Foreword

In 1970, when the second wave of the women's movement was still an emerging force and its legal and moral victories were yet to be won, academia seemed an impregnable male bastion. To those of us with newly minted PhDs (mine, in history, is dated 1968), the idea that we might one day breach its walls seemed far off.

Not that we hadn't begun to try. Led by some of the more spirited forces among us, historians in 1969 created the Coordinating Committee of Women in the Historical Profession (CCWHP) to investigate our status within the profession and to make forays into its male turf. Within a few years, we had pushed for, and created committees on the status of women in the major historical associations; we demanded representation on the editorial boards of the major historical journals; we asked for representation on panels in the annual meetings of our profession. When the profession was slow to respond, we demonstrated the vitality of the new field of women's history by creating a major conference on women's history; and we supported a new journal (*Feminist Studies*), to be followed by others. By the end of the decade, 'women's history' was a field, its practitioners the vanguard of an assault on the profession for equity for women within every historical sub-specialty.

Reading these essays, I am reminded that historians were not alone. We were part of a larger and more influential movement that penetrated every academic discipline—some more deeply than others. As our influence grew, our numbers expanded, and we moved into institutions that might never have thought of hiring a woman before. I, for example, was not the only woman to be 'the first woman' to be hired into my department; nor was I the only woman to experience the bad jokes that came when the guys reminisced about the good old days when camaraderie prevailed at department meetings and the secretaries made them coffee. And, in the 1970s, when academic hiring slowed precipitously, many of us remained the 'only' woman in our departments for years on end.

Our support, in those days, came from the profession rather than from within our teaching institutions. It was in the CCWHP, the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, the radical caucus of the American Studies Association, that women like me learned to speak on behalf of ourselves and to challenge the value systems that underlined our treatment

in our institutional homes. We learned there that exploring issues of women and gender was no less instructive than those of politics and diplomacy. Eventually we learned to question the hierarchies of judgment that assigned subjects relating to women or gender to a lower intellectual slot than those relating to legislation and political movements. We began to understand how race, class, and gender formed an indissoluble whole, each constitutive of the other, and we began to see how devaluing analyses based on race, class, and gender distorted the conclusions of our discipline. In so doing, we changed the arc of historical study.

Reading the essays in this book reminds me that these changes (as important as they continue to be) haven't altered academic culture as much as one would wish; nor have they touched all academic fields with equal force. We are reminded that women everywhere still face a constellation of institutional arrangements that sometimes discriminate against those who are married and/or have families and sometimes seem to disadvantage those without partners at all. We learn that a culture of gender-biased assumptions places barriers in the paths of even the most talented women in many disciplines and that those who surmount the barriers are equaled in numbers by those who, at some point, withdraw from the battle. In most of the sciences, engineering, and a few other disciplines, these essays tell us that the battle to legitimate different perspectives and approaches as to what constitutes objectivity has not yet been fought, leaving questions about what counts as 'knowledge' unexamined.

At the same time, I am struck by how many of the solutions that were developed in the last decades of the twentieth century have themselves become problematic in the current environment of higher education. For example, we learned in the early days of the women's movement to pay attention to the differential effects of tenure rules on women's careers. We pushed for rules that would 'stop the clock' for pregnant women and new mothers. But in the coming years, we face the task of wondering if a year of 'stopped clock' really compensates for the physical and emotional demands of child care; we wonder about the results of equally accessible parental rather than maternity leave; we begin to ask whether tenure itself (a cherished icon of academic freedom) is not at least part of the problem in that a seven-year up-or-out practice places undue pressure on candidates to perform at precisely the moment when they are having babies and raising young children.

A new layer of institutional rigidities exacerbates this problem. As the number of academic institutions seeking credibility rises and the numbers of PhDs in most fields expands at the same time that fiscal constraints worsen, institutions have increasingly demanded more productivity from their employees and have applied a variety of 'rules' in the consideration

of tenure and promotion. Examples abound: there is the ‘two book’ rule for tenure increasingly adopted by the most prestigious institutions; the insistence that only certain journals or certain grants ‘count’ as appropriate quality in the tenure packet; the dismissal of teaching and institutional service as significant aspects of production. When we, in the 1970s, insisted that women could qualify for tenure (given an extra year or so if parental issues are involved) in exactly the same way that men could, we did not count on the raising of the bar.

At the same time, a shifting occupational structure has encouraged academia to become far more reliant on adjunct and contingent faculty members just as the tenure-track research university job becomes a far scarcer commodity. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s we viewed job sharing—where appropriate for two partners—as a way for two people to work part-time and together earn a full salary, today we find that the majority of faculty employed in higher education now work as contingent faculty and that universities have significantly altered their commitment to full-time tenure-track faculty members.

One has to question whether ‘job sharing’ played a role in legitimizing part-time work. When we drew attention to the absence of women in the academy in the 1970s and called for fairer hiring rules, we benefited thousands of women who had been overlooked in the job market. But in the early twenty-first century, a moment when many fields produce more female than male PhDs and at least some departments have high concentrations of women faculty, calling attention to gender may perhaps demand that men be given the benefit of the doubt—hired at the expense of more readily available women. While it may well be that institutions of higher learning respond more quickly to these more recent calls for parity in faculty, in at least some departments this will be a concern that will stir debate and raise questions yet again about equity in hiring.

And then there is the question of partners. Having railed at the nepotism rules that forbade the employment of two partners in a single department or even a single university, we now see a push for ‘dual career’ hires. While failure to find that second job may mean the loss of the candidate, those without partners—often single women—are the first to point out that the jobs filled by other people’s partners are unavailable to them, reducing open competition and hiring based on merit. More troublesome to some, all faculty now ‘pay’ a price for benefits given to those who choose to parent. Where parental leave, child care, and family health insurance benefits are paid for out of a social pool, their costs are shared by those who choose not to partner and not to have children. Small wonder then that faculty members find themselves protesting the distribution of relatively small salary increments as the cost of social goods rises.

Finally, we have not squarely faced the complexities of the problem of ‘choice’—a problem so severe that it brought down Harvard’s President, Larry Summers, when he attributed the absence of women in science and engineering largely to their own desires. Summers and the issue of ‘choice’ run like a thread through these essays. And yet, once again, I am brought back sharply to the 1970s and 1980s, when it was the pinhead around which debate flourished. The question then was: were women ‘different’ from men—and if so should the workforce acknowledge these differences and accommodate them? Or were women similar enough to men that the workforce should treat men and women equally? On the one hand, acknowledging difference by providing health insurance for pregnant women and their newborn babies or encouraging flexible work schedules for mothers of young children, subjected women to potential discrimination as employers refused to hire those who would cost them more to keep as workers. On the other hand, treating women just like men would disadvantage women in the workforce by denying women the social benefits necessary to combine work and family life in a comfortable way. If there is some irreducible difference (and these essays provide strong evidence to refute Larry Summers’s notion that it is intellectual), then how do we define the meaning of choice? And how do we ensure that making choices, particularly around child care and nurturing issues, doesn’t disadvantage women in the academic workforce?

Even as we read the bad news, even as we learn that the glass is more often half-empty than half-full, I want to measure that half-empty glass against the one that had almost no liquid at all in it less than a generation ago. If the progress we made within a single generation produced a new layer of complicated questions and problems, still, it lends credence to the hope that in another generation we can make another giant leap forward. These essays, by suggesting some of the key issues we still have to face help us to anticipate what the next generation will bring.

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