environment, and the politics of sexuality and reproduction. It is by no means impossible to imagine that in an era of ever increasing conservatism and privatization of consciousness, and with the growing respectability of a frequently crypto-racist sociobiology, the thrust of seventies scholarship will be reversed: that a professional consensus will form around some version of "damage," but one whose policy orientation is malign neglect.[24]

If the future direction of white historical writing on blacks is unknowable, generalizations about the present relationship of black historians to the overwhelmingly white historical profession are very difficult to formulate. Though many whites had, with some success, striven to "think black," and while many younger black historians had been successfully integrated into the profession, and internalized all of its norms, there remained a good deal of de facto segregation of consciousness. Some black historians, like Vincent Harding, had always maintained a certain distance from the profession. From his earliest writings, Harding had scoffed at "white" notions of detachment and objectivity. His 1981 magnum opus, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, combined religious messianism and revolutionary black nationalism in an account which portrayed slaves as constantly on the verge of insurrection. White academic reviewers did not quite know what to make of the book, which wasn't scholarly history as they understood it. The black historian Nell Painter, who unlike Harding was an "integrated professional," noted this fact with some asperity, and said that black historians, on the contrary, were quite comfortable with Harding's approach. She saw no likelihood of a convergence of sensibilities in the near future.[25]

It would be difficult to find two more highly placed black historians than John Blassingame and Nathan Huggins, holders of the chairs in Afro-American history at Yale and Harvard, respectively. Unlike Harding, both Blassingame and Huggins had in the late sixties underlined their allegiance to traditional professional values. Both had spoken out against substituting myth for history, and for the maintenance of balance and objectivity in black scholarship. Ten or fifteen years later, when each wrote a major synthetic account of the black experience (in Blassingame's case in collaboration with Mary F. Berry), mainstream white historians were as much at a loss as they were in confronting Harding's work.

[24]From the late 1960s onward *Commentary*, the semiofficial house organ of neoconservatism, has carried more sustained criticism of the new black history, and more defenses of the "damage" thesis (and of Moynihan) than any other journal. Awareness of this may be one reason why those with opposing views have clung to them so tenaciously.

[25]Painter, "Who Decides What Is History?" 276–78.

Novick: That Noble Dream p 491-510

Blassingame's *Long Memory*, a synthesis of three hundred years of black history, was a catalogue of white oppression and unavailing black protest, acknowledging neither nuance nor even change over time. Huggins's *Black Odyssey* was, he said, like Harding's book, conceived not in the ordinary academic mode, but as "epic": "the strokes are broad, antithesis muted or denied." Both books, he said, were written by blacks for blacks, in a distinctively black mood and idiom. Most white academic critics responded to Blassingame's and Huggins's works with the same nervous bewilderment with which they had greeted Harding's *There Is a River*: they "weren't history." Some younger black historians agreed; others vigorously dissented. The issue of the existence, and legitimacy, of a distinct, unassimilable "black perspective" on history was clearly going to be unresolved for some time to come.[26]

II

Women's history was at least as great a particularist threat to professional norms of universalism as black history, and there were striking parallels in the ways in which the two developed. Both had their origins in the rise of new forms of militancy and collective consciousness outside the academy, and, once launched, grew with extraordinary rapidity into major historical fields. Those involved in both ventures were torn between professional obligations and a commitment to serving the psychic and political needs of their external constituencies and movements. In both cases arguments for at least semiautonomous cultures, with distinctive values and institutions, were forcefully advanced. With women, as with blacks, these constructs proved more ambiguous in their political consequences than their authors had originally believed.

Unlike blacks, women had been members of the organized historical profession from the beginning. But in many respects they were almost as marginalized as blacks. Among other things, most leading woman historians had been employed at institutions for "their own kind." In a variety

[26]Huggins, "Integrating Afro-American History into American History," in Hine, *Afro-American History*, 164. One interesting feature of the book which Blassingame wrote with Berry is that while in his previous work he had acknowledged the scholarly assistance of both black and white historians, all of the dozen historians thanked in the preface of *Long Memory* were black. Other black historians moved in the opposite direction. Armstead Robinson, as a graduate student, had been a moving spirit behind the establishment of a separate Black Studies program at Yale in 1968. In the early 1980s he declined to be interviewed for Meier and Rudwick's *Black History* on the Franklinian grounds that he was not a specialist in black history, but a Civil War and Reconstruction historian. (Meier and Rudwick, *Black History*, 300.)

of ways women were kept at arm's length, but the imperatives of chivalry demanded that they be given recognition. From early on, women were accorded token representation on committees of the major historical associations (which didn't matter much). But, with the rarest exceptions, they were excluded from membership in major departments (which mattered a great deal). At the beginning of the sixties there were no women at all among the total of 160 full professors in the ten highest ranking graduate departments of history; 4 women among the 128 associate and assistant professors in those departments. At the end of that decade of unprecedented growth there were a total of 274 full professors in the ten departments, of whom 2 were women; of the by then 317 associate and assistant professors in the top departments, 5 were women.[27]

"Affirmative action" of various kinds, which many denounced as an unbearable affront to universalist and meritocratic norms, was undertaken to countervail a legacy of gender discrimination that was undeniable. The ends of affirmative action programs were universalist rather than particularist, intended to further integration rather than separatism. In the professional associations (which still didn't matter that much, and where concessions could be made without substantial cost), women went from tokenism to substantial overrepresentation. In 1985 a majority of the members of the executive board of the Organization of American Historians were women. In the elections for the leading positions in the American Historical Association in 1984, women won all six of the contests in which men were slated opposite women; in 1985 they won seven of nine such contests, including those for president and vice-president. By the mid-1980s, as a result of preferential treatment, women's representation on the programs of professional meetings was a good deal more than proportional. Encouraged by this fact, but distressed at the continued presence on the AHA program of a number of sessions in which all the participants were male, the chairperson of the AHA's Committee on Women in the Profession, advanced a suggestion which went beyond integrationism, and repudiated not just separatism, but pluralism as well. She suggested that it might be time for the AHA Council to "avoid approving sessions that are racially or gender segregated."[28]

[27]Calculations based on tables in summary of the report of the AHA's Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, *AHA Newsletter* 9 (September 1971): 20. Stated differently, at the beginning of the decade women held 1.397 percent of the most highly prized positions in the profession; at its end, 1.385 percent.

