Ellen Willis Puts Rock Criticism on the Map

Radcliffe Institute Fellows Explore Schlesinger Library
Letter from the Director

The Schlesinger Library’s symposium of September 9, 2011, titled “The New Majority? The Past, Present, and Future of Women in the Workplace,” opened the fall with a bang. This major event celebrated the legacy of Clara Goldberg Schiffer ’32, a very generous supporter who provided a substantial bequest to the library in her will. From working-class origins herself—and able to attend Radcliffe College only by living at home and taking menial part-time jobs—Mrs. Schiffer always emphasized that documenting the lives of working-class and wage-earning women was essential to the library’s mission. Many members of her extended family came to Cambridge to honor and reminisce about Mrs. Schiffer, and her daughter Lois Schiffer ’66 eloquently sketched her mother’s personality for the audience.

Mrs. Schiffer’s bequest enabled the processing of five important collections concerning wage-earning women’s work and leisure. These are the records of 9to5 National Association of Working Women, the organization for office workers, and its Milwaukee branch; the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers, a pathbreaking woman-dominated union founded in the mid-1980s on feminist principles; Wider Opportunities for Women, a nonprofit founded in 1964 to advance poor women’s employment; Rockport Lodge, founded in 1906 by the Massachusetts Association of Women Workers to provide affordable summer holidays for working women; and another vacation home, Fernside, that operated for similar purposes from 1890 to 1989 under the auspices of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union in Boston.

The symposium, which examined the recent past and current outlook for working women in the context of the downsizing of companies, casualizing of labor, and harsh pressure on unions, featured six notable speakers, several of whom had known Mrs. Schiffer. They were Heidi Hartmann, founder and president of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research in Washington, DC; Ellen Bravo, a former director of 9to5 and current director of the midwestern Family Values @ Work Consortium; Kris Rondeau, the first leader of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers and currently a union organizer; the Hon. Marsha S. Berzon ’66, a judge on the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit; Lynn Rhinehart, general counsel for the AFL-CIO; and Nancy MacLean, Trinity College of Arts and Sciences Professor of History at Duke University. The speakers’ keen comments about women’s “unfinished revolution” in achieving workplace justice—to use Professor MacLean’s phrase—were warmly appreciated by the large audience.

Events that take their cue from the library’s collections are our favorites. The library was also delighted to participate in celebrating the 40th anniversary of the publication of Our Bodies, Ourselves, the trailblazing work by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, whose records at the library are frequently used by researchers. On October 5, the library hosted a high-spirited reception for the participants from abroad who had traveled to Boston for the collective’s anniversary conference. A library team created an exhibit of texts and objects, Our Bodies, Ourselves: The Collective Goes Global, to highlight the many pioneering translations and adaptations of the American text that have been created by the collective’s global partners.

The library’s current exhibition, Women on the Clock: Hard Work and Low Wages, follows up the September symposium by displaying materials on working-class women’s jobs and lives. It will be on view until March 12.

—Nancy F. Cott
Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director
Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History
Out of the blue, a call came in last March from a young woman who identified herself as the great-granddaughter of Edna Lamprey Stantial. While Stantial’s name is familiar to those who study women’s suffrage, there’s no significant collection of her papers in any archives, so interest at the Schlesinger was immediate. For many years, Stantial was the archivist of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and the family had several cartons of material she had saved. The caller had learned about the library’s suffrage-related collections from an online search and wondered whether we would be interested in this material as a gift. The answer was easy—yes!

When the cartons arrived in June, it became clear just how great a gift—to the library and to scholarship—the Stantial papers are. They include dozens of letters from leading American suffragists such as Alice Stone Blackwell and Carrie Chapman Catt. Stantial long served as secretary to the suffragist and women’s rights advocate Maud Wood Park ’98, so the papers also include hundreds of letters to Park from an array of notables, plus articles, photographs, clippings, and rare ephemera.

The Stantial papers tell the story of the struggle for women’s rights in the decades beyond passage of the 19th Amendment, offering insight into the issues with which these women wrestled, the strategies they employed, and the personal relationships they forged and sometimes fractured.

—Kathryn Allamong Jacob
Johanna-Maria Fraenkel Curator of Manuscripts

Stantial saved a wide variety of suffrage-related ephemera, such as this small card. The text of these “Christmas Greetings” conveys not cheery holiday wishes but grim determination.

