news from the
SCHLESINGER LIBRARY

SPRING 2014
A Privilege to Lead

This spring will be my last as director of the Schlesinger Library. My dozen years here have been wonderfully stimulating and rewarding. From colleagues on the staff, I have learned far more about the demands and possibilities of archival management than I ever knew as a historian using these materials.

The Digital Arena
During this time, the landscape of library technologies has vastly changed. The Schlesinger Library has become a leader in the digital arena, both in collecting born-digital materials and in employing newly available digital tools. I've especially admired and appreciated the determination of Marilyn Dunn, our executive director, to maintain the library’s reputation for state-of-the-art archival technology and for documenting women’s lives.

A Talented Staff
It has been a tremendous advantage for me to work with talented and dedicated staff members who have moved briskly with the times, adopting new methods when appropriate, while superbly performing the jobs for which they were trained. Their professional skills and phenomenal devotion to doing their work well have made the library an institutional leader in its field and an exceptional place for researchers to pursue their interests.

Time after time, students and established scholars—both inside and outside Harvard—have let me know of their immense appreciation for the collections they could access and for the guidance they received while conducting research at the Schlesinger. These gratifying reports have come to my ears only because staff members have worked so well individually and collaboratively—never resting on their laurels, but relentlessly improving collections, processing, and access.

The Library Council
It has also been a pleasure to work with the members of the Schlesinger Library Council. These important supporters of the library—many of them with us since I organized the council in 2003—have served as a sounding board for policy shifts and have offered their feedback on pressing matters concerning technology, fundraising, and acquisitions. I have benefited from their wit and wisdom and welcomed their moral support.

A New Reading Room
As I look back, I think of what a special privilege it was to be here in the very early years of the Radcliffe Institute, when I worked with sister historian Drew Gilpin Faust, then the...
dean, setting plans for new programs, projects, and conferences. There was no doubt about her full support for the Schlesinger Library. Under her leadership—and that of both subsequent deans—the library has been far better supported than it was as part of Radcliffe College. I was thrilled that she shared my conviction that the library’s magnificent holdings merited a more spacious and imposing reading room than the small, low-ceilinged space allotted on the third floor when I arrived. The subsequent renovation of the library restored half of the third floor to its original two-story height, enabling the new, far larger, and better-outfitted reading room—named for Carol K. Pforzheimer ’31, in honor of her crucial support for Radcliffe and particularly for the library—to regain its beautiful original double-height windows. When Dean Faust became President Faust, I thought it utterly necessary to have a portrait of her as founding dean hung in the reading room. That was accomplished with the support of the Institute’s new leadership, and a wonderful event, attended by Carol K. Pforzheimer and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. as well as President Faust and numerous library supporters, marked the installation.

Every time I enter the Pforzheimer Reading Room, I take a small breath of appreciation. I have been using the library’s collections for my own research since 1970, through more than one reconfiguration of the building, which was constructed as the Radcliffe College library in 1911. Today it is more fitting and beautiful for researchers than ever before.

A Sampling of Manuscript Collections Acquired under Cott’s Leadership

These included a zine collection curated by Ann Marie Wilson AM ’05, PhD ’10, one of Cott’s students, and the papers of:

Ti-Grace Atkinson, a radical feminist, writer, and teacher

Marjorie Buell, the cartoonist and shrewd businesswoman who created “Little Lulu” (and the mother of Cott’s Harvard colleague Lawrence Buell)

The Herrick Family, documenting the lives of three remarkable sisters—a doctor, an educator, and a minister

Catharine MacKinnon, a lawyer and advocate for human and women’s rights

Ann Petry, an African American writer

Betty Gram Swing, a suffragist and National Woman’s Party organizer

Lila Hotz Luce Tyng, a socialite who was married to publisher Henry Luce

Ellen Willis, a journalist, feminist, and music critic

Timeline text by Kathryn Allamong Jacob, Johanna-Maria Fraenkel Curator of Manuscripts
An Array of Public Events

Certain public events will always stand out in my mind—starting with the good-bye fête for Barbara Haber, who retired from her position as curator of books after 30 years. Because she had so much to do with developing the library’s culinary collection, the event had a gustatory as well as a scholarly dimension. I found myself phoning five or six Cambridge chefs to see if they would contribute hors d’oeuvres for a party to honor Barbara. Testifying to their appreciation for her and for the library, they readily agreed, and hundreds crowded in to enjoy the results.