[28]The seven out of twelve members of the 1985 OAH executive board who were women included two of the past three presidents of the organization, whose principal permanent official was also a woman (Executive Secretary Joan Hoff-Wilson). For AHA election results, see *AHA Perspectives* 23 (January 1985): 3, and 24 (January 1986): 3. For representation of women on OAH and AHA programs, see "Assessing the Past, Looking to the Future: A Report by the OAH Committee on the Status of Women," special insert in *OAH Newsletter* 14 (May 1986): 4; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Annual Report of the Committee on Women Historians," *AHA Perspectives* 24 (February 1986): 9 (also the source of the suggestion on ending "segregated" sessions).

Affirmative action in the 1970s scored victories in hiring as well, but met greater resistance, particularly at the most important institutions. Affirmative action programs had been designed with the dizzying growth of the sixties in mind. As one feminist journal put it, "Women Get a Ticket to Ride After the Gravy Train Has Left the Station." Overall, women's representation among the ranks of academically employed historians increased substantially, though disproportionately in temporary and part-time positions, and at lower-ranked institutions. By the end of the seventies, after a decade of effectively resisting pressure for affirmative action, the top ten departments had 5 (out of 294) women full professors, with a slight increase in women's representation in lower ranks. A tabulation of Ph.D.'s in American history from major universities showed women's share of new degrees rising dramatically, from 10 percent in 1970 to 30 percent in 1980. But this was an artifact of young men choosing not to enter academic life. The human reality behind the percentages was 30 women and 283 men in 1970; 29 women and 68 men in 1980.[29]

Women historians were by no means all historians of women, nor were they necessarily feminists. Most women historians of the older generation were neither, and in fact often opposed both feminism and the establishment of women's history as a separate field. In its late-twentieth-century embodiment, feminism was less a doctrine of equal rights—though it was that also—than of the liberation of consciousness; more an ideology of difference than of sameness. For feminists, while the particular forms which the oppression of women had assumed varied over time, and under different social systems, it was ubiquitous, from the boardroom to the

[29]Figures for women in top departments in 1979–80 from Joan W. Scott, "Politics and Professionalism: Women Historians in the 1980s," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1981): 25. Calculations of women's share of history doctorates in 1970 and 1980 based on figures in "Assessing the Past," 3. (For technical reasons, Harvard was not included among the four dozen institutions surveyed, but this omission could hardly have significantly skewed the overall picture.) The forty-eight history departments which turned out the largest number of Ph.D.'s in 1984–85 averaged 13 Americanists in their ranks. A majority had either one woman or none in this contingent; women's representation was usually less in the more highly ranked departments. (Ibid., 2.) Pressure to hire blacks was on the whole resisted less: there weren't that many available candidates; at most, they threatened a "takeover" of one small field, given that almost all specialized in black history; except in the South, black male historians were probably perceived as less of a threat to the folkways of the white male academic culture than were white women.

bedroom. Academic feminism thus insisted that gender was as central a category of analysis as race or class, and that any scholarly work which failed to give it due weight was fatally flawed. In history the feminist perspective was much more than a matter of including those who had been "hidden from history," but rather a transforming vision with revolutionary implications for the understanding of all human activities. Of particular relevance for our purposes, feminists consistently and repeatedly denounced the universalistic and "value-free" pretensions of traditional scholarship as masks for maintaining the domination of a male-centered world view. Their posture was avowedly perspectival, committed, and skeptical of objectivist claims. Moreover, for many feminists the ideology of "difference" extended to fundamental questions of cognitive style and epistemological values.

Since time immemorial the complaint of male historians about women colleagues had echoed that of Professor Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"—rigorous and objective, rather than intuitive and subjective. An especially favored female colleague would receive, with mixed emotions, the ultimate accolade: "She thinks like a man." That men and women had different cognitive styles was not simply locker room lore. A substantial body of psychological research suggested that, as a result of nature, nurture, or some combination of the two, boys were considerably more likely to think analytically, and display the kind of aggressive intellectual style associated with high-level intellectual productivity. Girls, wrote the psychologist Eleanor Maccoby, summarizing several studies, "tend to be more influenced by the opinions of others . . . are more conforming to what they perceive to be the social demands of the situation they are in."

> It is probably these conformist tendencies that help them to excel at spelling and punctuation—the kinds of performance for which there is only one socially prescribed right answer. But for higher-level intellectual productivity, it is independence of mind that is required—the ability to turn one's back on others . . . while working alone on a problem—and it is just this which girls . . . appear to find so difficult to do.

There were, of course, women with a "male" cognitive style, but, Maccoby said, they paid a price for this in personal anxiety—which, in turn, interfered with intellectual productivity. Parents of girls thus faced a dilemma: did they want to encourage intellectuality at the price of "femininity"? Academic women had for the most part either ignored such findings, denounced them as wrongheaded, or argued that whatever disadvantages women suffered from in this realm could be overcome by an

effort of will. On the whole, like Maccoby, they accepted "male cognitive style" as normative; they simply denied that it was necessarily "male."[30]

A later generation of feminists had a changed perspective. Embracing rather than rejecting "difference," feminist psychologists, philosophers, and historians of science explored, and transvalued, men's and women's thoughtways. Feminists employing D. J. Winnicott's object-relations theory argued that fundamental differences in the process by which male and females separated themselves from their mothers led to fundamentally different postures toward the external world, including, for scholars, the objects of study. In the words of the philosopher Sandra Harding:

> A rational person, for women, values highly her abilities to empathize and "connect" with particular others and wants to learn more complex and satisfying ways to take the role of the particular other in relationships. . . . For men, in contrast, a rational person values highly his ability to separate himself from others and to make decisions independent of what others think—to develop "autonomy". . . . No wonder women's relational rationality appears to men immature, subhuman, and threatening. No wonder men's objectifying rationality appears to women alien, inhuman, and frightening.