For liberty we’re standing,
We women of to-day;
For right and equal justice,
We work as well as pray;
To raise our fallen sisters
From degradation’s dust,
To make the world grow better,
More free from pain and lust.
There are many ways to be drawn into an organization: “We just need a little help”; “The rest of the board will love you”; “Your skills are exactly the ones we’ve been looking for”; and finally, “There’s no work involved, we just need your name.” Any of these statements can lead to years of stress and time expended without measure. My involvement with the Schlesinger Library was no different—it began during a research morning at the Library of Congress.

In 1981, I was finishing my dissertation for a PhD from American University and was writing busily when I heard a “psst.” I paid no attention, but a louder “psst” followed. Looking up to see who had the chutzpah to disturb the scholarly silence, I saw an acquaintance, Katie Louchheim, newly retired from the State Department. She motioned for me to come speak with her. Like everyone else in Washington, I obeyed her request—or, rather, her order.

“Joan,” she began, her manner indicating purposefulness, “I want you to help me with a small reception I’m giving for the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe.”

Unsophisticated as I was, I knew real trouble when it appeared on the horizon. “Sorry, Katie,” I said. “I don’t know your library [emphasis on your], and besides, I have no time, and besides, I didn’t go to Radcliffe.”

Heedless of my reply, Katie marched on. “There’s no work involved for you, I’m doing it all.” She turned to go. “I just need a backup. Thank you, I’ll give them your name.” By this point she was out the door.

I sighed. I was not the only person to become entangled in Katie’s web, but no work was called for—or so I thought. I returned to my dissertation and also began to inform myself about the Schlesinger for my own interest. I quickly learned about this superb library and recognized it for what it is: the premier research library on women’s history in the United States. I was intrigued and filled with admiration.

Two days later, I received a telephone call from Katie, who was coughing and gasping. “Joan,” she croaked, “I’m sick, very sick. You have to take over.” Click went her phone.

I called her back to no avail—no one picked up her phone. I called the library and spoke for the first time to Pat King, its distinguished director, destined to become one of my very dearest friends. When Pat recovered from the shock of hearing that the (major) event was being prepared and run by someone she’d never heard of, she was stunned. She pulled herself together. “I’m sure you can do it,” she said. “We’ll give you all the help you need.” I couldn’t see how the helping hand was going to stretch from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Washington, DC.

The work was indeed more than I had bargained for. The invitations, printed in DC, had to be mailed from Cambridge, so very late one evening, during the one major snowstorm of the year, my accommodating husband, David, and I drove very slowly to Union Station, where we put the boxes of invitations on a train.

The event was held at the beautiful, Harvard-owned Dumbarton Oaks. The full committee from Radcliffe, led by Susan (Sue) Storey Lyman ’49, HRPBA ’50, EdM ’63, came down from Cambridge. I was so impressed with Sue’s verve, competence, and friendliness that I forgave Katie for the weeks of work. “Stand next to me in the receiving line,” Sue said. Now prepared to follow all orders, I did. As Radcliffe alumnae arrived at the reception, they greeted me with disbelief: “Joan, is that you? I didn’t know you were an alum.” “Joan? Joan?” and then, in a low mumble, “Good to see you.” Only one person dared ask, “Joan, what are you doing here?”

At the end of the reception, Sue said to me with her arm
over my shoulder, “There’s no way we can thank you for what you did, but I can invite you to serve on the library’s advisory committee. There, that’s all settled.”

I found myself on the advisory committee of a library that I had only recently heard of, at a college I had not attended. I couldn’t have known that in time I would become chair of the committee. But that’s another story.

Thanks to Katie, her illness, Sue, the event, the wonderful people at the library, and the interesting, important, and timely activities of the Schlesinger, my respect for this premier institution has grown over the more than 30 years I have served. Best of all, Radcliffe accepted me.

One highlight for me was the four-day conference in 1994 titled “Women, Information, and the Future: Collecting and Sharing Resources Worldwide,” an event that made friends for the library in every corner of the world. The proceedings opened with an address by Wangari Maathai, of Kenya, who was honored with a Nobel Peace Prize in 2004—the first African woman to win that prize.