Not long after, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the library with a two-day scholarly conference titled “Gender, Race, and Rights.” Focusing on recent developments in African American women’s history, that conference featured numerous eminent scholars in the field, including Darlene Clark Hine RI ’04 and Nell Painter PhD ’74, BI ’77, and was bookended by comments from two historians of an older generation, Anne Firor Scott PhD ’58 and Gerda Lerner, both founders of the modern practice of women’s history. It was fitting and poignant that 10 years later, in December 2013, the symposium marking the library’s 70th anniversary honored Gerda Lerner, who had passed away earlier that year.

Other events I’ve been fortunate to arrange include the annual Rothschild Lectures. My first invitee was Angela Davis, who, in the presence of both Maurine and Robert Rothschild, addressed a large crowd in the Kennedy School’s Arco Forum (the Radcliffe Institute then had no lecture hall of its own) and alerted us to the abuses of mass incarceration. Every Rothschild lecturer since—including Samantha Power, Eve Ensler, Barbara Ehrenreich, Catharine MacKinnon, and Anita Hill—has been exciting and notable in a different way, and each one has carried on Maurine Rothschild’s special concern with advancing human rights. The symposia and seminars and conferences during these years have always required effort but have brought parallel satisfactions. I think, for instance, of the 2005 symposium “Putting Feminism on the Record: ReViewing the 1960s and 1970s,” which celebrated the completion of the library’s grant project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, to process major holdings on the modern women’s movement, including the records of the National Organization for Women. “The Modern Girl around the World” was a mini-symposium in the spring of 2006 on the "new woman" of the 1920s in the United States, Europe, China, and Africa.

That same spring, I hosted a panel discussion titled “Writing Past Lives: Biography as History,” which featured Alice Kessler-Harris, Linda Gordon, and our current dean, Lizabeth Cohen.

In 2007 we launched the Boston Seminar on the History of Women and Gender, a joint effort between the library and the Massachusetts Historical Society. We have hosted four scholars’ talks, with commentaries, during each academic year ever since.

Summer Institutes

The biography panel heralded a new venture I began in the summer of 2007—a weeklong institute on the same topic, which enrolled scores of applicants to hear two daily lectures by notable scholars (including the historian Susan Ware, now a member of the Schlesinger Library Council) and to participate in workshops in which they presented their own works in progress. The huge success of that experiment encouraged me to hold a second institute the following summer, “Sequels to the 1960s.”

That year the library also hosted the first of my summer programs for middle- and high-school teachers. In these weeklong educational learning experiences, funded by the Gilder-Lehrman Institute, the teachers heard lectures from me and invited scholars and used Schlesinger Library materials to develop their own class lessons, which they shared with one another at the end of the week. The avid participation of the public reference staff at the library gave the teachers a meaningful and often unique experience of conducting research in original materials.

Recent Events

More recent conferences also loom large in my memory. The symposium in September 2011, “The New Majority? The Past, Present and Future of Women in the Workplace,” assembled a federal circuit court justice, leaders of the American Federation of Labor and of the working women’s organization 9 to 5, and the director of the Washington-based Institute for Women’s Policy Research. Supported by a bequest from longtime supporter Clara Goldberg Schiffer ’32, the symposium honored Schiffer for her dedication to keeping working-class women front and center at the Schlesinger Library. The following fall saw one of our largest conferences ever, in which a panoply of scholars, former colleagues, and family members brought Julia Child back to life on the stage, producing one of the most delightful educational events ever to emerge from the Schlesinger.

Having come to the library under the leadership of a historian dean, I’m grateful that I leave it in a similarly favorable situation under Lizabeth Cohen. I feel confident that the Schlesinger will have a secure future of documenting the past.

—Nancy F. Cott
Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director
Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History
No New Backlogs: Workshop on Technology and Archival Processing

Having largely completed the effort to eliminate unprocessed collections, the library remains determined to create no additional backlogs. With the hope of finding new methods to expedite processing, the Schlesinger Library, supported by Academic Ventures and Events Management teams, has assembled a wide range of scholars—from software engineers and computer scientists to art historians, archivists, and technologists, including representatives from Microsoft and Google—for interdisciplinary collaboration on how to deploy technology to streamline archival processing. In April, the third workshop on technology and archival processing convened in the Knafel Center, with participants drawn from across the country and Europe for a two-day workshop dedicated to recognition software.

