Letter from the Director

A great transformation is taking place at Harvard: The scores of libraries in the University, all of which used to operate under their separate schools’ administrations, are being reorganized into a more centralized and forward-looking operation, to be called the Harvard Library—singular.

Harvard’s library resources are among the University’s greatest glories. To keep them that way, organizational adaptation is called for. One of the main intents of greater centralization is to enhance the development of library collections while avoiding duplication and redundancy. The extent of the centralization is limited. It mainly affects those areas where shared services make sense, where collaboration and central oversight will aid administrative efficiency—and meet the needs of library users better than before—while keeping ahead of rapidly changing information formats and modes of knowledge production and retrieval.

Most of the changes involved in the reorganization will occur in libraries whose books circulate to users—not in special collections libraries like ours, where the materials are unique or rare and are used only in the library. In fact, current changes have minimal impact on us. The one major result of administrative reorganization for the Schlesinger Library is that we now belong to an affinity group composed of all the special collections at Harvard, including the Houghton Library and rare book and manuscript sections of Baker Library at Harvard Business School and of Harvard Law School’s library.

Another aim of the Harvard Library transition is to spur innovation in library methods, especially with regard to digital formats. Here the Schlesinger should see increased opportunity to share its advances with other libraries. Our staff has been leading the way in devising methods to capture and retain born-digital materials, such as blogs and websites, because these will be the primary source material for researchers of the future who want to know about women in the early 2000s. Several staff members are avidly pursuing a pilot project—the Experimental Archives Space—to test methods for using digital technology to speed the labor-intensive work of processing manuscript materials. I am sure we’ll be reporting in the future on the results of this exciting project, which has the potential to become a model for the wider Harvard Library.

With best wishes for the summer ahead,

—Nancy F. Cott
Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director
Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History
Priscilla Fierman Kauff ’62 has always loved libraries. As a child growing up in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, she would ride the bus to the grand old Berkshire Athenaeum, where the reference room librarian would help her find what she was looking for. As an undergraduate, Kauff studied in the Radcliffe College Library—housed in the building where the Schlesinger Library is now located—which reminded her of that childhood experience.

In the 1990s, Kauff was invited to a luncheon in her home city of New York, where she met Mary Maples Dunn, then the director of the Schlesinger. “Mary talked about curating and how you figure out what will be historically meaningful 50 years from now—in other words, collecting,” Kauff says. She became fascinated with the Schlesinger’s mission of assembling material about the history of women in the United States.

Kauff introduced her mentor, Henriette T. Glatzer (1906–2001), an early psychoanalyst and analytic group therapist, to Mary Dunn. “I was delighted when Mary accepted Henni’s papers at my suggestion,” Kauff says.

Today, Kauff serves on the Schlesinger Library Council, which she joined in 2005, and travels to Cambridge as often as she can. In New York, she juggles a host of commitments—including teaching as a clinical professor of psychology in psychiatry at the Weill Medical School of Cornell University, supervising and training mental health professionals in China as a faculty member of the China American Psychoanalytic Alliance (CAPA), and maintaining a private practice in individual and group psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

Her work in China began in 2006, when a colleague at the Massachusetts General Hospital—also a specialist in analytic group psychotherapy—invited Kauff to teach with her at the Shanghai Mental Health Center for three weeks. “It became obvious very fast that what the Chinese could use from us was an introduction to psychoanalytic group psychotherapy,” Kauff says. “They didn’t want us to lecture about psychoanalytic theory—they had people coming from Germany to do that—they wanted to hear about groups.” Kauff continues to supervise people she met on that trip; she began by using e-mail and switched to Skype when it became available.

Kauff says there’s a lot of controversy in her field about whether psychoanalysts can work effectively on Skype or whether the video software interferes too much with the process of treatment. “But if you think about it,” she says, “Freud was really the first to try something different when he had patients lie on the couch—neither he nor the patient had eye contact any longer. I see that as an early paradigm for what has now become an ever more complicated situation. The use of Skype in treatment is in its earliest stages, and its impact remains to be explored. Its use as a supervisory and teaching tool is less complicated and very exciting.”

When she’s not teaching or conducting her private practice, Kauff sings in the Collegiate Chorale, a sophisticated amateur group that regularly appears at Carnegie Hall and similar venues. She also serves on the board of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, where she is the chair of the education committee.

