LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX!

Birds do it, bees do it, and Americans have been fighting about it for centuries. From Florida to the Great Lakes, European colonists enforced their dominion by policing chastity, monogamy, and fecundity. Laws regulating sexual behavior, and categorizing the offspring that often resulted from it, long predated the United States. Many such statutes lasted for centuries; some endure still. Since the 1960s, as historian Robert Self R '08 has demonstrated, issues rooted in marriage, sexuality, and family have remade American politics and public policy. Battles over sexual rights (and wrongs) continue to ripple through our national discourse.

Self, like others who have worked on this topic, did a lot of his research at the Schlesinger Library. Our collections richly document generations of pitched and earnest battle over issues ranging from contraception to abortion to pornography to sexual identity. Individuals and organizations whose records we hold staked out well-reasoned, passionately argued, and adamantly opposed positions on issues of intimate politics. The papers of reproductive rights pioneer Bill Baird can be read alongside the collection of antiabortion physician and organizer Mildred Jefferson. The antipornography thought and activism of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon can be considered alongside the contrary efforts of a growing number of sex-positive individuals and organizations, from the records of the sex-worker rights group COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) to the papers of adult industry pioneers Candida Royalle, Gloria Leonard, and Veronica Hart. Schlesinger’s ability to support fresh scholarship in these hot-button areas of study recently increased by an order of magnitude, thanks to our acquisition of collections assembled by the Center for Sex and Culture in San Francisco. Faced with the kinds of cost
increases that sometimes threaten the long-term survival of community archives, the CSC—a vibrant organization dedicated to documenting the work, lives, and thought of sexual minorities and sexuality activists in the Bay Area—chose Harvard as the permanent repository of the materials it had collected over decades. Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library partnered with Houghton and Widener Libraries to bring this enormous trove of material (manuscripts, rare books, printed ephemera, film, audio recordings, and three-dimensional objects) to Cambridge. After the CSC collections are processed, Schlesinger researchers will be able to study the papers of the trans activists Patrick Califia and Tala Brandeis; the records of Good Vibrations, one of the first woman-owned stores selling sex products primarily to a female market; and the papers of pornographic actress and sex educator Nina Hartley, and sexual freedom advocate and bisexual activist Margo Rila. As we continue to skirmish over wedding cakes and bathrooms, pronouns and politics, birds and bees, collections like these have the power to catalyze new ways of understanding the past and the present and, just maybe, to help us envision a more harmonious and inclusive future.

—Jane Kamensky
Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Director
Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Photographs from the Tala Brandeis Papers
Unpacking
ANGELA DAVIS
The papers of activist and scholar Angela Y. Davis arrived at the Schlesinger Library in January 2018. Since then, I’ve worked on a team with two other archivists to process the material, mindful of the Library’s plans to mount an exhibition on Davis and to host a conference about her work in October of this year. With the project now wrapping up, the collection should be open to research to coincide with these events.

Archivists preserve and provide context for primary source material, establishing both physical and intellectual control for the rich collections held by the Schlesinger. Our job is to research, analyze, and describe content, identify important topics or people within collections, put material in historical perspective, and document how it relates to other collections at the Library.

Processing of the Davis papers began at Davis’s house, in Oakland, California, when archivists Jehan Sinclair and Amber Moore accompanied curator Kenvi Phillips to pack the material in late December 2017. Sinclair and Moore packed items in numbered cartons, listing the contents and noting important details. Material that had been stored in Davis’s basement was marked on such the cartons, providing key contextual information for the unpacking process.

When the 150 cartons arrived at the Schlesinger, we were able to sort material quickly and see what parts of the collection needed the most work. Much of the material from the last 25 years was well organized and easy to process. Older material needed more preservation work and also more research to determine its history. Under the direction of conservator Amanda Hegarty, we used a HEPA vacuum to clean—one page at a time—six cartons of material that had gotten dirty from 40 years in Davis’s basement. Many of these items were from the 1970s: files from Davis’s teaching and speeches, as well as pamphlets, posters, and documents from worldwide freedom struggles.

One carton of material included letters sent to Davis when she was jailed in the early ‘70s on charges of which she was later acquitted. These letters, undelivered at the time, were found years later by the daughter of then-Marin County Sheriff Harvey Teague.