That workshop built on the discussions at the previous two, which included a strong concern about the vulnerability of audio, audiovisual, and digital files. Among the highlights were a panel of scholars and digital archivists discussing the future of the finding aid in a digital environment and sessions exploring the application of facial-, voice-, and handwriting-recognition software for full-content searching. Two plenary speakers set the tone for the day: Dan Cohen, of the Digital Library of America, opened the conversation about the role of the finding aid, and Lambert Schomaker, of the University of Groningen (Netherlands), presented on the MONK project, a digital environment to help humanities scholars discover and analyze patterns in texts. He also set the scene for a discussion of the application of automated-recognition technologies that could fundamentally transform access and the practice of archival processing and description.

These workshops have consistently appealed for innovation and experimentation, and the Schlesinger Library has heeded this call by establishing an experimental processing space, a laboratory where archivists can freely think about ways to scale up the use of technology for innovative archival processing and apply it onsite. But the culture of innovation is not limited to this team, and experimentation is alive in all other areas of the library, with projects going forward in research services and published-materials processing. This is our new and expanded focus, and we will deploy it in the service of preventing new backlogs.

—Marilyn Dunn
Executive Director and Radcliffe Institute Librarian

Susan Ware Appointed Senior Advisor to the Library

Schlesinger Library Council member Susan Ware AM ’73, PhD ’78 will become a senior advisor to the Schlesinger Library while the Radcliffe Institute conducts a search for Nancy Cott’s replacement. Ware’s 10-month appointment begins September 1.

Ware is an independent scholar who specializes in 20th-century American history, American women’s history, and biography. In addition to serving as the editor of Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century, which was sponsored by the Radcliffe Institute—and the files of which are archived at the Schlesinger Library—she is the author and editor of numerous books, including Game, Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution in Women’s Sports.

“The Schlesinger Library has been my professional home for my entire career as a historian,” said Ware of her deep and broad connections. “I am honored to be asked to serve as its senior advisor for the coming year—and an added bonus is the chance to be part of the vibrant Radcliffe Institute community.”
On a recent late-winter afternoon, 11 Harvard students gathered in the light-filled Radcliffe Room of the Schlesinger Library for a research seminar taught by the historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich AM ’95. Half of the two-hour class was spent discussing the reading—pretty standard for a college class—but it’s the second hour that set it apart.

Displayed on carts and tables around the room was a wealth of materials pulled by the three librarians on hand, including Ellen Shea, the head of research services and Ulrich’s primary collaborator for the course. Tiny hinged frames rested on foam cradles, open file boxes beckoned, and clean white cotton gloves lay at the ready.

“It’s going to be a very visual day,” declared Ulrich, a historian of the United States and Harvard’s 300th Anniversary University Professor. For class that day, the librarians had pulled myriad photographs out of the archives—from daguerreotypes to Polaroids—dating as far back as the Civil War.

Over the next two classes, the students would discuss autobiography, fiction, and the history of the Civil War—after reading Hannah Crafts’s

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, center, talks to her class. At left, first-year student Talia Weisberg. The class takes place in the Radcliffe College Room, which was established by the Class of 1954 on the occasion of its 50th reunion.

History Comes Alive through the Archives

One undergraduate class is experiencing firsthand the process of history making
The Bondswoman’s Narrative (Warner, 2003), believed to be the first novel written by an African American woman, and then watching the documentary film Rebel (2013), directed by María Agui Carter ’86, which recounts the story of Cuban-born Loretta Janeta Velázquez, who fought in the Civil War as a Confederate officer and a Union spy. By the end of the course, they will have considered questions of gender, identity, and authenticity—and also learned about and explored primary sources. Ulrich and the Schlesinger are bringing the archives alive for these undergraduates in a unique way.

Encouraging Shared Eureka Moments
Nora C. Garry ’14, a concentrator in studies of women, gender, and sexuality, notes the importance of archival research to humanities scholarship. But Ulrich’s class also offers “something we can’t re-create by visiting the Schlesinger on our own time,” she says. “It models proper archival engagement and promotes communal scholarship.” Garry appreciates being able to share her findings with classmates as she encounters them, and she believes that the course’s value is enhanced by its communal nature.

Shea agrees that the course offers a singular experience. “While doing research, you’re in the reading room, alone and in a controlled environment,” she says. “You often don’t get to share your eureka moments like these students do.”

Documents and Other Tangible Materials
Inspired by and named for Ulrich’s 2007 book Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History (Knopf, 2007), the course (WGS 1442) is described as “a hands-on introduction to history making in its many forms,” and the Schlesinger’s manuscripts and artifacts are the means. For some time, Ulrich taught classes in which students worked with museum artifacts. “It occurred to me: documents,” she says. “Documents are artifacts, and something happens when students are connected to real stuff.”