My gratitude to the library for allowing me to serve is unending. As I have found again and again in my life, when you serve, you receive far more than you give. So in the end I have to say, “Thank you, Katie,” for enlisting me in the ranks of those who admire and are dedicated to the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

—Joan Challinor
Member, Schlesinger Library Council

A Note on Joan Challinor

I met Joan Challinor in 2005, shortly after I joined the library staff. She made a special visit to the Schlesinger to meet me—or at least that’s the story she proclaimed as she filled my very large office with her very generous spirit. We had lunch in the Cronkhite Dining Room and discussed many interests that Joan had somehow discovered we held in common. She was the first member of the Library Council I met, and since that very first meeting, I have proudly considered her my friend.

Joan has served on several advisory committees and worked with or supported numerous organizations, many of which are related to libraries and education. She joined the Schlesinger Library Advisory Committee in 1980, served as chair from 1986 through 2001, and was appointed to the Schlesinger Library Council at its founding, in 2003. President Bill Clinton appointed her to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) in 1995, and she was reappointed in 2000. For her work as chairperson of the Bicentenniel of the Treaty of Paris, she received the Medal of the City of Paris from Mayor Jacques Chirac in 1983.

Joan earned a PhD in history from American University with a dissertation that focused on Louisa Catherine Adams, the wife of John Quincy Adams. She has written numerous essays and edited two books—Kin and Communities: Families in America (with Allan J. Lichtman, Smithsonian, 1979,) and Arms at Rest: Peacemaking and Peacekeeping in American History (with Robert L. Beisner, Greenwood Press, 1987). She worked on a project for a documentary film about Thomas Paine. In 1985, she received the American University Distinguished Alumni Award. She has lectured on a wide range of topics, including “Are Libraries as We Know Them Endangered Species in the Internet Era?”

Joan is one of the library’s most committed volunteers and among our most generous supporters, having established or made significant contributions to more than nine endowed funds that support various library endeavors, from manuscript and book acquisitions to the preservation of rare documents. We are tremendously grateful for her continued interest, advice, and generosity.

—Marilyn Dunn
Executive Director and Radcliffe Institute Librarian

My gratitude to the library for allowing me to serve is unending. As I have found again and again in my life, when you serve, you receive far more than you give.
Radcliffe Institute Fellows Explore the Schlesinger

Researchers, students, scholars, and authors travel from around the world to use the collections at the Schlesinger Library. Radcliffe Institute fellows are no exception. Several 2011–2012 fellows are seeking out the Schlesinger’s collections to find information and inspiration for their ambitious projects.

**JOHN AYLWARD RI ’12**

New England Poets: A Work for Soprano and Chamber Ensemble

Where rhythmic vitality meets lyricism and wit, one finds the works of composer and musician John Aylward. The 2011–2012 Rieman and Baketel Fellow for Music, Aylward will turn to the Schlesinger for inspiration in composing his modern classical music works.

Having just released his debut album, *Stillness and Change*, this past summer, Aylward will embark on his next musical adventure at the Institute—creating a song cycle inspired by the texts of influential New England women poets. His muses? Mary Oliver, Elizabeth Bishop, Anne Sexton, and Louise Glück. The works of these poets are part of the library’s collections, including personal audio recordings, correspondence, and notes of Anne Sexton. “I find the corollaries among music, other arts, and the humanities to be a source of inspiration,” says Aylward. “The focus on these New England poets will allow me to explore connections between the poetic verse and the musical phrase.”

**LAUREL BOSSEN RI ’12 AND MELISSA BROWN RI ’12**

Female Labor and Footbinding in Rural China, 1900–1950

For decades, anthropologists Laurel Bossen and Melissa Brown have collected interviews, field research, and documentary sources on rural families in China. Today, they’re collaborating at the Radcliffe Institute to continue their multidisciplinary investigations—across women’s studies, economics, China studies, anthropology, and history—to write a book on female labor and footbinding in early-20th-century China.

Brown, the Frieda L. Miller Fellow, and Bossen, the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Fellow, will join with visiting colleague Hill Gates to examine the labor contributions of rural Chinese women when modern industry, transportation, and trade undermined commercial production by women in rural households. Having conducted thousands of interviews with elderly women in more than 10 Chinese provinces and collected quantitative data, published materials, and photographic records, the two fellows intend to pursue further historical research. Next stop? The archives at the Schlesinger Library.