Many of the letters and postcards sent to Davis were from children in East Germany and other communist countries. The Davis materials also include textiles created by these children—bedsheets with marker drawings, or with other fabrics or paper pinned on, delivering the message “Free Angela!” Schlesinger archivists have connected with staff members at the Stanford University Library, which holds more material from the global “Free Angela!” campaign in the records of the National United Committee to Free Angela Davis. We hope to be able to link material from the two collections in the future.

The collection also contains 258 audiovisual items, primarily capturing Davis’s appearances and speeches. These holdings present special challenges: repeated play can damage older material, and tape-based media can deteriorate quickly. To better facilitate user requests, which are fulfilled by on-demand digitization, Schlesinger archivists describe the content of each media item. The process of listening and watching, while time consuming, promises users item-level information about each tape, which in some cases may be the only remaining copy of a Davis speech.

Davis’s papers show the evolution of her philosophies and visions around black feminism, prison abolition, and social and political change. They include early drafts of her books; letters with colleagues, family members, and fans; extensive documentation of her 1972 trial and its international reach; notes from the founding conference of the prison abolition organization Critical Resistance; printed material from anti-imperialist struggles around the globe; and letters and writings from imprisoned women and men. Historians, activists, artists, and others will find the collection an extraordinary resource.

—Jenny Gotwals
Lead archivist

For more information on the fall conference “Radical Commitments: The Life and Legacy of Angela Davis,” see page 10.
The Fight of Her Life: Gender Equality

A footnote put Bernice Sandler on the path to making headlines as a pioneer for women’s rights—“the godmother of Title IX,” as described by the New York Times.

“I was reading a report evaluating the enforcement of civil rights legislation prepared by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights when I came across a little known Presidential Executive Order, which prohibited federal contractors from discriminating in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin,” Sandler wrote in an article for the Cleveland State Law Review in 2007.

“There was a footnote, and being an academic, I read footnotes, so I turned to the back of the book to read it.”

The note explained that the order had recently been amended to include gender discrimination. Sandler had found a powerful response to the gender-based rejections she’d experienced as a lecturer looking to climb the ranks at the University of Maryland in the late 1960s.

“I was alone at home and it was a genuine ‘Eureka’ moment. I actually shrieked aloud for I immediately realized that many universities and colleges had federal contracts, were therefore subject to the sex discrimination provisions of the Executive Order, and that the Order could be used to fight sex discrimination on American campuses.”

Working with the Women’s Equity Action League, Sandler, who died at 90 on January 5, would go on to file administrative complaints with the US Labor Department against more than 250 colleges and universities. The research behind those complaints helped to set in motion legislative efforts by US Representative Edith Green, a Democrat from Oregon, that in time would produce Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

The Schlesinger Library, which holds Sandler’s papers, mourns her loss while celebrating her legacy.

Library Announces 2019 Grants

Each year, the Schlesinger Library supports research projects through grants to students, scholars, and writers. This year, grants have been awarded to 18 researchers, who will use the funds to spend time perusing manuscript materials, rare books, magazines, photographs, and audiovisual and electronic media housed in the Library’s collections. To see a full list of recipients, visit www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/schlesinger-library/grants.
Writing from the Library

Schlesinger holdings informed acclaimed books on feminism, work and family, and the African American essay.

Katherine M. Marino
Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement
(University of North Carolina Press, 2019)

Marino consulted a number of collections while researching Feminism for the Americas, including the Alma Lutz Papers, the Frieda S. Miller Papers, the Alice Paul Papers, the Jane Norman Smith Papers, the Doris Stevens Papers, the Mary N. Winslow Papers, and the Louise Leonard Wright Papers.

In a starred review, Library Journal said that the book “would make a welcome addition to courses on feminist theory and women’s roles in the Americas, and it should encourage scholars to dig deeper into the lives and works of feminists who were on the frontlines without necessarily publishing books or articles about feminism.” Nancy F. Cott, the Jonathan Trumbull Research Professor of American History in the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences and former Carol K. Pforzheimer Director of the Schlesinger Library, was no less impressed with the effort: “This is the most convincing case I have ever seen for centering the United States in histories of transnational or international work, in order to tell the full story.”