For Talia Weisberg ’17, a first-year student considering a concentration in studies of women, gender, and sexuality, the direct connections to history are key. “I have never before been able to work with primary sources in a library or class,” she says. “I find it really exciting just to work with these original documents, since I know that they meant a lot to their original owners.”

“Coming up close and personal with manuscripts and correspondence forces you to realize the humanity of your subject,” Garry adds.

Ulrich previously collaborated with staff members while developing a course and related exhibit titled Tangible Things, which highlighted treasures and curiosities housed in University collections by displaying them in unusual locations. For that collaboration, the Schlesinger displayed a document from a different Harvard library (a guest object) and lent materials of its own to the central exhibit.

The Wow Factor
Although the library often hosts single classes during which librarians discuss collections specifically relevant to a course, Shea says that in her 20 years at the Schlesinger, no one course has drawn from its collections to the extent that Well-Behaved Women does.

After consulting with Ulrich about what types of materials might best illustrate the week’s themes, Shea gets feedback from the archivists. “I know the collections very well and have had my hands in many of them over the years,” she says. “But the archivists may remember something from processing that I’ve never seen before.” She aims for items that will excite students with a “wow factor.” In a recent class, for example, students read letters and diaries written by Radcliffe students from the 1890s, 1920s, and 1950s. The current students found them surprisingly relevant. “One of the students said the only thing that had changed was the taxi fare from Logan to Harvard Square,” Shea says.

Sharing the Riches
Ulrich’s students have considerable freedom for their final projects—they can produce a scholarly essay or a creative project, among other options—but they must undertake original research at the Schlesinger.

These 11 students will have spent an entire semester surrounded by the riches of the Schlesinger, but they’re not the only beneficiaries of Ulrich’s course. “It would be great if there were a class like this every year,” says Shea. “It’s energizing for the staff and a great use of our resources.”

—Ivelisse Estrada
Writer/Editor
This is the year of Judy Chicago. In celebration of her 75th birthday, museums and galleries throughout the country are showing her work during 2014. The National Museum of Women in the Arts, in Washington, DC; the Brooklyn Museum; the New Mexico Museum of Art, in Santa Fe; and the Nyehaus gallery, in New York, are among the major venues for shows exploring her long career as an artist.

As the repository of Chicago’s papers—which she began donating in 1996—the Schlesinger Library is celebrating her 75th with an exhibit titled Judy Chicago: Through the Archive, on view until the end of September. The exhibit highlights Chicago’s work as a painter and sculptor, as a founder of the field of feminist art education, and as the creator of large-scale collaborative works such as The Dinner Party, Birth Project, and Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light.

After touring the Schlesinger’s exhibit in early March, Chicago recalled the first time she visited the library. “I was so overwhelmed I burst into tears,” she said, “because we have so few institutions of our own.”

Chicago came to Radcliffe not only to visit the library’s exhibit, but also to hold a public conversation about art education and popular feminism with the historian Jane Gerhard, author of The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2007 (The University of Georgia Press, 2013).

Improving studio art education at the university level is one of Chicago’s passions, as she makes clear in Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education (The Monacelli Press, 2014). She explains her pedagogy—“My own success as a teacher is based upon my ability to help students find their personal voices, an approach that is quite different from the usual university studio class”—and describes her experiences in the 1960s and 1970s at Fresno State College, where she established the first feminist art program, and at California Institute of the Arts. Chicago left academia in 1974 to return full-time to her studio, and for 25 years she focused on making art. From 1999 to 2005, she returned to teaching and often team-taught with her husband, the photographer Donald Woodman.

Nancy F. Cott—the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director of the library and the Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History, who moderated the Radcliffe conversation between Chicago and Gerhard—asked Chicago how she now defines feminist art. In the past, Cott recalled, Chicago had defined it as “all the stages of a woman giving birth to herself.”

“I often say that in the 70s we cast the discourse incorrectly,” Chicago said, “because we cast it entirely around gender. Feminism is more about values.” She gave as an example her husband, who had wanted to work on The Dinner Party in Houston and was told that he couldn’t participate because of his gender. “You don’t have to be a woman to be a feminist,” she said.

In an interview at the Schlesinger Library the day after her presentation, Chicago said that the eight years she and Woodman spent on the Holocaust Project also helped broaden her definition of feminism. “We began to think of the Holocaust as a prism through which one could see the whole global structure of dominance, injustice, and oppression. I began to understand women’s oppression in that larger structure.”

Chicago’s art has evolved in profound ways during her long career. Her early minimalist paintings (such as Rainbow Pickett, 1965/2004) were followed by large installations—including The Dinner Party and the Holocaust Project—that have been succeeded by the smaller glass, ceramic, and bronze pieces that will show in Santa Fe as part of the 75th celebration.

