertook to study the past of women I did not know that I would have to learn more than several advanced academic degrees could encompass. I would have to learn to think in opposition; to free myself from patriarchal thought and constraints; to learn to withstand ridicule, contempt, and obstinate resistance.

As a citizen I have always striven to be an agent for social change and to carry my values and intellectual insights into practical applications. I believe that there is a constant, fruitful interaction between theory and practice. The art of it is to be conscious of that interaction and flow with it, rather than resist it. Teaching is one arena for such creative exchange. The obvious danger and one of which one must constantly be aware is indoctrination. As an agent of social change one believes passionately and wants to share one's experiences with others. This must be resisted, since that would be an abuse of the privileged position and power one holds as a teacher. I believe that I should teach my students ways of obtaining information, ways of evaluating and selecting such information, and let them experiment themselves with how to use such information for practical purposes. It is not my job as a teacher to use myself as a model for imitation. It is my job to demystify knowledge and to teach students how to evaluate what they are taught in light of their own experience, not of mine. Part of demystifying knowledge is the teacher's obligation to expose her own biases and allow students fully to contradict and oppose her without fear of ridicule or intimidation.

I taught students how to do "graduate reading"—a skill designed to extract all necessary knowledge out of any book in an hour. I taught them how to take notes from lectures, articles, or books, using no more than a

4 x 6 card, which involves the skill of analyzing essentials out of a flood of detail. To teach such useful skills meant to demystify the hidden structure in all written arguments and to help students discover the hidden structure in all explanatory schemes. I taught students how to lose their fear of tests by making them practice how to create tests out of a given field or topic. They would then discover that there are only a limited number of test and essay questions that can be constructed and that, in fact, it is possible to anticipate a great number of them in preparation for a test.

I have never before summarized all these practices, but as I do it I discern a clear underlying theme: teach students to understand the structure of intellectual product and of institutions and allow them to acquire a sense of mastery in doing so.

In Chapter 7 I present in outline form a workshop I have taught to diverse groups on several continents. It represents the essence of my theoretical work on the social construction of deviant out-groups, distilled into a few simple principles. I approach the construction of deviant groups, the process of “othering” various target groups for the purpose of exploiting them and turning them into scapegoats, as a necessary aspect of maintaining hierarchical social systems. Rather than focusing on various forms of discrimination—sexism, racism, ethnic hatred, anti-Semitism, homophobia—as aberrations in otherwise well-functioning social systems, I look on them as one technique with an infinite variety of arbitrary targets designed to keep oppressive systems in power. In analyzing the ways in which the creation of deviant out-groups reinforces oppressive power, I show how such processes can be interrupted and defused.

Of necessity the format of Chapter 7 is different from that of other chapters. It consists of my outline—the analytic concept underlying the workshop. The course syllabus and an outline of psychological exercises designed to connect students emotionally to what is being discussed appear in Appendixes B and C. By representing these basic ingredients of the workshop I hope to enable other teachers to use it as it is or to adapt it to their own purposes.

The reflections in Chapter 8 were generated by a large body of my written work and by decades of teaching on the subject. I have written a scholarly biography and a short biography of my mother, two autobiographies, and a partially autobiographical novel. In several oral history projects I learned about the strengths and weaknesses of personal interviews as historical biography. I taught several graduate seminars entitled “Biography

and *Autobiography as History and Literature*,” in which I compared various genres of telling the stories of individuals in history in an effort to find out if any one of them comes closer to the historical truth than do the others. How can any of these genres be used as sources for the historian? Which of these genres best transmits a story of the past to present-day readers?

Researchers in women’s history often have to depend on autobiographical writings — diaries, letters, memoirs, and fiction — to piece together the life stories of women of the past. In Chapter 8 I discuss the reliability of such sources and the problems connected with their use. Self-descriptive narratives of women abound in omissions and disguises. These are means that allow women to break out of their gender-defined roles to assert the dignity and value of their own lives. Attention to the ways in which women’s autobiographical writings differ from those of men can help in the interpretation of women’s sources. The answers to the questions I discuss in this chapter are not only of theoretical interest, but should also have value for the practicing historian and scholar.

A subset of autobiographies and biographies concerns women who had special friendships with other women prior to the period when lesbian relationships were publicly defined. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s essay, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” had long defined the discourse and also limited it.⁶ Smith-Rosenberg had argued that single-sex friendships among women were accepted by society in the nineteenth century and were not considered marks of deviance. Were modern historians justified in defining such friendships as lesbian relationships? Were they reading modern interpretations into the past record? The subject was mostly discussed and written about by lesbian historians, while heterosexual historians, coming upon ample evidence of such special relationships, gingerly danced around them. Among the many prominent nineteenth-century women who had lifelong stable relationships with other women, which involved shared home-making, shared finances, and often shared organizational responsibilities, were Jane Addams, Frances Willard, and M. Carey Thomas. What kind of “evidence” did one need to define the relationship as lesbian? Were such relationships lesbian if one could not prove sexual aspects? Heterosexual authors often chose to ignore such relationships or to refer to them simply as “friendships,” allowing the reader to draw her/his own conclusions.