Marino is an assistant professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Kirsten Swinth
Feminism’s Forgotten Fight: The Unfinished Struggle for Work and Family
(Harvard University Press, 2018)

Has feminism failed women, or did the movement face a societal block? To answer this question, Swinth consulted the Dolores Alexander Papers, the Toni Caraballo and Judith Meuli Papers, the Catherine East Papers, the Mary O. Eastwood Papers, NACW Legal Defense & Education Fund Records, the National Organization for Women newsletter collection, Records of the National Organization for Women, and the Tully-Crenshaw Feminist Oral History Project Records.

“With calm acuity and rigor, Swinth surveys several fronts of 1960s—’70s feminist activism to dismantle cultural, economic, and social inequalities enforced by the ‘male breadwinner model,’ women’s outsized responsibility for domestic matters, and workplace discrimination against pregnancy and maternity,” says Publishers Weekly.

Swinth is an associate professor of history and American studies at Fordham University.

Cheryl A. Wall
On Freedom and the Will to Adorn: The Art of the African American Essay
(University of North Carolina Press, 2019)

Wall explores the evolution of the essay in African American literature through the Harlem Renaissance before turning to four writers she considers among the most influential of the 20th century: James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, June Jordan, and Alice Walker. For her chapter “On Women, Rights, and Writing: June Jordan and Alice Walker,” the author relied mostly on Jordan’s published works, but she also accessed the June Jordan Papers.

“Beautifully written and compellingly argued, this welcome and necessary book rescues the genre of the essay from the margins of our discussions about African American intellectual and cultural production,” said Farah Jasmine Griffin ’85, a professor at Columbia, in advance praise.

Wall is the Board of Governors Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English at Rutgers University.
An Intimate Narrative of NOW’s Sweeping History

Katherine Turk, Mary I. Bunting Institute Fellow, immerses herself in a movement.

I arrived as a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute in September 2018, eager to work in the Schlesinger Library on my book project: a history of the National Organization for Women. Founded in 1966 and enduring to this day, NOW is one of the largest and most prominent feminist membership associations in America.

Scholars tend to agree that NOW has been a significant force in the American past, but none has done the deep research to illuminate the organization’s historical arc and connect its local outposts to its national story. Instead, they have reckoned with its size and complexity in pieces, focusing on specific moments or single campaigns, individuals, chapters, or aspects of its structure. I longed to consult a history of NOW as I worked on my first book, *Equity on Trial: Gender and Rights in the Modern American Workplace* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), which considered how gendered notions shaped the development of workplace rights in roughly the same years of NOW’s existence. Because that broader account of the organization did not exist, I set out to write it myself.

I knew that the project was ambitious. But as I began to take daily visits to the Schlesinger Library, opening box after box, I was struck by the size of the task before me. NOW members and officials have diligently sent their materials to the Library, which is the organization’s central repository. It houses nearly 700 boxes of material in NOW’s two main collections, including memos, reports, and correspondence; the personal papers of more than 30 NOW leaders and members; the records of several New England chapters; complete runs of national newsletters and those of many chapters; over three dozen oral history interviews; and significant audiovisual holdings. Because
I had framed my project so broadly, every document in every folder was relevant. I had too many sources.

Historians of women and gender often have the opposite problem. Many have done masterful work on people who left few written materials of their own. These scholars have done relentless digging, read documents against the grain, and interpreted archival silences. I was pleased to have ample material, but I needed a plan to tackle it, and quickly. I decided to zero in on the newsletters and board meeting minutes—sources that could help me to chart a broad overview of the organization’s trajectory. I have worked outward from there, following familiar and lesser-known feminists into their communities and NOW chapters and recovering their relationships to the national organization and to deep shifts in American politics and culture. I ultimately chose three figures whose stories will anchor the book’s narrative and illuminate broader themes. Each of these women had distinct expectations for NOW’s open-ended mission, and the book will trace how their aspirations were ultimately adopted or went unfulfilled.

I have not had to work alone, to my great fortune. The Library’s staff has been flexible, responsive, and utterly supportive as my research has changed tracks. I have also collaborated with five top-notch undergraduate assistants through the Radcliffe Research Partnership program: Clara Bates, Lauren Fadiman, Julia Fine, Frances Hisgen, and Jordan Villegas have worked with great skill and dedication, combing the Library’s NOW-related collections and helping me to interpret their discoveries.

And, of course, the Library will be here for my future visits. As this fellowship year draws to a close, I am comforted to have so many reasons to return.