“The Schlesinger will allow us to compare our quantitative findings with early missionary writings about women in China,” Bossen says. “The library’s resources can provide supplementary background information on changes in trade, textiles, and footbinding practices corresponding to areas of provinces for which we have interviews.”
KARA OELHER RI ’12
Known Unknown

Kara Oehler, an independent journalist and 2011–2012 Radcliffe–Harvard Film Study Center Fellow, is a rising star in public media who is pushing the boundaries of documentary forms.

At the Radcliffe Institute, Oehler will build the foundation for Known Unknown, an interactive audio documentary that immerses audiences in the particularities of place, combining aesthetic experimentation with ethnographic approaches in order to delve deeper into major news topics. “I create experimental radio and interactive documentaries that engage and refamiliarize people with everyday stories and pressing issues,” she says. “I believe sound is a uniquely absorptive, reflective, and intimate medium—one that requires the listener to draw on his or her memories to provide a subjective backdrop for a stranger’s story.”

Oehler plans to utilize the holdings of the Schlesinger Library to inform future episodes of Known Unknown. Three collections, quite different from one another, especially interest her. They are the video recordings, photographs, and correspondence of the sexologist and gerontologist J. Ari Kane-DeMaios; the archives of Florence Rapoport’s television program Focus on Women, featuring women of achievement; and the records of the Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association, a nonprofit organization promoting the New England fishing industry.

VICTOR VALLE RI ’12
The Aesthetics of Fire: On the Art of Chile Eating

One of the main reasons that ethnic studies professor Victor Valle applied to the fellowship program is that he wanted to examine the Schlesinger’s culinary collection to write his next book, “The Aesthetics of Fire: On the Art of Chile Eating.” His book will blend cultural history, memoir, and aesthetic philosophy to interpret the ways in which North America’s Capsicum (pepper) aficionados understand and express the fruit’s beauty.

Valle will probe the Schlesinger’s culinary holdings for texts, images, and cookbooks that express how North Americans, Mexicans, and 18th- and 19th-century European colonists have interpreted the chile-eating experience. Valle also looks forward to researching the manuscript cookbook collection of the late Sophie D. Coe ’55, an important food historian and anthropologist whose research in Mesoamerican and New World cooking led her to write America’s First Cuisines.

After visiting the Schlesinger collections to record the lyrics of a Mexican folk song—“Yo soy como el chile verde, picante pero sabroso . . . (I am like the green chile, hot but tasty)”—Valle comments, “My research will explore written and lived cultural texts to understand when North American cuisines incorporate the chile and how different cultures look at the beauty of the chile, some stressing piquancy while others seek sweetness.”

—Karla Strobel
Communications Officer
In 1968, after Ellen Willis had published a single article about music—the story of Bob Dylan’s career in the context of folk music, folk-rock, psychedelic music, and the British renaissance—the New Yorker hired her to be its first rock critic. Willis had worked on the Dylan piece, “Before the Flood,” published in the counterculture magazine Cheetah, for five months, and it showed. Her views were complicated, ambiguous, and illuminating. She was already writing as a cultural critic, not limiting herself to music. “Dylan has exploited his image as a vehicle for artistic statement,” Willis wrote. “The same is true of Andy Warhol and, to a lesser degree, of the Beatles and Allen Ginsburg. (In contrast, James Dean and Marilyn Monroe were creatures, not masters, of their images.)” Insightful stuff, especially from a 26-year-old.

The Schlesinger Library acquired Willis’s papers in 2008, after Nancy F. Cott, the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director of the library and the Jonathan Trumbull Professor in Harvard’s history department, contacted Willis’s widower, Stanley Aronowitz, who is a distinguished professor of sociology and urban education at the City University of New York. Processing of the Willis papers was made possible by gifts from the Radcliffe College Classes of 1950 and 1968. Among the 10 boxes of Willis’s papers are correspondence, diaries, drafts of articles, artwork her daughter Nona Willis Aronowitz made as a child, short stories, unfinished novels, and an original copy of the Cheetah issue containing the Dylan piece (see back cover). There’s also a brief note that Simone de Beauvoir sent to Willis at Rolling Stone—where she was a columnist from 1976 to 1978—regretfully declining an invitation to be interviewed.