I urged historians to report honestly on what their sources told them about these relationships, without necessarily being able to report on how the participants or their contemporaries defined such relationships. It is obvious that U.S. society regarded such female friendships differently in different historical periods and that such social definitions must have exerted an influence on the women living in the past. We must distinguish between the lived reality, the consciousness and self-definitions of participants, and the societal definitions of normalcy or deviance attached to such relationships. Late nineteenth-century social reformers, such as Henry George, Frances Willard, and Edward Bellamy, could refer to themselves as Socialists or Christian Socialists without incurring societal censure. After the political struggles and the fierce witchhunts against Socialists in the 1920s, this designation carried the connotation of deviance and even of treason. Just so did societal definitions of female friendships change over time.

I argue in my essay that the biographer must recreate the life and times of a subject from within the subject's own consciousness and from the context of her time. Homoerotic or homosexual relationship must be treated forthrightly and be given the same respectful consideration that would be given to heterosexual relationships.

Chapter 9 reproduces my acceptance speech on the occasion of my receiving the Bruce Catton Prize of the Society of American Historians in 2002. This speech allowed me to focus on the problems of history writing, a topic in which I have long been deeply interested. The way in which graduate training in history often works to train students in bad writing has long concerned me. Most historians either think it is not their job to teach students writing skills or feel unqualified to do so. Graduate training in proper documentation and footnoting, as it is usually offered, makes students anxious and induces them to overly qualify their statements and generalizations. The emphasis is on producing well-documented essays, extensively footnoted, in which opinions and conclusions are carefully separated from documentation and proof. Dissertations are treated as though they were an assemblage of separate essays. Very seldom is there any emphasis on telling a story, and even rarer is the concept that a book is a whole. The very assumption, shared by mentors and publishers, that a dissertation needs to be "reworked" in order to make a book reveals the way in which the separation of good writing and historical writing is institutionalized.

I believe proper graduate training should encourage a merging of both skills. I have tried to teach my students to think of a dissertation as a book. I stress that conceiving the work as a whole is a strategy that keeps the writer focused and inspired. I emphasize that throughout the process of working on a dissertation they should make a distinction between the historian's and the writer's work. Both need to be done; one disciplines the other. I encourage students to draft their last chapter first and state their hypothetical conclusions before they have worked out all the proof. This has the advantage of making them conscious of the book as an entirety and it energizes them, as they struggle through the more pedantic work of laying out their proof. Arguing for and displaying the proof has to be done carefully and with rigorous attention to verification. If, as the student goes through this phase, the proof in some way contradicts the previously written conclusions, these should be altered and adjusted to what can be proven.

Once a first draft of argument and proof, as laid out in successive chapters, is written, students enter a new phase, the writer's phase of the process. This consists of several successive readings of the manuscript, each focused on a separate editing problem: structure, style, grammar. Only after that prolonged editing process should they deal with checking and verifying the footnotes.

By integrating instruction in writing in my history teaching I have helped students to cut the time they spend on dissertation-writing and to produce publishable books. My Catton award speech allowed me to summarize my thinking on this subject, to reflect on my teaching practice, and to give needed emphasis to an important aspect of the historian's work.

In Chapter 10 I look at the present state of Women's History, assess its accomplishments in the past forty years, and project its possible future. As one of the founders of this field, I have often been asked in interviews and after lectures to address such questions. As director of two graduate programs in Women's History I have been challenged to justify students' investment of time, effort, and considerable expense in training in this new field. Is Women's History not simply a fad, inspired by feminist politics, and would it not vanish after a short spurt of interest? I had to take such questions seriously, especially when they came from college and university administrators who used me as a consultant, when they were considering starting or upgrading their Women's History programs. I answered those questions with as much hard evidence as I could muster, and I wrote sev-

eral articles on the topic. The last of these was based on my survey of three years of scholarly work (1998–2000), 817 items in all, as cited in eight issues of the *Journal of American History* under their “Current Scholarship” bibliography.⁷

In Chapter 10 I reiterate my basic belief that the development of Women’s History as a field is a serious, highly significant, and irreversible stage in intellectual history. I discuss the major contributions the field has made to historical knowledge and practice and show, on the example of several important recent books, how Women’s History scholarship has led to new directions in the general field. The new interest by historians in multicausal, multiracial, and transnational historical narratives points to the emergence of a more holistic approach to telling the stories of the past. I discuss the implications of this trend and welcome it as evidence of the transformative power of Women’s History scholarship.