And then there’s work on the 50th reunion committee of her Radcliffe class, which includes an effort to encourage her Radcliffe classmates to designate their gifts for the Schlesinger Library. She also has plans for a book about group psychotherapy and spends time visiting with her two children, three stepchildren, and several grandchildren.

“I’d love to spend more time in Cambridge,” Kauff says. “My memories of being a student there are wonderful. I realize in retrospect that there were many limits on us as Radcliffe students—you couldn’t be on the Crimson or have access to all the libraries or houses. But that said, I’m back, and I love being affiliated with the Schlesinger Library.”

—Pat Harrison
Publications Manager
A New Collection of Photography Focused on Women in Afghanistan

Photographer Paula Lerner ’84—who took pictures of people all over the world, but especially women in Afghanistan—gave her papers and photographs to the Schlesinger Library before she died on March 6 at age 52 in Belmont, Massachusetts. She had been diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004.

Lerner made five trips to Afghanistan on her own and as a volunteer for the Business Council for Peace (Bpeace), an organization that helps women in post-conflict countries set up self-sustaining businesses. In 2007 and 2009, she traveled to Kandahar, the capital of southern Afghanistan, to work on a long-term project on women there. Her multimedia feature The Life and Death of Sitara Achakzai, about a prominent female Kandahari politician, was a Webby Award honoree in 2010. Later that year, she collaborated with the Toronto Globe and Mail to produce Behind The Veil, an Emmy-award winning multimedia feature about women in Kandahar, which was also a Webby Award nominee and won a prestigious EPPY Award. Lerner’s clients included Business Week, Newsweek, Smithsonian, and Time.

We’ll bring you more news about the Lerner Collection after it arrives at the library and is processed.

—Marilyn Dunn
Executive Director and Radcliffe Institute Librarian

Tenacious Women: Activists in a Democratic Society

Organized to complement the Radcliffe Institute’s “Women Making Democracy” conference, this exhibit features four women—Flo Kennedy, Florence Luscomb, Maud Wood Park, and Jeannette Rankin. These women spent their lives working for democratic change and expanding the rights and freedoms of women and African Americans. Employing traditional methods of lobbying legislators and holding elected office as well as staging grassroots public demonstrations and teach-ins, they exemplified American civic responsibility. The exhibit opened on March 26, 2012, and will run through September 7. It is on view in the Schlesinger Library’s first-floor exhibit area during regular library hours: Monday through Friday from 9:30 AM to 5 PM.

Photo by Tony Rinaldo

Photo by Tony Rinaldo
Save the Date
September 21, 2012, 9:30 AM–5 PM

Siting Julia:
A Julia Child Centenary Symposium

Distinguished speakers will focus on three “sites” that Child inhabited, learned from, and influenced:

Post–World War II Paris
Cambridge, Massachusetts
National television

The Schlesinger Library, which houses Julia Child’s extensive papers, is sponsoring this daylong symposium to mark the centenary of her birth.

More information will be posted online this summer at www.radcliffe.harvard.edu

THE VIRTUAL INSTITUTE

Can’t make it to the Schlesinger Library in person?

Browse its people, programs, and collections at www.radcliffe.harvard.edu—and don’t forget to see what’s happening elsewhere at the Radcliffe Institute.

For example, Radcliffe Day, on May 25, is dedicated to exploring the law and social change. Margaret H. Marshall EdM '69, former chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, will receive the Radcliffe Institute Medal at the luncheon. All of the day’s events will be live streamed on the website, and video will be available later for repeat viewings.

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Some of the women were just out of college, energized by President John F. Kennedy’s challenge to make the world a better place. Some, who had never traveled outside the country, wanted to see the world. Some had to persuade parents who were dumbfounded at their daughters’ decision to join the Peace Corps. They were idealistic, naïve, and adventurous.

It was 1969. The women were members of an all-female team of Peace Corps volunteers sent to Afghanistan as part of the World Health Organization’s campaign to eradicate the scourge of smallpox. They would struggle with the challenges of vaccinating in high mountains and vast deserts, where many of the Afghan women and girls could not be seen, much less vaccinated, by men outside their families. The Peace Corps women joined teams of male Afghan vaccinators stationed in the Hindu Kush mountains north of Kabul and in the southern part of the country, traveling by Jeep and on foot, going house to house, village by village. “We walked in on weddings, on funerals . . . whatever was going on, and vaccinated everyone,” one of them said.