Feminist historians of science traced modern conceptions of objectivity and rationality to the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, when scientists, breaking with previous conceptions of the relations between knower and known, framed inquiry in adversarial terms of domination and power: "squeezing the truth out of Dame Nature's anus." Evelyn Keller, in her study of the Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock emphasized the "holism" which characterized McClintock's work, which contrasted to prevailing reductionist approaches. It was unclear how much impact all of this had on women historians, but it certainly had its attractions, since the themes stressed in the literature on women's cognitive style—empathy, seeing globally and contextually—were precisely those often privileged in discussions of historical consciousness. And there were indications of a new willingness on the part of women historians to stress their gender in describing their modes of inquiry. Natalie Zemon Davis wrote of her "maternal" attitude to the past, "wanting to bring people to life again as a mother would want to bear children."[31]

[30]Maccoby, "Feminine Intellect and the Demands of Science," *Impact of Science on Society* 1 (1970): 17, 19, 24, 26–27.

[31]Harding, "Is Gender a Variable in Conceptions of Rationality? A Survey of Issues," *Dialectica* 36 (1982): 235–36; for "Dame Nature," see Ian Hacking, "Liberating the Laboratory," *New Republic* 193 (15–22 July 1985): 48; interview with Davis in *Visions of History* (New York, 1983), 113.

In principle, feminist perspectives in history were as relevant to such male activities as war and diplomacy as they were to realms in which women dominated. In practice, though there were repeated programmatic statements pressing this point, little such work was done. Feminist perspectives were not restricted to those women historians who wrote the history of women. But while among historians of women a deep feminist commitment was all but universal, among women in other areas it was usually neither as profound nor as widespread. One consequence of this was that the impact of feminist perspectives on history was more restricted in scope than it might otherwise have been, or might be in the future. The other side of this coin was that it was in women's history, which in practice was the feminist history of women, that the full force of the new antiuniversalist sensibility made itself felt. By the late 1970s the assertion that women's history could only be legitimately written from a feminist standpoint was no longer being argued; it was a settled question, beyond argument.

The very staking out of a distinct territory designated "women's history" constituted an antiuniversalist manifesto. So too was the rejection by most women historians of the integrationist strategy of "mainstreaming" women's history into general history courses and texts, scorned as a recipe to "add women and stir." Interdisciplinary programs in Women's Studies were neither as well-funded nor as administratively autonomous as Black Studies had been. When Black Studies programs had been established (before the gravy train left the station), the very word "black" was loaded with ideological significance. The designation "Women's Studies," rather than "Feminist Studies" was a bit disingenuous, probably representing, one feminist historian said, "an implicit recognition that expediency favors maintenance of a token of traditional academic 'objectivity.'" Whatever their connection with Women's Studies programs, historians of women were on history department budgets, and the nuances of their ambivalent relations to the male-dominated historical profession varied a good deal from case to case. But the frequency with which they chose to publish major work in interdiscplinary feminist journals, the patterns of their acknowledgments of scholarly assistance, and other informal indications, strongly suggested that for most, the feminist community was at least as salient a reference group as was the profession. Albeit with variations in nuance and emphasis, all feminist historians shared the belief that "sisterhood," a bond of solidarity and mutual support, was both historical reality and contemporary moral imperative.[32]

[32]Marilyn J. Boxer, "For and About Women: The Theory and Practice of Women's Studies in the United States," in Nannerl O. Keohane et al., eds., *Feminist Theory: A Critique of*

The major themes in black history were all present in women's history: overcoming historical neglect; stressing the contributions of the group; an emphasis on oppression, with its troublesome complement, victimization and damage; a search for foreparents in protest and resistance; finally, a celebration of an at least semiautonomous separate cultural realm, with distinctive values and institutions. In the case of black history a tradition had developed over many decades, and one can see a pattern of changing emphases. Women's history grew so rapidly that often-contradictory themes arose more or less simultaneously.[33]

Though many aspects of the black experience had been neglected by historians, by the time the new black history arrived on the scene the significance of the black presence in the United States was not in question. Women, half of the population, had hardly a walk-on role. Given the continuing focus in historical scholarship on male-dominated realms, it was perhaps unreasonable to expect equal time. But surely something was seriously amiss when twenty-four out of twenty-five leading American history texts published in the sixties and seventies devoted considerably less than 1 percent of their pages to women. "Contributionism" in black history peaked at a time when the consensual orientation was integrationist. Negro historians experienced no inner conflict in documenting black contributions to white society. By the time historians of women arrived on the scene, and sought to "make the invisible woman visible," a feminist sensibility had developed which resisted accepting male-centered definitions of importance and excellence: they were often deeply ambiva-

Ideology (Chicago, 1982), 240. No generalization about the way in which feminist historians balanced the competing claims of professionalism and sisterhood can be more than impressionistic. Certainly formal avowals cannot be taken at face value, since working inside the profession to advance the cause of women mandated one posture, while continued participation in the discourse of women's history dictated another. Though I have stressed the particularist claims of sisterhood, there were many historians of women—particularly those who also thought of themselves as social historians, or historians of the family—for whom loyalty to the profession was of equal or greater importance. Because there were so few men in women's history one rarely heard claims for an exclusive franchise, but the work of men sometimes received a cool reception. One woman historian speculated about the extent to which "the rather inordinate interest of male scholars in the history of women's sexuality serves to provide them with titillating reading material and reinforce phallocentric views of women's nature." (Hilda Smith, "Female Bonds and the Family: Recent Directions in Women's History," in Paula A. Treichler et al., eds., *For Alma Mater: Theory and Practice in Feminist Scholarship* [Urbana, Ill., 1985], 284.)

[33]No field of historical inquiry had ever grown as rapidly. A survey of the incidence of articles about women in the major journals of five academic disciplines showed an overall increase from 2 percent of all articles in 1966 to 7 percent in 1980. During the same period articles in historical journals about women went from half of 1 percent to just under 12 percent. (Ellen Carol DuBois et al., *Feminist Scholarship* (Urbana, Ill., 1985), 164–69.

lent about writing a "compensatory" story of women's contributions which tacitly accepted a male framework.[34]

There were other problems with a contributionist, or compensatory orientation. Pressed too far, it tacitly minimized the extent to which women had been excluded from full participation in society. Much contributionist work was also the history of resistance; celebration of those "women worthies" who had led campaigns for suffrage, women's trade-union struggles, and the like. But this theme too presented difficulties, since many late-twentieth-century feminists were convinced that those who in earlier days had led political and economic struggles on behalf of women had been victims of "false consciousness": they had been naive in their belief that women's cause could be pursued in alliance with men, and they had failed to realize that the prime locus of their oppression was in the patriarchal family. One result was that like some discussions of nineteenth-century black leadership by black nationalist historians, historical treatments of past women leaders were sometimes condescending toward those whose concerns were not what the historians thought they ought to have been.