In Chapter 11 I argue that feminism is a practical, political program for the liberation of both women and men and for the creation of a better social order. It is, in fact, the only existing such program which has a likelihood to succeed.

I argue that patriarchy—the alliance of male dominance over resources with militarism and the hierarchical ordering of society—has long outlived its usefulness. It is actually dangerous to the survival of humankind in the twenty-first century. Wars no longer solve national problems and warfare falls most heavily on civilian populations. Rampant consumerism threatens the survival of animal and plant species and the contamination of the atmosphere and the seas through global warming. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the power of global corporations, and the predominance of military influence over civilian control of the state, together with rampant global exploitation of labor and resources, makes reform and amelioration very difficult, if not entirely unlikely. Because patriarchal leaders in politics and the military are unable to conceive of different forms of social organization, they are, in effect, a danger to the survival of human civilization.

I do not argue that women are better than men or wiser or kinder. I simply observe that throughout the millennia of patriarchy women as a group have been kept out of major positions of power. They have therefore, like all the oppressed, had to focus on individual and group survival, and develop characteristics that would improve their chances for it. I also argue that women, because they are half of all human beings and are dis-

tributed in every group of society, are the only group strategically placed in such a way that they cannot be decimated by violence in the long run. The history of Western civilization abounds with examples of the successful destruction of rebellious or revolutionary groups, such as the Albigenian heretics in the thirteenth century, or the suppression of native peoples by colonial powers. In such cases the liberation movement was destroyed with the bodies of its adherents. But feminism as a movement cannot so be destroyed. It is obviously possible to restrict, confine, and abuse women in a given region or state, as did the Taliban in Afghanistan for a given period of time. But in the long run, women cannot be wiped out that way without bringing about the destruction of the oppressor society.

My belief in feminism as a transformative worldview has meant much to me in my work—it has been a foundation of my thought and has given me the courage and the conviction to continue my work over decades, in the face of obstacles and opposition. I have in recent years lectured frequently on the subject and found audiences surprisingly responsive to my message.

Men and women hunger for a vision, a philosophy that transcends the boundaries of hierarchical social structures, the dog-eat-dog race of unchecked competition and of the outdated polarized systems of ideas that dominate our culture. We all want and need to believe in utopian possibilities. And yet we have had it drummed into our brains that we must be realists and what we think about must be practical. Human beings have a need for something more than practical reforms and the solution of present-day problems. They want and have always wanted a dream of an ideal, a transcendent future that will make the world better for their children than it has been for themselves. The great world religions, the various world philosophies have provided that dream, even if they could not point to its realization. Since the fall of Communism and the socialist vision that sustained it, there seems to be no system of hope-giving ideas available for the future. I believe that feminism is such a system, for women and for men, and I believe that the peaceful transformation of attitudes and customs that feminism has already achieved in the past 150 years attests to its strength and realistic potential.

Chapter 12, “Reflections on Aging,” marks a thematic turning point in my work. It was recently written, and it is based on an interview, conducted via email, and printed in an Austrian feminist journal. Doing an

English translation and rewriting it as an article came almost as an afterthought, as I became aware of my own life process of aging. I surprised myself by discovering that I had no need or desire to research the subject, but that I simply wanted to set down my thoughts.

I also wanted to engage intellectually with the challenging life processes that I am now experiencing. Aging is still one of the taboo subjects in our culture; people deal with it in symbols and euphemisms. Advertisements addressed to old people are inevitably illustrated with images of youthful-looking middle-aged people. Despite the fact that the vast majority of the very old are women, the media depict the aged as consisting of cheerful active couples. As I experience the eighth decade of my life, I find little has been written that speaks to my actual experience. I find few models that can help me adjust to the inevitable disturbances and disabilities of very old age.

I find this phase of my life challenging and demanding. I close my book with reflections on it because that is the last task set before me. Up to now, in my life, action was usually motivated by thought; theory led to practice. In this case, the reverse is happening. I'm living the experience and it is forcing me to reflect on it, to think about it, to meet it with awareness. It is a new stage of life that demands its own process and engagement.

Notes

1. Gerda Lerner (ed.), *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).
2. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (eds.), *Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971). A fourth volume, with 442 additional biographies, appeared nine years later: Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green, with Ilene Kantrov and Harriette Walker (eds.), *Notable American Women, the Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980).
3. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
4. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to 1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
5. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda J. Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 vols. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1881–1922).
6. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations

between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” *SIGNS* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1–29.

7. Gerda Lerner, “U.S. Women’s History: Past, Present, and Future,” *Journal of Women’s History* 16, no. 4 (2004): 10–27. The items studied consisted of 150 books, 280 dissertations, and 290 articles plus the 97 additional books that were reviewed in those issues of the journal, making a total of 817.