The volunteers stayed overnight in local family compounds, eating whatever their hosts offered. They wrestled with homesickness, illness, and culture shock; enjoyed new music, food, and friends; and explored the differences and universalities of women’s lives. In some of the villages, they were the first Westerners the residents had ever met.

Years later, after a group reunion, one of the former volunteers, Jill Vickers, set out to make a documentary about their experiences. The result was a film, *Once in Afghanistan* (2008), and a wealth of material—letters home, photographs, and diaries—that the women had collected to help her tell their story.

That’s where matters stood in January 2011, when Harvard history professor Erez Manela—who was studying the global campaign to end smallpox—sent an e-mail asking if we might be interested in the papers of a group of women who’d been Peace Corps volunteers in the late 1960s. We most definitely were: One of the library’s strategic goals is to increase our holdings focusing on American women acting globally.

Manela put us in touch with Kristina Engstrom, the training director for the Afghanistan project, who recognized the historical value of the material the women had gathered and was taking the lead in finding it a suitable home. Several libraries were in the running.

Engstrom, Vickers, and other former Peace Corps volunteers visited the library in February 2011 and listened carefully to our descriptions of who we are, what we do, and why. That their saved material—the tangible, personal record of their part in this worldwide effort—would find a good home at the Schlesinger and good company among our dozens of collections documenting women’s activism in the United States and abroad over a century and a half was compelling to them.

We were as moved by what these women had done as they were by what we do, which is to keep stories like theirs and their part in the long history of women’s work for peace, justice, and human rights alive and available to researchers, who will fit it into the puzzle of their scholarship.

Last November, when we featured *Once in Afghanistan* in

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Women Vaccinating Against Smallpox in Afghanistan

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Last November, when we featured *Once in Afghanistan* in
the library’s film series, Engstrom, Vickers, and several other women who appeared in the film were present to answer questions from a large audience that included former Peace Corps volunteers who had worked in other parts of the world, young Afghans far from home, and students. On behalf of all the women who had been part of the project in Afghanistan in 1969–1970, Engstrom presented to the library the saved material of several volunteers, the beginnings of a larger collection to come. More has already arrived.

The word is out, and additional letters, diaries, and photos are on the way to help tell the story of these American women who acted globally 40 years ago as part of the successful effort to stamp out smallpox in an Afghanistan not yet ravaged by decades of violence.

—Kathryn Allamong Jacob
Johanna-Maria Fraenkel Curator of Manuscripts at the Schlesinger Library
Exploring 375 Years of
Women at Harvard

On April 23, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz AM ’65, PhD ’69, RI ’01 presented a Radcliffe Institute Dean’s Lecture titled “It’s Complicated: 375 Years of Women at Harvard” as part of the University’s 375th anniversary. A noted historian of higher education and women’s studies, Horowitz drew a full house to the Radcliffe Gym.

Prior to her lecture, approximately a hundred Radcliffe College alumnae gathered to hear Nancy F. Cott, the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director of the Schlesinger Library and the Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History, discuss the importance of the Schlesinger Library in women’s history.

Schlesinger Library Director Nancy F. Cott

The role of Radcliffe in establishing the Women’s Archive, the predecessor to the Schlesinger Library, is one of remarkable distinction. I hope you won’t mind if I show you why I think so with reference to my own career. . . .

As a graduate student in 1970, I had the opportunity to teach an unprecedented course in women’s history. At the time, I was flush with the heady assumptions of youth and with the conviction that the women’s liberation movement had found new truths. So I was very cavalier about things that had already been written about women in history. I distrusted them. Most of the secondary sources I read seemed faulty in one way or another and didn’t convey what I was sure was the depth and variety and possibility for change that had characterized women’s lives. So I turned quickly to primary documents because I felt that to locate women as subjects there were no sources that seemed more promising and less tainted by stereotyped assumptions than documents that women had written for themselves or for other women. I was very fortunate because I lived in Cambridge, and the Schlesinger Library was here and it was open to the public.

In retrospect I am conscious of how much I owe my very career to the Schlesinger Library’s existence. By the time I discovered it, the library had already been collecting documents for almost 30 years. So I was able to look on the shelves of the Schlesinger and find one primary source after another.