Before the new black history made its appearance in the sixties, a previous generation had not only documented the pervasiveness of racism and discrimination, but exposed the prejudices which informed earlier scholarly work. By the sixties almost all white historians readily acknowledged the depth of past and present oppression of blacks, and were at least formally committed to racial equality. This was neither difficult nor threatening to white male academics, particularly outside the South. The forms of discrimination had been public and palpable, and in any case, whatever prejudices whites had toward blacks, they usually didn't have more than casual contact with them. They had little opportunity to practice discrimination or interest in doing so. Men's association with women was daily and often intimate. The forms of oppression were for the most part subtle and generally unacknowledged—sometimes, at least on a conscious level, even by its victims. For men to confront the manifold dimensions of their own discriminatory attitudes and behaviors was as difficult and threatening a demand as could be conceived. Some, mostly of a younger generation, made a concerted effort; most did it halfheartedly, or not at all. And most male historians' commitment to gender equality was ambivalent at best. As of 1969, when William O'Neill published his *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*, it was inconceivable that an historian would write of blacks as O'Neill did of women, in his preface: "I have avoided the question of whether or not women ought to have full parity with men. . . . Since we do not know what genuine equality would mean in practice, its desirability cannot fairly be assessed."[35]

[34]Calculations based on figures in Dolores Barracano Schmidt and Earl Robert Schmidt, "The Invisible Woman: The Historian as Professional Magician," in Berenice A. Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History* (Urbana, Ill., 1976), 45–48. I have not independently verified the figures on pages devoted to women. Since the article was written for polemical purposes, I suspect that borderline cases did not get the benefit of the doubt, and in any case, this is a crude measure. But even if one doubled the pages which Schmidt and Schmidt say were devoted to women, eighteen of the twenty-five texts would still score under 1 percent.

Documenting the range of ways in which women had been oppressed, and even forcing acknowledgment of women's existence on the profession, was a necessary item on the women's history agenda of the seventies. But the very fact of having to undertake such a rudimentary task was demeaning. When, as it inevitably did, the effort revealed the depth of male-centeredness, complacency, and even misogyny in the existing historical literature, the result was often further alienation of feminists from the profession. The documentation of oppression, particularly in domestic life, was an emotionally charged activity in other ways. A white historian of slavery might have a more difficult time than a black historian in achieving psychic identification with a slave, but even the black historian was more than a century removed in time, and light years in social circumstances, from the institutions of chattel slavery. Black scholars had to make almost as great an imaginative leap as whites. A woman historian of oppression within the patriarchal family had usually been raised in one. More often than not her own domestic arrangements carried daily reminders of the price traditional arrangements exacted. The focus on modes of male domination which had changed relatively little over time made its historical study a very "undetached" exercise. Insofar as many women historians had only recently come to the perception of their collaboration in their own victimization, the subject had an even greater charge. It was this sort of thing which accounted for the tone of much writing in women's history—for example, the common employment of the evocative "phallocentric" in place of the scientistic "androcentric" as a general term for a male-oriented outlook.

The move from a focus on women's oppression to women's culture was on the whole a response to the same considerations which operated in black history. In Gerda Lerner's words, an emphasis on oppression "makes it appear either that women were largely passive or that, at the most, they reacted to male pressures or to the restraints of patriarchal

[35]*Everyone Was Brave* (Chicago, 1969), viii.

society." As in the black case, an antireductionist argument could turn into a tacit reductionism of another kind. To treat women "only" as victims of oppression was not just a very partial view, but "once again places them in a male-defined conceptual framework: oppressed, victimized by standards and values established by men." Which was fair enough, but it was hardly less reductionist to argue, as Lerner and other feminist historians did, that the "true" history of women was the story of "their ongoing functioning in that male-defined world *on their own terms.*" One reason for shifting the focus from victimization to women's autonomous activity was stated frankly by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, who said that she had gradually realized that emphasizing male oppression of women had turned her into an "historian of men," when she wanted to be an historian of women.[36]

There were various ways in which feminist historians effected the transition from an historiography which stressed women's subordination and victimization to one which emphasized their agency and autonomy. Probably the most important, and certainly the most imaginative, was the reconceptualization of the history of middle-class women in nineteenth-century America. The "cult of true womanhood," which arose early in the century, had defined women as pure and submissive. It was the ideological justification for their restriction to a largely domestic "women's sphere." But, feminist historians argued, women had not experienced this ghettoization as victims. Rather, within that sphere, they had created a "rich and empowering culture of women." The "women's sphere," it was maintained, was the seedbed of organized political feminism. To alter the metaphor, friendship and support networks became "crucibles in which collective acts of rebellion were formed."[37]

But the theme of resistance, at least political resistance, was less central to the new work than insistence on the autonomy of the woman's world, that women's values were distinctive and not to be assimilated to those of men. The most original, provocative, and sophisticated work in this area was by Smith-Rosenberg, who argued for the existence of a nineteenth-century female world "in which men made only a shadowy appearance"; a world filled with female rituals "so secret that men had little knowledge of them, so pervasive that they patterned women's lives from birth to

[36]Lerner, "Placing Women in History" (1975), in *The Majority Finds Its Past* (New York, 1979), 147–48; Smith-Rosenberg, in "Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium," *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980): 61.

[37]DuBois, *Feminist Scholarship*, 56; Rayna Rapp et al., "Examining Family History," in Judith L. Newton et al., eds., *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London, 1983), 244.

death." Smith-Rosenberg was explicit about the "explosive" political implications of her work:

> If we assert that nineteenth-century women in particular, and perhaps all women, constitute an autonomous female culture, we assert that women's separate sphere and experiences are the product, not of men's ghettoization of women, but of women's distinctive psychosexual and biological nature. We then unambiguously proclaim women's absolute Otherness.