The Dinner Party, which features 39 mythical and historical women, opened in 1979 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and traveled to 16 locations, where more than a million visitors saw it. Although it remains Chicago’s best-known work, The Dinner Party didn’t find its permanent home—in the Brooklyn Museum’s Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art—until 2007. Chicago and others describe the work’s creation and journey in The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History (The Monacelli Press, 2014).

Her papers found a permanent home long before The Dinner Party did. When Chicago spoke at Harvard’s Institute for Politics in 1996, she attended a dinner where she sat next to Mary Maples Dunn, then the director of the Schlesinger Library. Dunn asked Chicago about her papers, and soon Anne Engelhart, the head of the library’s collections services, was flying to New Mexico to meet the artist and examine her archives. Engelhart looked at the papers, stashed in YouStoreIt containers with no temperature control, and told Chicago that the library would take everything—forever. “I’ve had to train our staff,” Woodman said at the library, “to follow Judy around and rescue stuff out of the trash.”

Chicago and Woodman have lived in a renovated hotel in the small town of Belen, New Mexico, south of Albuquerque, since 1996. After growing up in Chicago and living in California for many years, the artist couldn’t imagine herself in New Mexico. “I never really had a home of my own,” she said, “and Donald felt rooted in New Mexico. Then we found this old railroad hotel, and Donald renovated and restored it for us. We have almost 9,000 square feet, which we could never in a million years afford anywhere else.”

Meanwhile, Chicago’s papers are at home in the Schlesinger Library, where researchers can review an abundance of materials relating to her personal and professional life: correspondence, drafts, photographs, notes, journals, and gallery catalogs.

—Pat Harrison
Publications Manager
This is the year of Judy Chicago.
In early December 2013, the Schlesinger Library celebrated its 70th anniversary with a symposium in the Knafel Center at the Radcliffe Institute. Nancy F. Cott, the Pforzheimer Foundation Director of the library and the Jonathan Trumbull Professor of History at Harvard, introduced the five historians on the panel and moderated their discussion. Following are edited excerpts from her introduction and from the panelists’ presentations.

The speakers were Joyce Antler, the Samuel B. Lane Professor of American Jewish History and Culture at Brandeis University; Thavolia Glymph, an associate professor of history and African and African American studies at Duke University; Linda Gordon Bl ’84, a University Professor of the Humanities and the Florence Kelley Professor at New York University who is a 2013–2014 fellow at the Radcliffe Institute, where she holds the Matina S. Horner Distinguished Visiting Professorship; Linda K. Kerber, a Radcliffe fellow in 2002–2003, who retired in 2012 from her position as the May Brodbeck Professor in the Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Iowa, where she was also a professor of history and a lecturer in the College of Law; and Alice Kessler-Harris, the R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of American History at Columbia University, who was a Radcliffe fellow in 2001–2002.

Gerda Lerner and the Schlesinger Library
After Gerda Lerner’s death, in January 2013, it seemed obvious that any event to mark the 70th anniversary of the Schlesinger Library that same year ought to honor Lerner. The two were intertwined in several ways.

Lerner’s career as a historian coincided with the decades of the Schlesinger Library’s major growth. Her force in developing the field of women’s history helped the collections of the Schlesinger become larger and more significant. She spoke at the library’s 40th, 50th, and 60th anniversary events. Characteristically, she closed the 50th anniversary program by stating decisively, “Patriarchal ideas are obsolete and powerless. Feminist ideas, conversely, are future-oriented and powerful.”

The founding years of the library and the career of Gerda Lerner are strongly linked through the historian Mary Ritter Beard’s imprint on both. Beard deserves the name of women’s history pioneer. Better known in the first half of the 20th century as the coauthor, with her husband, Charles Beard, of several best-selling works on US history, she herself wrote about women’s history and in the 1930s began an ambitious project to establish the World Center for Women’s Archives. Her motivation was more than archival. She believed that building a women’s archive was a “way to recapture the imaginative zest of women for public life,” as she wrote.

Beard’s insistence that recovering women’s history would revive contemporary women’s power to act inspired Gerda Lerner. In Lerner’s capacious volumes The Creation of Patriarchy (Oxford University Press, 1986) and The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy (Oxford University Press, 1993), she explicitly aimed to complete a project of historical recovery begun by Mary Ritter Beard. Beard equally influenced the development of the Schlesinger Library. In addition to counseling Radcliffe College President W. K. Jordan, she handed over some of the collections she had amassed for her World Center, becoming an unofficial founding mother of the Radcliffe Women’s Archives (renamed the Schlesinger Library in 1965).