“No documents, no history,” was the mantra of Mary Ritter Beard, who was a real pioneer of 20th-century women’s history writing, a woman whose knowledge and contacts were quite important in the quality that the Radcliffe Women’s Archives achieved in its initial holdings.

The repository assembled here at the Schlesinger Library is a result of Radcliffe College’s vision and ultimately of Harvard’s persistence and support. Harvard has not been just an important player but a truly essential resource, and I want to give it credit on this day that we’re talking about women’s history.

Radcliffe Institute Dean Lizabeth Cohen

Tonight’s lecture provides a perfect way in this 375th anniversary year to honor the legacy of Radcliffe College while also celebrating its successor, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. . . . Appropriately, given our topic today, furthering the study of women, gender, and society is one of the Institute’s intellectual commitments.

Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz

[Radcliffe] began as a unique institution of higher learning for women. Unlike the other six of the Seven Sisters that it joined

Above, Lizabeth Cohen; Left, Nancy F. Cott
in the 1920s, Radcliffe had no separate faculty, but drew on
the all-male instructors of Harvard. By the early 1890s, over
200 women students were taking courses taught by 70 men.
Initially graduates received no AB. Instead of a diploma, they
got a certificate. . . .

The struggle wasn’t easy nor was the outcome necessarily
assured. What raised the fiercest opposition was the fight
waged at the turn of the 1970s by students and NOW to attain
a 1-to-1 male/female ratio. Listen to powerful Harvard dean of
freshmen F. Skiddy von Stade: “When I see bright, well-edu-
cated, but relatively dull housewives who attended the Seven
Sisters, I honestly shudder at the thought of changing the
balance of males versus females at Harvard. . . . Quite simply,
I do not see highly educated women making startling strides
in contributing to our society in the foreseeable future. They
are not, in my opinion, going to stop getting married and/or
having children. They will fail in their present role as women
if they do.” (I’m sure his niece, the great mezzo Frederica von
Stade would have shaken her head at this, if her schedule per-
mitted.) Moreover, within his official Peterson Report of 1970,

Harvard admissions dean Chase Peterson opposed changing
the 4-to-1 ratio with all the vigor of his strong rhetoric. But the
1975 Strauch Committee Report in favor of sex-blind admis-
sions gave Harvard’s president the needed ammunition to
gain faculty support. . . .

Moving an institution toward equity turns out to be very
hard work. President Faust has stated that it is easier to
change an administration than a faculty, and in the recent
period there has been real success at the administrative level.
Of the 16 members of the Harvard Council of Deans, seven
are women, and these include the deans of the Law School
and the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. What is
impressive is not just those who are at the top, but also those
at the next levels, seeing to the hard work of running the uni-
versity. For example, of the 15 associates and assistants in the
Provost’s Office, 8 are women.

Harvard University President Drew Faust
I think if we look at the most recent of Harvard’s centuries, the
last hundred years, we might be able to look at it in the frame-
work of a narrative of progress for women in this institution.
So I hope there are some lessons that we can draw from Helen
Horowitz’s presentation today, some important and enduring
lessons for Harvard about how change does happen, about
how individuals committed to learning and opportunity can
make their way into a world that comes increasingly to accept
and embrace them. And also some warnings and perhaps in-
sights about how much work still remains to be done to ensure
that Harvard is a place fully embracing of all the men and all
the women who can contribute to its next 375 years.

MORE ONLINE
Visit the Radcliffe Institute’s new website at www.radcliffe.
harvard.edu to see a video of the event and to read Horowitz’s
full lecture on the themes of origins and exclusion, history and
tradition, prestige and privilege, innovation, access, accommoda-
tion and invisibility, and struggle and equity.
At age 99, Marian Cannon Schlesinger ’34 recently published the second volume of her memoirs, *I Remember: A Life of Politics, Painting and People* (Tidepool Press, 2012). The first volume, *Snatched from Oblivion: A Cambridge Memoir* (Little, Brown & Company), came out in 1979, when she was 66. In addition to these books, she has written and illustrated five children’s books, painted countless landscapes and portraits, and raised four children.

Schlesinger attributes her longevity—though not her achievements—partly to exercise. “I played tennis a couple of times a week until I was 85,” she says. “In Washington, a lot of the tennis players were Republicans—it was the only time I met any Republicans.”