In 1969, while Willis was writing for the New Yorker, where she remained on staff until 1975, she and other New York feminists founded Redstockings. The name came from combining “bluestockings” (for intellectual women) with a color that signaled their leftist politics. Redstockings’ manifesto and principles, contained in Willis’s papers, may sound over the top to contemporary readers (“All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women”), but they are true to their time. Willis eventually focused more on feminism, family, and politics than on rock music in her writing.

Jenny Gotwals, one of the library’s lead manuscript catalogers, who processed the Willis papers, notes that some of Willis’s views differed dramatically from those of other second-wave feminists whose papers also reside at the library. “It’s great for the library and for history that we have this spectrum,” Gotwals says. Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, for example, campaigned against pornography, whereas Willis was a leader in the anti-antipornography camp. In a column for the Village Voice, Willis famously wrote, “In practice, attempts to sort out good erotica from bad porn inevitably come down to ‘What turns me on is erotic; what turns you on is pornographic.’”

Interest in Willis was renewed in the spring of 2011 when the University of Minnesota Press published a collection of her articles edited by her daughter. Out of the Vinyl Deeps: Ellen Willis on Rock Music contains 59 of Willis’s essays, most of which originally appeared in the New Yorker. Nona Willis Aronowitz, an associate editor and writer at Good magazine (where one of her recent articles was “Campaign Kids: Jon Huntsman’s Daughters and the Politics of Family”), says that she decided shortly after her mother’s death to compile the book.

“Right after she died, there were a lot of obituaries online and in print about her writing, and a big chunk of them remembered her music writing,” Aronowitz says. “I didn’t realize she had such a cult following in the music world. When I was born, she had already left rock criticism behind and was
more interested in feminism and politics and foreign policy.” It became clear to Aronowitz that her mother had been a pioneer in rock criticism, and “that she was one of the first and one of the best.”

Willis taught journalism at New York University beginning in 1990 and founded its Cultural Reporting and Criticism program in 1995. In April 2011, Aronowitz and a couple of Willis’s students organized a conference to celebrate the publication of Aronowitz’s book. Titled “Sex, Hope, & Rock ‘n’ Roll: The Writings of Ellen Willis,” the conference was held at NYU. Speakers included Robert Christgau, a reigning rock critic of the 1960s and 1970s, and Daphne Brooks RI ’11, an English and African American studies professor at Princeton University, who was thrilled to find the Willis papers at the library during her Radcliffe fellowship and used them to consider Willis’s relationship to black feminism in a piece she presented at the conference.

In her talk, “Soul Surfer: Riding the ‘Then, There’ and ‘What Might Be’ of Ellen Willis’s Second Wave,” Brooks first pondered a photograph of Willis from the 1960 college issue of Mademoiselle that she had found in the Schlesinger archive. Brooks marveled over discovering “this image of a nearly 19-year-old Ellen Willis in a smart shirtwaist dress, her lovely curls shaped into a neat New Frontier coiffure, sitting face-to-face with the genius, celebrated Lorraine Hansberry.”

Willis was a junior at Barnard College when she won the Mademoiselle competition to serve as a summer guest editor of the magazine. She chose to profile Hansberry, a 30-year-old playwright who had triumphed a year earlier with A Raisin in the Sun, the first play by an African American woman to be produced on Broadway.

Brooks noted that Willis was more engaged with white male musicians such as Dylan and the Rolling Stones than with black artists and feminists, but she also pointed out several moments—such as her profile of Lorraine Hansberry—when Willis broadened her scope. While Brooks celebrates Willis’s pioneering work, she also declared that she wished “that Willis had gifted us with more extraordinary pieces on women—and especially women of color who rocked the democratic ideals of freedom and pleasure like she heard and saw in Janis [Joplin]. I wish that we had Ellen Willis articles that saw the outlaw rebel spirit in Etta James riding up and down the open interstate highway 5 like the road warrior journeyman Dylan in her definitive piece on him.”

Willis was only 64 when she died of lung cancer, in 2006, but her voice lives on in her work. Younger feminists are becoming aware of her, not only through Aronowitz’s book and the three collections of essays published during her lifetime—Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope, and Rock-and-Roll (Knopf, 1981); No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays (Wesleyan University Press, 1993); and Don’t Think, Smile! Notes on a Decade of Denial (Beacon Press, 1999)—but also through web postings (see below). Feminists of any age might welcome Willis’s commentary on contemporary culture right now.