A number of historians of women argued that it was precisely the decay of a separate women's world which accounted for the decline of feminism in the early twentieth century, and that a revival of separatism had energized the women's movement in the sixties and seventies.[38]

The concentration on autonomous women's culture was not accepted by all feminist historians. Those with a continuing left commitment, entailing solidarity with male comrades, were more likely than others to question both its historiographical and contemporary-strategic implications. Socialist-feminists also shared in the general uneasiness on the left concerning the new social history's concentration on the private realm. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese acknowledged that work which treated women as "the Other" had, "at its most rich and complex . . . taught us much." But she saw it as "capitulat[ion] to official history's insistence upon the universal claims of female biology." It did not, she said, necessarily challenge mainstream history, "or rather, it poses a challenge so extreme as to make interchange next to impossible." But it was work which emphasized women's autonomy and a distinctive women's culture which dominated the field. When that orientation was joined to the consensual insistence on bringing an explicitly feminist orientation to bear on problems past and present, the generally separatist implications of most feminist history were clear enough.[39]

The logical conclusion of militant black separatism was political nationalism, involving emigration, or at least total withdrawal from white society. More realistically, a kind of moral and cultural emigration was called for. Such a prospect was in truth not at all disturbing to most whites, for whom the black presence was troubling, and black absence welcomed. The logical conclusion of separatist feminism was lesbianism. Smith-Rosenberg, and she was by no means alone in this, made explicit

[38]Smith-Rosenberg, "Hearing Women's Words: A Feminist Reconstruction of History," in her *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985), 28, 41.

[39]Fox-Genovese, "Placing Women's History in History," *New Left Review* 133 (1982): 14.

the homoerotic dimension of the bonds of sisterhood which she celebrated. She somewhat tentatively endorsed the view that heterosexuality was "an artificial construct imposed upon humanity." The Stanford historian Estelle Freedman embraced not just a separatist historiographical orientation, and a separatist strategy for the present, but said that the history of separatism "helps explain why the politics of lesbian feminism have been so important in the revival of the women's movement."

> Lesbian feminism, by affirming the primacy of women's relationships with each other and by providing an alternative feminist culture, forced many nonlesbians to reevaluate their relationships with men, male institutions, and male values. In the process, feminists have put to rest the myth of female dependence on men and rediscovered the significance of woman bonding. I find it personally gratifying that the lesbian feminist concept of the woman-identified woman has historical roots in the female friendships, networks, and institutions of the nineteenth century. The historical sisterhood . . . can teach us a great deal about putting women first, whether as friends, lovers, or political allies.

While only a minority of feminist historians were or became lesbians, a much larger number were inclined to agree that heterosexuality was to some substantial extent a male-imposed construct. A common response was a kind of political or cultural lesbianism. Lesbians were honored as *serious* feminists, much as Jews accorded special respect to those who demonstrated the depth of their Zionism by emigrating to Israel. Even if women did not physically separate themselves from men—and many, in various ways, did—a kind of moral separatism was fairly widespread. All of this was a good deal more threatening to academic life, and the domestic life of male academics, than black separatism had been.[40]

Many of the central issues in women's history came together dramatically in the mid-1980s in the case of *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck, & Co.* The EEOC, in seeking to prove that Sears had discriminated against women with respect to jobs in commission sales, presented evidence concerning the company's procedures for selecting such personnel, and alleged inadequacies in its affirmative action program. But the centerpiece of its case was the undisputed statistical underrepresentation of women among those members of the total Sears sales force who held the better-paying commission positions. The heart of Sears' defense was that one could only infer discrimination from this statistical pattern on the assumption that women were equally inter-

[40] Smith-Rosenberg, "Hearing Women's Words," 32; Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870–1930," *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 524–25.

ested in commission sales positions, which, Sears claimed, they were not. Many women, Sears maintained, "fear or dislike . . . the competitive, 'dog-eat-dog' atmosphere of most commission sales divisions"; feared nonacceptance by customers in selling such traditionally "male" items as hardware and automotive supplies; and disliked the high-pressure sales techniques associated with commission selling. Overall, Sears said, "the crux of the issue" was "the reasonableness of the EEOC's a priori assumptions of male/female sameness with respect to preferences, interests, and qualifications."[41]

Opinions and testimony to this effect offered by Sears managers were, if not tainted, at least suspect. One member of the legal team representing Sears, having been formerly married to an historian of women, was aware that much recent scholarship in women's history tended to support Sears' contentions that women's values and interests could not be assumed to be the same as men's, and in the end it was his ex-wife, Rosalind Rosenberg of Barnard, who became Sears' expert witness. In her previous academic work Rosenberg had been skeptical of arguments for a distinctive "women's culture," but in her testimony she was able to draw on a body of recent historical literature which differentiated women's values and interests from those of men.

The EEOC's statistician, she told the court, "assumes that given equal opportunity women will make the same choices that a man would make. . . . That assumption is based on a traditionally male model of how people behave in the universe, that . . . the most important thing is economic maximation." Women, rather more than men, she said, "have goals and values other than realizing maximum economic gain . . . values shaped in earlier eras." Women were "more interested than men in the cooperative, social aspects of the work situation." Many women shared the view that for them work should be subordinated to family obligations, and chose jobs that complemented those obligations over jobs that offered increased earnings. "The overwhelming weight of modern scholarship in women's history," Rosenberg said, "supports the view that disparities in the sexual composition of an employer's workforce . . . are consistent with an absence of discrimination on the part of the employer."