She’s referring to the years she spent in the capital with her husband, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. ’38, LLD ’01 (1917–2007), a history professor who twice won the Pulitzer Prize: for history in 1946, for *The Age of Jackson*; and for biography in 1966, for *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*. The eldest son of the couple for whom the Schlesinger Library is named, he worked as a speechwriter for and special assistant to President Kennedy.

Marian Schlesinger devotes a chapter in *I Remember* to the JFK years in Washington. “There was a roller-coaster atmosphere in those years,” she writes. “One felt that the administration reveled in crisis, and there were plenty of crises, some genuine and some invented for their own sake. I had a curious feeling that great decisions were made in an almost frivolous way, like the Bay of Pigs fiasco, which from my remote perch seemed to have been run by a bunch of hubris-mad teenagers, mostly Yale boys, who dominated the Central Intelligence Agency and who looked upon the Cuban enterprise and the catastrophe rather like a Harvard-Yale game they would win next time.”

Schlesinger had met her husband back in Cambridge, where both their fathers served on the Harvard faculty. Her father, Walter B. Cannon AB 1896, MD 1900, was the George Higginson Professor of Physiology at Harvard Medical School and coined the term “fight or flight” to describe an animal’s response to threat. Her husband’s father was a distinguished historian of the United States. Her mother, Cornelia James Cannon AB 1899, was a best-selling novelist who raised five children and helped to found Planned Parenthood. (In 1998, Marian Schlesinger gave the Cannon Family Papers to the Schlesinger Library, and in 2010, she gave her own papers.)

Before she married, in 1940, Schlesinger spent a year in China living with her sister Wilma Cannon Fairbank ’30 and brother-in-law, John King Fairbank ’29, LLD ’70, who later became an esteemed China scholar. Schlesinger’s description of her arrival in Shanghai in the fall of 1934 is typically delightful: “John and Wilma came aboard, whisked me through customs, and carried me off through the teeming streets to their ‘apartment.’ They believed in cheap living, and their rooms in a scabrous old building on the corner of Shanghai’s Broadway and 42nd Street had all the appearance of an opium den.” The three young people had numerous adventures as they traveled around China and pursued their vocations: John studied Chinese; Wilma, an art historian, worked on restorations; and Marian drew and painted landscapes.

Schlesinger’s China sojourn was followed by a year in New York working at the Institute of Pacific Relations, travel to Guatemala, and meeting her future husband in her parents’ living room. After 23 years of married life in Cambridge, during which Arthur served on the Harvard history faculty, and 7 years in Washington, the Schlesingers divorced in 1970. Arthur moved to New York, and Marian moved back to Cambridge, to the grand Victorian that she and Arthur had purchased in 1947. “What to do with the rest of my life?” she writes. “It seemed to loom ahead for decades, empty and desolate. I had been an artist all my life, but even painting and drawing did not seem to revive my flagging spirits.”

Slowly she found her footing, rejoining clubs and renewing friendships, and beginning a series of drawings of the textile mills in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Her illustrious neighbors livened up the neighborhood: John Kenneth Galbraith AM ’50, LLD ’88, the Warburg Professor of Economics at Harvard, and his wife, Catherine (Kitty) Atwater Galbraith AM ’36, who lived beyond the brick wall out back, and Julia Child and her husband, Paul, who lived a few blocks down Irving Street.

Marian Schlesinger Remembers
Today, Schlesinger still lives in the Irving Street house, with her son Andrew ’70, also a writer, whose latest book is *Veritas: Harvard College and the American Experience* (Ivan R. Dee, 2005). John Kenneth Galbraith said of this book, “Many have given their views on Harvard; few, if any, have surpassed this splendid account.”

When the weather permits, Marian paints in her studio in the enclosed porch at the back of the house. This winter, she watched *Downton Abbey* on television (“it’s fun”) and also the Republican debates (“awful”), but spent most of her time reading. She ticks off several books she’s read recently: *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War*, by Amanda Foreman (Random House, 2011); *Pearl Buck in China: Journey to The Good Earth*, by Hilary Spurling (Simon & Schuster, 2010), which prompted her to reread *The Good Earth*; and *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*, by Joan D. Hedrick (Oxford University Press, 1995), which made her go back and reread *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Not unlike Maggie Smith in *Downton Abbey*—playing the Dowager Countess of Grantham with her long perspective and appealing plain spokenness—Schlesinger gives a good-natured bark when asked to name the high point of her life. “Oh, come on,” she replies. “Some people might answer that question, but I certainly won’t.”