Lerner decided to give her papers to the Schlesinger Library in 1975, and now, with the generous help of her children, Stephanie Lerner Lapidus and Daniel Lerner, her collection is complete. To honor and celebrate the significance of Gerda Lerner to the field of women’s history, it seemed appropriate to reflect on developments in the field over the past four or five decades. To do that, I called on five eminent historians, each having a different angle of focus in her scholarship. Each of them knew Gerda Lerner well, in a context or at a time that was distinctive.

—Nancy F. Cott

Gerda Lerner as a Force
The historian Linda Gordon, who is working on a book about social movements in the United States, said, “Gerda was a social movement,” with the power to convert people to women’s history through her speaking and writing, even though English was not her first language.

“She meant to change the world,” Gordon said, listing several of Lerner’s concerns, including racism, war, imperialism, poverty, and religious intolerance. “But starting sometime in the 1940s, patriarchy became her chief enemy, and her weapon of choice was women’s history.”

Gordon said that Lerner had no illusions that she could change the world simply by writing and teaching. “She was an organizer with a very keen sense of strategy,” she said, pointing out that Lerner built women’s history programs because she understood that courses alone would not be enough to gain respect for the field.

Living in History
Reflecting on Gerda Lerner’s personal history, Linda K. Kerber said, “Gerda learned the hard way that a woman’s relation to her own state is fragile.” Not only had Lerner been imprisoned in Austria for being a Jew, but after she emigrated to the United States, she had to register as an enemy alien. Lerner understood, Kerber said, “that women have a different relation to history than do men, parallel to the understanding that Jews have a different relation to history than do non-Jews.”

Kerber said that Lerner reached for grand generalizations, for the big picture. “And the big picture meant understanding that we live in history; that the boundaries placed on us and choices we make about the shape of our lives infuse how we understand the past.”

Celebrating the Schlesinger’s First 70 Years
Gerda Lerner in 1981.
Difference Isn’t the Problem
Thavolia Glymph discussed Lerner’s contributions to the history of African American women, including her influential book Black Women in White America: A Documentary History (Vintage, 1972). The book contains more than 160 documents about black women’s lives from 1811 to 1971. Glymph quoted Lerner about difference: “It is not difference that’s the problem, it is dominance justified by appeals to constructed difference that is the problem.” This is especially true, Glymph said, for black women’s history.

“The great outpouring of work in women’s history over the past four decades has been incredibly exciting,” Glymph said. “It has fundamentally changed how we do history and, thus, how the world is explained.”

A Historian Because of Her Jewish Experience
Joyce Antler was the director of the women’s studies program at Brandeis University when she organized the first conference on US Jewish women’s history in 1993. The first person she invited to speak at the conference was Gerda Lerner. Antler called Lerner and asked if she’d be interested in talking about “the connections between her identity as a Jew and her work as a historian of women.”

Lerner was not happy with the question and hung up the phone. “A few minutes later,” Antler said, she called back to say that “while she had never given this issue even a moment’s thought, it was among the most profound questions she had ever been asked.” At the conference, Lerner proclaimed, “I am a historian because of my Jewish experience.”

Too Many Workers and Not Enough Women
“I knew Gerda best when she was struggling hardest,” said Alice Kessler-Harris, referring to the early 1970s, when Lerner was working at Sarah Lawrence to gain recognition for the field of women’s history.

In the dissertation on Jewish labor history that Kessler-Harris had written in 1968 at Rutgers University, she had not mentioned women. But as a tenured professor of history at Hofstra University, she signed a contract to write a book about women’s labor history. After hearing about the contract, Lerner called Kessler-Harris. “You’re never going to be able to write that book,” she said. “Too many workers and not enough women. The only way you’ll ever be able to write that book is to come to Sarah Lawrence and work with me.”

Kessler-Harris took a leave from Hofstra and joined Lerner at Sarah Lawrence, where the two worked together to understand “the inseparability of categories such as race and class and ethnicity.”

“So what did we do with women’s history?” Kessler-Harris asked. “We did exactly what Gerda told us we should do. We started the process of changing the world.”

Behind the Scenes: Movie Night at the Schlesinger Library
How the area’s best-kept film series secret comes together

Were you to wander into the Schlesinger Library at 6 PM on the first Wednesday of most months, you would find what a local NPR affiliate has called “the area’s best under-the-radar film series.”