—Katherine Turk
2018–2019 Mary R. Bunting Institute Fellow, Radcliffe Institute, and associate professor of history and adjunct professor of women’s and gender studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“BECAUSE I HAD FRAMED MY PROJECT SO BROADLY, EVERY DOCUMENT IN EVERY FOLDER WAS RELEVANT. I HAD TOO MANY SOURCES.”
Young Voices Energize Session on Transgender Archives

An overflow crowd filled Knafel Center on December 18 for a session of the Boston Seminar on the History of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, a collaboration between the Schlesinger Library and the Massachusetts Historical Society. Jen Manion, an associate professor of history at Amherst College, organized and moderated the event and filed this report for the newsletter.

Academics were joined at the Knafel Center by activists, community members, and local high school students excited to hear from a predominantly transgender panel. The gender diversity of the crowd was itself a sign of changing times and a positive step toward inclusion, as trans women, trans men, and nonbinary people of all ages filled the room. The event, "Transgender History and Archives: An Interdisciplinary Conversation," brought together an array of experts to reflect on transgender studies in history, archiving, and public health. The panel also explored how changes in terminology have facilitated or hindered research.

The panelists covered a great deal of territory in their opening remarks, providing a clear foundation for listeners new to the material. Genny Beemyn, of the University of Massachusetts, offered an overview of the state of the field of transgender history, noting the value of recent work by scholars Peter Boag and Emily Skidmore in documenting the lives of transgender people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in rural and frontier communities.

Sari Reisner, of Harvard Medical School and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, charted trends in public health research about transgender individuals and communities, noting major disparities in health care access for all trans people and especially trans people of color. Reisner spoke of navigating the relationship between widely recognized sexual orientation and gender identity categories and individual identity as an issue both vital and tricky for public-health researchers, calling for flexibility, compassion, and prioritizing the needs and language of the individual.

Laura Peimer, a Schlesinger archivist, reflected on her work processing transgender collections at the Library, including the challenges involved in incorporating new terminology and categories to the catalog. One example: archivists navigate a desire to make collections visible to researchers without imposing an anachronistic category on someone of the past or, even worse, misgendering someone.

Panelists answered questions about whether feminist theory or feminist politics plays a role in their work, with all offering some version of a resounding "yes" to the question. When asked about race and ethnicity, given that so much of the available transgender archive focuses on white people, the panelists noted efforts to identify and elevate the existence, experience, and needs of transgender people of color. They were less optimistic about a future relationship between women's history and transgender studies, as the binary nature of "women's" history seemed for some to be at odds with transgender studies, in which nonbinary gender is foundational.

The presence of so many young people in the audience energized the event with a sense of urgency and possibility. One student asked why these conversations aren't happening in the classroom. Another sought support in making teachers and administrators understand the value of a trans-inclusive learning environment.

Panelists and fellow audience members rose to the occasion, offering names of transgender authors and writers, websites featuring transgender history, and resources for support in their schools.

In the end, this scholarly forum on the relationship between transgender studies and women's and gender history was in many ways both invigorated and reclaims—not by graduate students, nor by feminists, but by transgender, nonbinary, and LGBT+ high school students and their allies saying /why is this knowledge being kept from us? and We need this now! To which audience members and panelists alike seemed to collectively respond Yes! and What can I do to help?
The Schlesinger Library Reopens
September 3

Judy Chicago Portal Launch
October 17
As part of the launch, panelists will explore the value of feminist artists’ archives and trends in online research portals.

Radical Commitments: The Life and Legacy of Angela Davis
October 28–29
Informed by Davis’s life and work, a cross-generational group of leading scholars, activists, musicians, and incarcerated women will discuss movements in activism and social theory over the past half century. The conference will also mark the opening of an exhibition highlighting materials from the Angela Y. Davis Papers, an archive recently acquired by the Schlesinger Library in partnership with the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research.
A Deeper Sense of Her Own Story

Preparing her papers for the Schlesinger gave Alice Randall a chance to reflect on her life and art.

Alice Randall authored a story of high artistic achievement after graduating from Harvard-Radcliffe in 1981, making her name as a writer of hit country songs performed by Trisha Yearwood and others and of such novels as *The Wind Done Gone* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001). The details behind that story now await discovery—and processing—in nearly 100 boxes at Schlesinger Library. We asked Randall about the experience of reviewing and preparing her papers, the creative life they reflect, and more. Her answers have been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Why is the Schlesinger Library the right home for your papers?