> I myself might prefer a world in which as many women as men placed career ahead of family, in which as many women as men were ready, willing, and able to sell furnaces . . . but that is not our world today. I have tried to show that nothing

[41] "Post-Trial Brief of Sears, Roebuck and Co.," 9, 11–12; "Trial Brief of Sears, Roebuck and Co.," 21; in *EEOC v. Sears*, Civil Action No. 79-C-4373, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, 9, 11–13, quoted in Ruth Milkman, "Women's History and the Sears Case," *Feminist Studies* 12 (1986): 383–84.

about our history, and nothing in the best recent scholarship about women in our history, would lead one to expect otherwise.[42]

On the narrow point at issue Rosenberg had no difficulty making an effective case. A much more difficult task faced Alice Kessler-Harris, chosen by the EEOC to rebut Rosenberg. And her job was not made easier by the fact that Rosenberg had been able to cite Kessler-Harris's *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* on behalf of Sears' argument that women's own attitudes were an important factor limiting their full and equal participation in the work force. Married women's failure to take jobs during the Great Depression, Kessler-Harris had written, was a result of "ideological constraints that continued to operate even in this period of crisis." Until quite recently, she had said in her book, "the ideology of the home still successfully contained most women's aspirations." Elsewhere Kessler-Harris had expressed the view that women "harbor values, attitudes, and behavior patterns potentially subversive to capitalism," an assertion that Rosenberg, in surrebuttal, found "at odds with her testimony . . . that women are as likely as men to want Sears' most highly competitive jobs, those in commission sales."[43]

Embarrassed at having her own work used against her, Kessler-Harris tried to talk around the narrowly posed question, and to advance broader arguments, but the format defeated her. She found herself offering testimony in which, as she later acknowledged, "subtlety and nuance were omitted . . . complexities and exceptions vanished from sight." It was, in fact, a bit worse than that. The rules of the game were such that Rosenberg had only been required to show that women's values and attitudes played some role in their choice of jobs; Kessler-Harris was required to assert that they played no role. In an impossible situation Kessler-Harris advanced impossible arguments. "Where opportunity has existed," she told the court, "women have never [*sic*] failed to take the jobs offered. . . . Failure to find women in so-called non-traditional jobs can thus only [*sic*] be interpreted as a consequence of employer's unexamined attitudes or preferences, which phenomenon is the essence of discrimination."[44]

[42]Trial Transcript, 10357–58 (11 March 1985); "Offer of Proof Concerning the Testimony of Dr. Rosalind Rosenberg," pars. 1–2, 19; "Written Rebuttal Testimony of Dr. Rosalind Rosenberg" (June 1985), pars. 1, 16; all quoted in Milkman, "Sears Case," 385–88.

[43]*Out to Work* (Oxford, 1982), 259, 296, 311; Kessler-Harris, "American Women and the American Character: A Feminist Perspective," in John Hague, ed., *American Character and Culture* (Westport, Conn., 1979), 228; Rosenberg, letter to *Chronicle of Higher Education* 32 (2 July 1986): 22.

[44]Kessler-Harris, "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company: A Personal Account," *Radical History Review* 35 (1986): 74; "Written Testimony of Alice Kessler-Harris" (June 1985), pars. 6, 13, quoted in Milkman, "Sears Case," 376.

The outcome was hardly in doubt, not because of the relative skill of the historical witnesses, and not even for reasons having much to do with whether Sears did in fact discriminate, but because the EEOC had so structured its argument that an historian much less adept than Rosenberg could have knocked it over. No historian could have done much more than Kessler-Harris to defend that argument against assault. The judge's verdict (there was no jury) was delivered in January 1986. He found the EEOC's statistical argument fatally flawed, primarily because of its assumption that there were no differences in women's interests and values which could account for their underrepresentation among commission sales personnel. The judge described Rosenberg as "a highly credible witness . . . offer[ing] reasonable, well-supported opinions." His verdict cited the view of Rosenberg and another Sears witness that "women tend to see themselves as less competitive." Neither, he said, contended "that all women have these tendencies or preferences, and the court has not drawn any such inference from their testimony. They have merely attempted to describe the overall tendencies of many women." The testimony of Kessler-Harris, he said, "focus[ed] on small groups of unusual women and their demonstrated abilities in various historical contexts, not on the majority of women or their interests."

> For example, Dr. Kessler-Harris testified about the experience of women during both World Wars, who took jobs such as welders, shipfitters, and crane operators, as well as similar experiences of other women in unusual circumstances throughout history. It is *not* an issue in this case that *some* women are both capable and interested in holding commission sales jobs in traditional male product areas, such as automotive, plumbing, furnaces and fencing. This is obviously true. The real question is what percentage of women versus men . . . at Sears stores during 1973 to 1980, were capable and interested.[45]

Various conclusions were drawn from the trial. To Jonathan Wiener the case demonstrated what left-feminists had argued all along, that "arguments about distinctive female values play into the hands of conservatives." For Kathryn Kish Sklar the case illustrated the dilemma of contemporary feminism: "When we admit difference, it goes overwhelmingly against women. On the other hand, to deny difference may also prove futile. I lament the way this case has shown that admitting difference is a negative thing." Another feminist thought that at a minimum the lesson of the Sears case was that

> We ignore the political dimensions of the equality-versus-difference debate at our peril, especially in a period of conservative resurgence like the present. . . .

[45]628 F. Supp. 1264 (N.D. Ill. 1986), 1308, 1314.

Feminist scholars must be aware of the real danger that arguments about "difference" or "women's culture" will be put to uses other than those for which they were originally developed.[46]

For some the case was a scholarly morality play, showing, in Thomas Haskell's words, that "justice is better served by truth than zealotry." Carl Degler thought the controversy surrounding the case would harm women's history by "mak[ing] it seem simply a polemical subject and not . . . a real field of scholarly inquiry." Rosenberg, in this view, emerged as the spokesperson for the disinterested historical truth, in all its sometimes painful complexity. But neither of the two opposing expert witnesses was "disinterested." Neither had taken a "tell the truth though the heavens fall" posture. Both decided to testify based on their respective evaluations of the political consequences of the verdict. And their decisions to testify were also based on a priori beliefs about Sears' guilt or innocence which in neither instance seemed very well grounded.[47]

For Kessler-Harris, "the success of Sears' lawyers would undermine two decades of affirmative action efforts and exercise a chilling effect on women's history as a whole. . . . The potential consequences were terrifying." It does not seem an exaggeration to say that for Kessler-Harris, Sears was guilty until proven innocent, inherently complicit in the discrimination endemic to the capitalist system. Sears was, in her words, "at best, a potentially discriminatory employer." "Why not," she asked, "give women, rather than employers, the benefit of the doubt?" She invoked an avowedly instrumentalist criterion in choosing what explanation of disparity to adopt. After the trial, tacitly retreating from the position she had taken on the witness stand, she said that the real question was

> not whether discrimination is the *only* explanation, but whether it is . . . the best, most appropriate explanation for statistical disparities? . . . The point is that, in a case that is about discrimination, to argue that discrimination was not the likely explanation is to lend one's expertise to the argument that other explanations are more plausible.[48]

[46]Wiener, "Women's History on Trial," *Nation* 241 (1985): 180; Sklar, quoted in Carol Sternhell, "Life in the Mainstream: What Happens When Feminists Turn Up on Both Sides of the Courtroom," *Ms.* 15 (July 1986): 89; Milkman, "Sears Case," 394.