Movie Night at the Schlesinger Library began during the 2000–2001 academic year. Since then it has become a great opportunity for enthusiastic Schlesinger staff members to share documentaries, feature films, and the odd television show with one another, the larger Harvard community, and the public.

Planning occurs during the relatively quiet summer months, when staff members come together to brainstorm themes and possible movies. With only seven or eight Movie Nights in a year, there are often many more excellent choices than opportunities to show them.

The planning for this academic year started with suggestions for three movies: The Motherhood Archives, directed by Irene Lusztig RI ’11; Indelible Lalita, directed by Julie Mallozzi ’92; and Womanish Ways, directed by Marion Bethel BI ’98. These movies seemed disparate at first, but it quickly became clear that what they had in common—Radcliffe affiliations—was a great idea for a theme. “We were lucky to have so many talented directors seek us out as a venue for showing their films,” says Summer Unsinn, a cataloger and the film committee chair. “With alumnæ from Harvard-Radcliffe College, the Bunting Institute, and the Radcliffe Institute Fellowship Program, we had a large pool of talent to choose from.”

Among the other filmmakers with Radcliffe connections, Liz Canner RI ’03 turned out to be an especially fortuitous choice, because she credits the Institute with helping her create her film Orgasm, Inc. “I had some footage lying around that I had shot of members of the pharmaceutical industry being very open with me about their involvement with the creation of female sexual dysfunction,” she says. “It was not something I was sure I wanted to pursue as a film. Being at Radcliffe, however—where the halls and rooms echo with the history of so many women—and after engaging in lunch conversations with brilliant feminist scholars, I was inspired to investigate the story further.” Canner offered to attend the movie night and lead a post-screening discussion, which was thrilling: Her presence and engagement with the audience made for a truly high-caliber conversation. “It was a gift,” she says, “to finally bring the finished project home and share it with the Radcliffe community.”

Movie Night originated at the suggestion of alumna Clara
Goldberg Schiffer ’32 and was funded with her generous annual gifts. By the time of Schiffer’s death, in 2009, it had become so popular with staff members and the public that the library has continued to support it, most recently with money from the Library Council Fund. The members of the Film Committee look forward to continuing this tradition next year. If you’re in the neighborhood, please drop in.

—Honor Moody
Cataloger and Film Committee Member

‘Cliffe Connections: Films by Radcliffe Grads and Fellows
Movie Night at the Schlesinger Library has attracted attention from WBUR’s arts blog, The Artery, for screening the best under-the-radar films. The following films, all with a Radcliffe pedigree, composed the 2013–2014 season.

September 2013
The Motherhood Archives (2013), directed by Irene Lusztig ’97, RI ’11*
A history of maternal education, explored through educational, industrial, and medical training films.

October 2013
First Comes Love (2013), directed by Nina Davenport ’90
Davenport documents her journey to have a child, from the decision to pursue single motherhood, to the birth itself, to the early days of parenting.

November 2013
Raising Renee (2011), directed by Jeanne Jordan BI ’93, RI ’03 and Steven Ascher, starring Beverly McIver RI ’03
After their mother dies, the artist Beverly McIver RI ’03 takes in her developmentally delayed sister.

December 2013
Orgasm, Inc. (2009), directed by Liz Canner RI ’03*
When she is hired to edit erotic films for a pharmaceutical firm that is hoping to develop a counterpart to Viagra for women, Canner is inspired to further explore female sexuality and greater questions of ethics in the medical industry.

February 2014
True-Hearted Vixens (2001), directed by Mylène Moreno ’87
This documentary follows two athletes playing in the first season of the Women’s Professional Football League.

March 2014
Indelible Lalita (2012), directed by Julie Mallozzi ’92*
Lalita, an emigrant from Bombay to Montreal, contemplates her identity as her body is transformed by vitiligo, cancer, and heart disease.

April 2014
Womanish Ways (2012), directed by Marion Bethel BI ’98*
A history of the women’s suffrage movement in the Bahamas.

May 2014
Girlfriends (1978), directed by Claudia Weill ’69
A struggling photographer and her best friend share an apartment in Manhattan until one of them decides to marry and move out.

*The filmmaker participated in a discussion of the film.
Is it possible to fall in love with a space? I would not have thought so until I arrived at the Schlesinger Library, in late January. I am a Dorothy Porter and Charles Wesley Harris Fellow at Harvard’s Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, here from the University of Birmingham (UK) to complete thesis research. My thesis, titled “Breaking the Binaries of Empire: West African and African American Women’s Interactions, 1930–1960,” focuses on the transatlantic networks that existed among a group of elite West African and African American women. These networks facilitated an exchange of ideas concerning womanhood, Pan-African and nationalist politics, and the position of women of the “darker” races in a world structured around ideas of European racial superiority. The collections at the Schlesinger offer a unique window onto these women’s interactions, their political work, and—most interesting to me—their friendships, which lasted lifetimes and shaped their conceptions of one another and the world at large.