—Pat Harrison
Publications Manager

Ellen Willis Online
Nona Willis Aronowitz maintains a site where she has posted much of her mother’s writing and several photographs of her: http://ellenwillis.tumblr.com. The e-bookstore Emily Books is also spreading the word about Willis with its blog at http://emilybooks.tumblr.com/.
INSPIRATION AMONG LEDGERS AND MINUTE BOOKS

Jacqueline (Jackie) O’Neill is a busy woman. As Harvard University marshal, she oversees official University protocol, meets heads of state and other dignitaries visiting the campus, and organizes Harvard’s commencement. Her office is presently directing Harvard’s yearlong 375th anniversary celebration, which kicked off on October 14.

O’Neill’s diverse and encompassing responsibilities mean that countless University publications find their way to Wadsworth House, the building (dating from 1726) where her office is located. In spring 2007, when the Schlesinger Library newsletter arrived in her mail, a story about Lebanese and Syrian women organizing for their community piqued her curiosity.

The article, written by Kathryn Allamong Jacob, the library’s Johanna-Maria Fraenkel Curator of Manuscripts, discussed the records of the Lebanese-Syrian Ladies’ Aid Society of Boston, in the South End. “The reason I noticed it is because part of my family on my mother’s side is Lebanese—and both my grandmother and my mother grew up in the South End,” recalls O’Neill. “So in the back of my head, I thought, ‘Gee, it’d be really interesting to go over someday and see what’s in the collection.’” (Initially, she hoped to visit the collection with her daughter, Leigh O’Neill, a Middle East expert who speaks several languages, including Arabic, and has served as an international observer for national elections in the region. “I thought it would help her understand her heritage,” O’Neill says. But other needs intervened.)

Recently, O’Neill was invited to speak at an event for a Lebanese civic organization whose members are largely professional men. She would be the first woman to address the group. She decided to focus her talk on the Lebanese heritage of Greater Boston from a woman’s point of view. “That would be my hook,” she says.

O’Neill remembered the newsletter article and headed to the Schlesinger Library. Unexpectedly, this led to a personal journey: Within the multilingual ledgers (written by various hands in Arabic, English, and French), meeting minutes, and programs, she found familiar names—including those of her cousins Rose Kfoury and Rose Maloof. She discovered that the society was originally housed at 102 Tyler Street, next door to where her mother was born. The records, dating from 1917, also revealed the migration of the Lebanese American and Syrian American communities from the South End to the Boston suburbs.

What O’Neill found most touching—and tried to impress upon the audience for her speech—was the women’s selfless commitment to helping the needy even though their own resources were meager. “They didn’t have a lot to begin with,” she says. “But they were civic-minded enough to raise money for people other than themselves,” whether it was a couple of dollars for a family going through a rough patch or help with groceries. Her visit to the Schlesinger gave her not only a great story, but also newfound pride in the strength and generosity of her grandmother’s community.

Looking out into a sea of physicians, engineers, academics, and scientists as she delivered her speech, O’Neill thought back to the society members whose voices now live on in the Schlesinger Library. “Two or three generations later,” she says, “their children and grandchildren are living proof of the American dream.”

—Ivelisse Estrada
Writer/Editor

HARVARD
Save the Date
April 23, 2012
Dean’s Lecture on the History of Women at Harvard in Honor of Harvard’s 375th Anniversary
“It’s Complicated: 375 Years of Women at Harvard”
Helen Horowitz PhD ’64, RI ’01, Sydenham Clark Parsons Professor of History and American Studies Emerita, Smith College
How a speaking invitation led University Marshal Jackie O’Neill to a discovery at the Schlesinger Library

Boston Area Collections
In the first half of the 20th century, the South End of Boston was particularly diverse: recent immigrants from China, Ireland, Lebanon, and Syria—and many African Americans—lived cheek-by-jowl in the neighborhood. “The diversity of that community was, in many ways, more robust than it is now,” O’Neill recalls of her grandmother’s neighborhood. She praises the Schlesinger Library’s efforts to diversify its collections by reaching out to ethnic communities in the greater Boston area. “It’s a very smart thing to do,” she says. “Many of these communities are disappearing.”