[47]Haskell, letter to *The Nation* 241 (1985): 410; Degler quoted in Sternhell, "Mainstream," 88.

[48]Kessler-Harris, "Personal Account," 75, 59, 71; Kessler-Harris, quoted in Sternhell, 51; "Personal Account," 63. Kessler-Harris's criterion of the "best" or "most appropriate" explanation was exactly that which R. G. Collingwood explicated as the sensible principle of selecting relevant causes in practical life: the cause that we can do something about. (See *An Essay on Metaphysics* [1940; reprinted Chicago, 1971], 302–12.)

Rosenberg's critique of the inferences drawn by the EEOC statistician would have been equally cogent whether or not Sears had discriminated, but she repeatedly insisted that her decision to testify for Sears was based on her certainty that Sears had not discriminated. Her grounds for this belief were no less a prioristic than Kessler-Harris's opposing conviction. One was the absence of complainants. "I said in the beginning, 'If there's ever a complainant in this case, I'm not going to testify, which strikes me in retrospect as a little bit crazy . . . but for me, symbolically, the absence of complainants was critical." The absence of complainants at the trial was, however, purely a function of the EEOC's self-defeating strategy of sole reliance on statistical evidence. Her confidence in Sears' innocence was, she said, furthered by the fact that they were represented by the law firm of Chuck Morgan, whom she had respected for many years as a civil rights lawyer. (Which seems equivalent to inferring the innocence of Loeb and Leopold from the fact that they were defended by Clarence Darrow.) The overall thrust of Rosenberg's testimony tended to undermine the plausibility of her belief that Sears had not discriminated. As she pointed out, there were very substantial historical and cultural influences which probably led many women to conclude, against their self-interest, that commission selling was inappropriate for women. Was it less probable that many of the thousands of male Sears middle managers shared these views, which were in their self-interest, and that these historically determined cultural stereotypes influenced their selection decisions? And, like Kessler-Harris, Rosenberg based her decision to testify on a calculation about what would aid the cause of women. In her view a victory for the EEOC would have discouraged other companies from enacting good-faith affirmative action programs.[49]

The problems of feminist historians in the courtroom were not theirs alone. When committed scholars enter the legal arena, they uphold the highest academic standards when circumstances allow; when circumstances don't, they fudge. Until the Sears case the best known example of historians' involvement in the legal process was in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Supreme Court asked the attorneys for both sides to address the question of the "intentions of the framers"; whether those who proposed and ratified the Fourteenth Amendment had intended to outlaw school segregation. Henry Steele Commager, when approached by the NAACP, told them to drop the point, since the unhelpful answer to the Court's question was "no." John Hope Franklin, Vann Woodward, and Alfred Kelly were among those who helped the NAACP

[49]Rosenberg, quoted in Milkman, "Sears Case," 392–93.

respond. The principal contribution of the historians involved was to devise ways of evading a direct answer to the question. Kelly recalled:

> The problem we faced was not the historian's discovery of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. . . . It is not that we were engaged in formulating lies; there was nothing as crude and naive as that. But we were using facts, emphasizing facts, bearing down on facts, sliding off facts, quietly ignoring facts, and above all, interpreting facts in a way to do what Marshall said we had to do—"get by those boys down there."

In *Brown v. Board of Education*, unlike in *EEOC v. Sears*, obfuscation was precisely what the Court desired, it having already determined, on other grounds, to decide for the plaintiff, even if the historical evidence went the other way. By the highest standards of academic rectitude, Franklin et al. were no doubt in scholarly honor bound to submit an *amicus curiae* brief which cut through the NAACP's evasions. They should have informed the Court that if it wished to interpret the Fourteenth Amendment according to the framers' intentions, segregation must remain.[50]

What most disturbed feminist historians was what they regarded as the apostasy of one of their number. Rosenberg had not been the first historian of women approached by Sears. When Kathryn Kish Sklar was asked to testify, she told Sears that "they were wasting their time. There was no way . . . that I was going to testify against the EEOC in this case. I didn't feel I could testify against the individual rights of women to equal employment opportunity." Carl Degler also turned down Sears, a decision he originally described as based on his reluctance to "us[e] historical evidence as a justification for limiting opportunities," but which he later characterized as stemming "partly from simple laziness, partly from cowardice, partly because I didn't care to compromise my feminist bona fides."[51]

Hostility to Rosenberg was no doubt exacerbated by the fact that the case took place in the wake of the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, and in a general climate of feminist retreat. Ellen DuBois termed Rosenberg's testimony "an attack on working women and sexual equality." Women historians, she said, "have an obligation to remain honest to our feminist origins by, at the very least, ensuring that our scholarship is not used for an anti-feminist purpose." Renate Bridenthal reported that most people were appalled that Rosenberg "put her skills in the service of a company when we mostly identify with the position of women workers and the Women's Movement."

> Some people think she was misguided, that she made a mistake. Others think it was more than that, that she was stupid or evil. Personally, I can't believe anyone could be so stupid. I'm more inclined to believe she was defending a class interest as she understood it.