My experience with archives as a historian of African women is one of deafening silences. The colonial records held at both the British and Ghanaian National Archives are unsurprisingly lacking in African women’s experiences. I am well versed in having to use nontraditional sources while assembling the crumbs of archival mentions into narratives. I say this to communicate my delight in arriving at the Schlesinger. Imagine my joy to be in a space in which women’s voices are valued and, more important, easily accessible.

I found myself, for the first time, in the enviable position of having too many collections to work through. I initially intended only to mine the papers of Shirley Graham Du Bois, focusing on her time in Ghana and the work she did with women’s groups there. After I consulted the collection, however, it quickly became apparent that these papers were just the beginning. I have been using the Maida Springer Kemp collection and the papers of Caroline and Olivia Phelps-Stokes. All these collections contain invaluable insights about the relationships that were created through diasporic transatlantic networks. These narratives complicate the largely androcentric metanarrative of Pan-Africanism and nationalism. By far the most valuable and exciting source I have consulted is the Black Women Oral History Project in interviews, 1976–1981. The ability to hear—to really hear—the voices of the women in whose lives I have been so interested is an almost indescribable privilege.

But it is not just the collections that make this library so special; it is the physical space—a space in which women’s history is treasured and respected. After the closure of the Women’s Library in London, in 2013, something I found personally upsetting, it is emotionally and spiritually uplifting to be in a place where I am among peers and colleagues who share a belief in the importance of women’s history. To be working alongside scholars who are actively engaged in the political process of putting women’s narratives back into the historical record has led to the most productive and rewarding research of my relatively short career.

—Holly Ellis
Dorothy Porter and Charles Wesley Harris Fellow,
Hutchins Center for African and African American Research

This photograph by Judith Sedwick of the trade union activist Maida Springer Kemp was part of the Women of Courage exhibit, based on the Black Women Oral History Project.
The former New York Supreme Court judge Paula Omansky ’56, JD ’62—who has served on the Schlesinger Library Council since 2006—has often found herself at the center of media and public attention, including when she presided over a case against Phil Spector, the man behind the Wall of Sound, the recording technique that defined pop music of the 1960s. He shepherded acts such as the Righteous Brothers and Ike and Tina Turner to fame, but not to fortune. In 2000 the Ronettes, who had gained popularity for their recordings including “Be My Baby” and “Baby I Love You,” sued Spector for millions of dollars in unpaid royalties.

Although Omansky maintains that her courtroom was “usually quiet and orderly,” Spector’s was only one in a string of celebrity civil cases that crossed her desk in 16 years on the bench. A fire began in the apartment belonging to the child star Macaulay Culkin’s mother and resulted in four deaths and damaged property. Academy Award nominee Leonardo DiCaprio was involved in an altercation with the actor Roger Wilson at a Manhattan club. Suddenly Omansky’s name was found in People magazine as well as in court documents.

She is known for less star-studded cases as well, several of which made the headlines for significant legal reasons. Omansky presided over the groundbreaking First Amendment case Banamex v. Narco News, which decided that alternative news sources—such as online newspapers and their journalists—are protected by the same rights as traditional ones. And in Brennan v. Metropolitan Opera Association, Inc., Omansky held that legislation against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation extends to cover heterosexuals, though there was insufficient evidence to try this particular case. “That was a toughie!” says Omansky (who adds that she is a fan of the Met and often attends the opera).

If such a résumé is rather unexpected for a woman who came of age in the cultural climate of the 1950s, no one is more surprised than Omansky herself. She made the unusual decision to attend Harvard Law School following her graduation from Radcliffe College in 1956 and a brief stint in the Harvard-Radcliffe program in business administration. One of only 14 women in her HLS class, Omansky had no plans to become a judge when she graduated. But after 15 years in private practice and working for government agencies, she went for a judicial nomination and was elected in only two years—a relatively brief time for a complicated process that Omansky refers to as “an education in itself.”

Since her retirement, in 2004, Omansky has dedicated herself to continuing her education, taking courses at New York University, where she currently focuses on a class about the Hebrew Bible. “I threatened when I left the bench to take up the violin,” she says, “to learn how you can make music with only 4 strings when it takes a piano 88, but I haven’t gotten around to it.”