Her memoir, however, gives an array of possible answers.

—*Pat Harrison*
*Publications Manager*
New Cache of Letters Illuminates Life of African American Novelist Ann Petry

A previously unknown collection of letters to and from the African American writer Ann Petry—the first African American woman to sell more than a million copies of a novel—is now in the Schlesinger Library. The letters were a gift from her daughter Elisabeth Petry and the main correspondent, Ed Clark.

This collection offers precious untold perspectives on Petry during the last third of her life. Clark was a professor of English at Suffolk University in Boston in 1973 when he first wrote to Petry, whose award-winning and powerfully revealing novel about Harlem, *The Street* (1946), had already made her famous. Clark had never met Petry but much admired her work, and he invited her to deliver the inaugural lecture in the African American literature program that he had just started at Suffolk. That invitation began a 25-year correspondence and friendship for the two and their spouses.

Petry was born in 1908 in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, where her family lived above the drugstore they owned and operated—for a white clientele, since they were among only 15 African Americans in a town of 1,500. Her aunt Anna James, whose papers also reside in the Schlesinger Library, was a powerful force in her life. A licensed pharmacist (a rare professional achievement for a black woman at the time), James took over the pharmacy from her sister and brother-in-law and ran it from the 1920s to the 1960s. Generations of high school students found their first jobs there; its glass cases and marble-topped soda fountain appear vividly in Petry’s fiction.
Following family patterns, Petry graduated from the College of Pharmacy at the University of Connecticut, but she was unhappy “counting pills,” she later said, because she had aims to be a writer. Marrying George Petry and moving with him to New York City in 1938 put that goal within reach. They arrived in Harlem in the trough of the Great Depression. Economic times were difficult, but the community was hopping with new arts and dissident politics, including consumer boycotts led by black women. She enmeshed herself in the Harlem community, so different from the Old Saybrook of her upbringing. She performed in plays with the American Negro Theater and covered murders, accidents, fires, and rallies for the neighborhood’s newspaper, *The People’s Choice*, also editing its women’s pages.

Petry’s first breakthrough came in 1943, when the prestigious journal of the NAACP, *The Crisis*, published a short story of hers. This caught the attention of an editor who suggested that she apply for Houghton Mifflin’s annual novel-writing fellowship. The following year, she submitted a synopsis and five chapters of the novel she had under way and won the fellowship. With its grant of $2,400 (roughly the median annual household income at the time), she finished *The Street* 10 months later.

*The Street* takes place on 116th Street, both the home and the enemy of Petry’s protagonist, Lutie Johnson, a hardworking and responsible single mother seeking a small measure of happiness and security for herself and her child against the odds posed by poverty, crime, and human chicanery. The novel was widely praised, both for being a highly realistic, specific portrait—a view from the “inside” of Harlem—and for conveying universal human needs and strivings. Its compelling drama and prose made it a best seller.

In the view of Farah Griffin ’85, BI ’97, a professor of English and comparative literature and African American studies and the director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University, “Ann Petry is an important, if underappreciated, American writer. The first to provide emotionally complex portraits of urban working-class African Americans, particularly women, Petry wrote fiction that is original, compelling, and timeless. Her political and aesthetic sensibilities continue to inform and influence new generations of writers, critics, and literary theorists.” Griffin plans to make Petry one of the subjects of her forthcoming book, tentatively titled “Harlem Nocturne: Black Women Artists and Politics in Mid-Century New York, 1938–1952.”


With her earnings from *The Street*, Ann and George Petry moved back to Old Saybrook in 1947 and bought an old sea captain’s house, where they lived for another half-century and raised their daughter. It was from this home that she conducted her correspondence with Ed Clark.