Sandi Cooper wrote that Rosenberg had acted immorally in "us[ing] the labors of other scholars . . . to demonstrate the validity of second-class status for women." Kessler-Harris said that "the issue is purely this":

> You would not lie in your testimony, but you also would not say or write something as a historian solely to hurt a group of people. . . . [Rosenberg] was prepared to testify that other women—working class women, poor women, nonwhite women—had not wanted well-paying jobs, and would not willingly make the kinds of compromises she herself had made in order to succeed at them. What was to be gained by such testimony?[52]

At a meeting of over 150 feminist scholars at Columbia University's Women and Society Seminar in December 1985, where the case was discussed, Rosenberg had not a single defender. Later that month the Coordinating Committee of Women in the Historical Profession passed a resolution which avoided mentioning Rosenberg by name, but which expressed the belief that "we have a responsibility not to allow our scholarship to be used against the interests of women struggling for equity in our society." A few women historians deplored the acrimony of the controversy. Some privately criticized Kessler-Harris's testimony; and there were no doubt those who expressed their ambivalence through

[50]Kelly, "When the Supreme Court Ordered Desegregation," *U.S. News and World Report*, 5 February 1962, 88. (Kelly's reference is to then NAACP legal director, later Supreme Court justice, Thurgood Marshall.) See also Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York, 1977), chap. 24. In *Brown*, of course, the historians were not testifying, but preparing in-house memoranda for the lawyers. Therefore, they did not publicly assume individual responsibility for the use to which their labors were put. They were not cross-examined on the cogency or relevance of their arguments.

[51]Sklar, quoted in Sternhell, "Mainstream," 86–87; Degler's first explanation quoted in Wiener, "Women's History on Trial," 179; second explanation in Sternhell, "Mainstream," 88.

[52]DuBois, quoted in Wiener, "Women's History on Trial," 179, and in Karen J. Winkler, "Two Scholars' Conflict in Sears Sex-Bias Case Sets Off War in Women's History," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 31 (5 February 1986): 8; Bridenthal, quoted in Sternhell, "Mainstream," 48–49; Sandi Cooper's reference to Rosenberg's testimony as "an immoral act" appeared in a circular letter, cited in Sternhell, ibid., 88; Cooper's quoted remarks in her "Women's History on Trial," *Conference Group on Women's History Newsletter* 16 (October 1985): 6; Kessler-Harris's first two sentences quoted in Samuel G. Freedman, "Of History and Politics: Bitter Feminist Debate," *New York Times*, 6 June 1986, B1, B4; second two sentences from her "Personal Account," 59.

silence. The only historians to publicly support Rosenberg were two males, Degler and Haskell.[53]

Feminist historians were members of both the community of feminists and the community of historians, with all of the potential for conflicting loyalties that such dual citizenship entails. Of all the illusions in which we seek refuge, none is more pathetic than that which holds out the prospect of satisfactorily resolving irreconcilable claims. In such circumstances, we cannot steer between, but rather ricochet off, the rocks on either side of the channel, inevitably getting a bit bruised in the process. In the Sears case Rosenberg's feminist credentials and Kessler-Harris's scholarly credibility were each bruised, though not, one hopes, irreparably. So long as dual citizenship continues, and there is no reason to believe that it will not, conflicts of this kind will recur.

III

As a result of their commitment to provide a usable past for their respective constituencies, black and feminist historians in the academy had introduced into historiography strong particularist currents which contradicted the universalist ethos of scholarship. But though their external commitments were often deeply felt, their work, cast in an academic idiom, and appearing in academic media, rarely reached a lay audience. Virtually all of them were firmly embedded in a culture of academic professionalism. Their avowedly perspectival and particularist sensibilities implicitly challenged universalist norms, but their institutional location, and socialization into institutional values, constrained how far they could push that challenge. In a separate development, a movement arose within the historical profession which not only directly assaulted universalist assumptions, but sought to institutionalize particularism,

[53]Report on Columbia Seminar and CCWHP resolution in Milkman, "Sears Case," 391–92; for Degler and Haskell, see above, note 47. The issues in *EEOC v. Sears* resembled those in the Moynihan Report controversy. Rosenberg was arguing that active, current discrimination, and the absence of formal opportunity, was not an adequate explanation of women's disadvantaged state—that historically conditioned cultural factors needed to be taken into account. This was approximately the point Moynihan had been making with respect to ghetto blacks, and which brought down on his head the wrath of historians of blacks, as Rosenberg's testimony made her anathema to historians of women. There were the same charges that history was being used to divert attention from contemporary discrimination: "History should never have been in that courtroom," Kessler-Harris said. There was even identical rhetoric: Kessler-Harris called Rosenberg's testimony "a classic example of blaming the victim." (Kessler-Harris, quoted in Sternhell, "Mainstream," 91; Kessler-Harris, "Personal Account," 70.)

calling into question not only standard notions of objectivity, but traditional conceptions of "historical professionalism" as well.

We have seen how, at the turn of the century, the professionalization of history and the establishment of norms of objectivity were intimately linked, each process reinforcing the other. A national historical profession would transcend provincialism and particularism. Amateurs who adjusted their findings to the tastes and values of their audience would be displaced by professionals loyal only to objective truth; in an academic environment historians would be insulated from outside pressures. Thus objectivity as individual moral aspiration would be reinforced by powerful social and institutional buttresses.

At the center of the ideal of professionalism, and with obvious relevance to the way in which professionalism furthered objectivity, was "professional autonomy." The ideal-typical professional was an individual practitioner to whom clients deferred. The professional's livelihood was held to depend not upon satisfying any particular client, but rather was a consequence of upholding universalistic professional standards which the laity as a whole would honor. At the core of traditional definitions of professionalism was the proposition that while a client could engage the services of a professional, it was the professional, and not the client, who determined how the services were rendered: what pill to prescribe, what motion to file.

Not all professions had their origins in independent practice, and in the course of the twentieth century even members of "free professions," like doctors and lawyers, were increasingly becoming salaried employees. But as the de facto autonomy of other professionals declined, that of academics rose. They, too, were employees of large bureaucratic organizations, but the university as employer had less and less control over academics' work. How much one taught might be decided by employers, but hardly ever what took place in the classroom. In the case of scholarly writing, university administrations might establish quantitative guidelines for tenure or promotion, but judgments of content were delegated to members of the discipline involved. While scholars' increasing autonomy from institutional pressure could hardly guarantee objectivity, that autonomy was generally seen as one of its principal social preconditions.

By no means all of those in traditional academic disciplines were to be found on campuses. A substantial proportion of all natural scientists were employed by government or industry. In the social sciences, psychologists might work for the penal system or attempt to manipulate the consciousness of an industry's work force; sociologists were employed in