In May 2011, the Schlesinger Library received more than 80 applications for its grants and awarded funding to 38 applicants. Grant recipients and their projects are listed below.

CAROL K. PFORZHEIMER STUDENT FELLOWSHIPS

Chelsea Carlson ’13  

Adrian Gonzalez ’13  
“The Mamaifesta: Women and Childcare Policy in the US (Or, What has Been the Legacy of the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971?)”

Rosemary Imms ’12  
“Margaret Sanger’s Changing Motives and Methods of the American Birth Control Movement”

Iman James ’12  
“Theorizing Liberation through Literary Erotica and Pornography”

Jyoti Jasrasaria ’12  
“The Politics of Women’s Work: Gaining Access to the Home and Effecting Social Change through Writing”

Devi K. Lockwood ’14  
“Visual Poetry”

Tony Ray Meyer, Jr. ’11  
“Sexual Policing, Sexual Play, and Sexual Pedagogy in Early 20th Century Boston”

Camille Owens ’13  
“June Jordan: Creative Social Justice Work in the Community”

RESEARCH SUPPORT GRANTS

Erin D. Chapman, George Washington University  

Kyri W. Clafin, Boston University  

Colin J. Davis, University of Alabama at Birmingham  
“Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association: A Case of Perseverance and Success”

Gillian Frank, Rowan University/SUNY, Stonybrook  

Julie Garbus, Independent Scholar  
“Anticipating History: The Activist Life of Vida Scudder”

Jane Gerhard, Mt. Holyoke College  

Lisa Levenstein, University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
“Don’t Agonize, Organize!: Displaced Homemakers and the Decline of the Family Wage in the Postwar United States”

S. Ani Mukherji, University of California at Los Angeles  
“Radical Pacifism, Homophile Orientalism, and the Queer Culture of Liberation Magazine”

Jennifer Nelson, University of Redlands  
“Community Health Reform Movements from the Mid-1960s to the Present”

Nora Rubel, University of Rochester  
“Reading the Settlement Cookbook: Recipes for the Melting Pot”

Jennifer S. Tuttle, University of New England  
“I can feel the poetry coming’: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and California”

Melissa Walker, Converse College  
“Women Growing Old: Middle-Class Women and the Experience of Aging in 20th Century America”

Molly Wood, Wittenberg University  
“Lucile Atcherson Curtis: The First American ‘Lady Diplomat’”

DISSERTATION SUPPORT GRANTS

Sarah-Jane Burton, University of Wollongong, Australia  

Theodora Clarke, University of Bristol, England  
“Art in Exile: Katherine Dreier and the Russian Avant-Garde in America, 1920–1953”

Jaci Leigh Eisenberg, The Graduate Institute, Geneva  

Julie R. Enszer, University of Maryland  

Jessica Frazier, Binghamton University  

Abby Goldman, Duke University  

Mimi Kim, University of California at Berkeley  
“Contesting Feminisms: Social Movement Challenges to Gender-Based and State Violence”

Katherine Marino, Stanford University  
“Pan-American Feminism and the Rise of International Women’s Rights, 1922–1948”

Rachel Pierce, University of Virginia  

Josie Rodberg, Harvard University  
“Human Rights, Women’s Rights, States’ Rights: The Struggle over Federal Family-Planning Programs in the United States”

Joann M. Ross, University of Nebraska at Lincoln  
“The Private Becomes Very Public: Evaluating the Marital-Rape Exception in America”

Julie Solow Stein, University of California at Berkeley  
“The Age of Independence: Youth, Sexuality, and Autonomy in Mid-20th Century America”

Sarah Sutton, Brandeis University  
“Industrializing the Family Farm: Dairy Farming, Milk Consumption, and the New England Landscape”

ORAL HISTORY GRANTS

Crystal Mun-hye Baik, University of Southern California  
“Women-of-Color Leaders, US Immigrant History, and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)”

Rachel Myslive, Kansas University  
“Green Sisters in Rural Kansas”

Rachel Pierce, University of Virginia  

Amy Starecheski, Columbia University  
“The Experiences of Female Squatters in New York City, 1980–2011”
In north central Kansas, a group of nuns is fighting for the earth. Rachel Myslivy intends to tell their story before it’s lost to the ages.