—Nancy F. Cott
*Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director
Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History*

—Kathryn Allamong Jacob
*Johanna-Maria Fraenkel Curator of Manuscripts*
I first began reading zines—small-circulation, often self-produced publications featuring uncensored, creative views of young women’s lives—as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. An avid fan of indie pop and riot grrrl music, I gravitated toward zines that grew out of these overlapping music scenes, and I harbored a special fondness for feminist editors who subverted the machismo of traditional punk rock. On road trips, I discovered new titles at alternative press stands such as Quimby’s in Chicago and St. Mark’s Bookshop in New York City. But most zines arrived in the mail. Poring over the latest copy of Factsheet 5—a compendium of zine reviews categorized under headers such as “B-movies,” “Food,” “Queer,” and “Personal”—I would mark my selections and then write to the editors, wrapping neatly folded dollar bills in handwritten letters. A few weeks later, my mailbox would fill with small stapled, cut-and-paste publications, usually accompanied by a personal note or a drawing.

There was something intimate about sending and receiving these little packages in the mail—a kind of feminist, indie-punk gift economy. For me, the peculiar intimacy of zine culture became more important, and more sustaining, after I graduated and moved to San Francisco, where I spent many tedious hours working in front of a computer for a variety of technology companies. Away from the ready-made community of the seminar room and the college campus, zines gave me a connection to other young people who thought seriously about the same issues I did and who were, like me, searching for models of healthy, creative, intellectual adulthood.

Several years later, when I was studying history as a graduate student at Harvard, I received the Schlesinger Library’s freshly redesigned, full-color Fall 2007 newsletter. The issue featured a striking image of a superhero from the Ms. Marvel comic book, along with a cover story about the library’s commitment to documenting popular culture. Reading on, I noted that the Schlesinger collection included a growing number of feminist zines.

Inspired to learn that the library was curating materials that I myself had stashed at home, I wrote to my dissertation advisor, Nancy Cott, to ask if the library might be interested in a few additional boxes of materials from the 1990s. Nancy put me in touch with Marylène Altieri, the library’s curator of books and printed materials, and over the next few weeks, we worked to sift through the publications I had collected and to transfer the most interesting ones—more than 300 in all—from my cluttered, musty basement to the safe, climate-controlled confines of the Schlesinger.

At the time, I didn’t reflect much on how my old boxes of zines and comics might be of value to historians. It simply seemed like a good idea to get them out of my basement. But now that I’m teaching my own courses in historical methodology, I’ve thought more carefully about how this particular archive came into being, and how future scholars might make use of it.

Although zines continue to be published today, their explosion in the 1980s and early 1990s can teach us much about the lives of young people at a time before Facebook gave every teenager a platform for self-fashioning and before the Internet transformed “social networking” into a phenomenon to be taken for granted. And while zines’ do-it-yourself aesthetic has occasionally been appropriated by glossy magazines, the cut-and-paste materiality of handmade magazines has been largely lost in the template-driven universe of personal blogs. Offscreen, zines can give us a view of the cultural and artistic repertoires of creative young people armed with scissors and glue sticks.

Zines can also teach us about politics. Many zines of the 1990s capture the sense of isolation felt by well-educated but aimless office workers like my 22-year-old self. Publications like Temp Slave!, Dishwasher, and Working for the Man are rich sources of information about the culture and consequences of temporary, dead-end employment.

Grrrl zines, in particular, offer an invaluable source for understanding the emergence of the so-called feminist “third wave.” By showcasing the viewpoints of bold, often countercultural young women (and of young women of color, in particular), the small-run feminist zines of the 1990s reveal political debates and cultural practices that flew under the radar of mainstream journalism—and directly in the face of conventional depictions of women in movies and on television. During those years, debates about race, sexuality, and coalition politics filled the pages of Slant and Hear Us Emerging Sisters, just as they did those of peer-reviewed publications.

These are just a few of the reasons that scholars might be interested in the Schlesinger’s growing collections of zines. I
expect that there are others, and I am excited to discover what questions future historians will bring to these materials. As I remind my students (paraphrasing E. H. Carr), historical study involves a continuous process of interaction between the scholar and her facts—and between the (online) present and the (archival) past.

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Above, the front and back of Dishwasher, issue number 14. Right, Doris, An Anthology of Zines + Other Stuff 1991–2001
A photo taken in the late 1960s in Afghanistan by Margery Bickler Affleck Gadd, one of the Peace Corps volunteers who have contributed material to the Collection on Women Peace Corps Volunteers in Afghanistan’s Smallpox Eradication Program.