Myslivy, a research assistant at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, has won a grant to document the environmental activism of the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Nazareth Convent and Academy in Concordia, Kansas. Myslivy saw the importance of collecting stories and had spoken with Sister Bernadine Pacta, one of the nuns in Concordia.

“Environmental themes kept popping up in our conversation. She started telling me about the importance of recycling, composting, and eating low on the food chain,” Myslivy said. “The effects of environmental degradation, overconsumption, and pollution are most directly felt by the poor. The sisters see protecting the earth as a primary means of protecting those who need it most.”

Myslivy’s great aunt, Sister Susan Kongs, is also a member of the convent. She told her about the sisters’ community efforts, including operating a garden in which local citizens can rent space to grow their own food, screening films about the world’s food supply, and other work. The religious aspect combined with the environmental concern appealed to Myslivy, who lives on a small farm with her husband and two daughters. They use organic methods and grow food they use throughout the year.

She then learned of grants available from the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard and decided to write a proposal.

“I sent my application off thinking, ‘Oh, why not?’ I’m not even a full-time grad student yet, but I should try it,’” she said. “Thankfully, I got it. Now I can go back and get the rest of their stories.”

The grant, which was open to applicants from across the nation, will pay for Myslivy to travel to Concordia and document the nuns’ environmental and spiritual work. She’ll make at least two trips there this summer to interview the sisters, observe their community work and environmental activism, and record it for a future written project. Myslivy has already found that the sisters in Concordia aren’t the only ones working to care for the earth and improve the health of the nation’s food supply.

“It’s a large, underground movement,” Myslivy said. “I think the work is unique, and it’s not getting much press.”

She feels an urgency to document the work and the nuns’ history before it’s too late. Many of the sisters are more than 60 years old, and their way of life is changing. When they were young, there were not as many options available for women, leading many to a life in service of the church. Fewer young women are joining the sisterhood today, and the number of convents in small towns such as Concordia is dwindling.

Myslivy said she hopes the project is the first of many, and she hopes to secure funding to expand the oral history project to include other convents in the state. She plans to continue taking graduate classes in religious studies and to continue researching the intersection of religion and environmentalism in Kansas.

“They’re amazing women,” she said of the nuns. “Throughout history, nuns have always been at the forefront of working for what’s right. It only makes sense that they’d be fighting for the earth now.”

—Mike Krings
Public Affairs Officer, University of Kansas
On September 9, the library held a symposium titled “The New Majority? The Past, Present, and Future of Women in the Workplace.” The event featured 10 speakers, several of whom are quoted here and are also discussed in the Director’s Letter on page 1.

“Clara Schiffer moved in and out of the federal government in jobs related to workers, children, women, and health—taking time out to raise her four children—for over 50 years. It is worth noting that she thought federal jobs were good jobs, that the federal government could solve problems, and that employees could make a contribution to improving opportunities for and the lives of Americans.”

—Lois J. Schiffer ’66

“Unions are good for working women. The benefits and advantages of women being represented by a union at work are numerous, plentiful, overwhelming. If you want to talk about pay, women who are represented by a union get higher pay. There’s a really significant wage premium for women who are represented by a union, even larger for women of color.”

—Lynn Rhinehart
General Counsel, AFL-CIO
“I have been involved and committed for many years to public history, to bringing academic historians together with filmmakers, museum curators, policy makers, and other professionals to move history teaching and learning out of the traditional classroom and into the public realm. I feel that with this symposium today—where we have professors, researchers, activists, union organizers, union officials, and a court of appeals judge contributing—we are doing public history in the best sense.”

—Lizabeth Cohen RI ’02
Interim Dean of the Radcliffe Institute and Howard Mumford Jones Professor of American Studies at Harvard University

“Women are nearly a majority of the labor force. For a brief time, at the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010, as a result of the recession hitting more men’s jobs than women’s, women workers did number more than half of the nonfarm employees on payrolls. But in the slight recovery that has taken place from then till now, men have gained more jobs, whereas women’s losses have continued. So the new majority of women did not last, at least to this date. That’s why the question mark in the title of our event.”

—Nancy F. Cott
Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director of the Schlesinger Library and Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History at Harvard University

“That’s why the question mark in the title of our event.”

—Drew Gilpin Faust
President and Lincoln Professor of History at Harvard University

For more information about other symposium speakers, visit www.radcliffe.edu/events/calendar_2011workplace.aspx.