A: Though I arrived in Cambridge in 1977 as part of the first class of women directly admitted into Harvard College, memories of Radcliffe are central to my Harvard narrative.

Be it working for the Radcliffe Forum; planning dinners for the likes of Kate Millet, activist and author, or Irish Senator Gemma Hussey and Huber Matos, one of the four generals of the Cuban Revolution; strategizing with then-President Matina Horner to help me achieve
an independent study with Julia Child; borrowing Radcliffe china for elaborate dinner parties in North House for a short-lived organization called Harvard Friends of Food; or speaking at Drew Faust’s last Radcliffe Day. Radcliffe shines bright in my memory—and no part of it shines brighter than the Schlesinger.

When I was an undergraduate, I experienced one of the great pleasures of my life in the Schlesinger Library. I held a 19th-century cookbook and was told by a librarian that the copy I held was the only known copy of the cookbook, and then I was allowed to cut the pages. As far as I knew I was the only person living who had read those words. I found that exhilarating. I have loved the Schlesinger Library since I first sliced open those pages and discovered that through the reading and study of antique cookbooks I could taste history. At the Schlesinger I came to understand, while still a teen, that I could better understand the day-to-day life of women and how class worked in America by understanding what was required of different women in different kitchens—or by learning what certain women required other women to do in the kitchen. The Schlesinger cookbook collection changed my life.

It was at the Schlesinger, hearing that “archive talk”—the day-to-day gossip of those doing the business of the archive—that I learned to look for the small moments in large lives that made me the novelist I am. To donate my papers to a library that contains the papers of Julia Child and Angela Davis is to assure that my papers will live as I have lived, in the company of complex and powerful women.

Another reason: Kenji Phillips. The Schlesinger had hired a curator of race and ethnicity who is profoundly well-read in the literature that has mattered to me and to my writing. Meeting Phillips, I was struck by the profound insight she brought to the hard questions of ownership, privacy, readings, and misreadings, all of which come into play when a black person gives their papers to a predominantly white institution.

Q: Was the process of preparing this collection for the Schlesinger also a process of self-discovery? Were there themes that surprised you?

A: When my grandfather Will Randall—a cream-colored man labeled “Negro” in the 1930 Federal census—died, my father showed me a letter my grandfather’s white half-brother had written to the black family on the occasion of my grandfather’s death.

Best as I can remember, my grandfather’s white brother described an idyllic, bucolic childhood shared in nature, hunting and fishing with a pal unacknowledged as kin, acknowledged in the letter as a loved playmate of youth. DNA has since proved they were kin. After I read that letter my father burned it. He explained that the literate and prosperous uncle’s letter had to be destroyed because my grandfather couldn’t read or write. Will Randall hadn’t had a chance to tell his side of the story, to narrate and document his childhood, didn’t have the opportunity to leave a record, to have a say with his words on paper. My father wouldn’t let his half-uncle’s record stand as my grandfather’s history.

Preparing my papers for donation became a celebration of the privilege of being literate, the privilege of owning a house and having had an opportunity to hold on to so many of the bits and pieces and scribbles and drafts that I created as I lived and that I collected in the process of living.

Q: I assume moving to Nashville not long after you graduated from Harvard, in 1981, was one major turning point in your development as an artist. Can you describe some of the others?

A: Moving to Nashville was important to me because it was a turn to the South and a return to the South. It was a place I could use as a perch to look down to Alabama and to look up to Detroit—to Motown from the perspective of a second and very different Music City.

But my biggest turning point as an artist occurred in high school. I was hospitalized and scheduled for a spinal tap. The doctors couldn’t figure out how a talkative star student had suddenly become near mute. They hadn’t read Maya Angelou, or read her the way I read her. I got my idea for my silence reading Angelou: Young and idealistic, I thought someone would read the sign, know, and come rescue me. The good parent. A teacher. Someone. As the hour for surgery approached, I realized no one was coming. If I was going to be rescued I had to do it myself. I put a bright smile on my face, will some light into my eyes, and walked up to the nurses’ station, where I explained in full and complete sentences, with neither too much nor too little emotion, that I was in need of no further treatment and would be going home. When my mother arrived at the hospital, in desperate whispers I offered her the story of my miraculous recovery. That day I learned the power of words chosen for a particular audience and the importance of surviving to fight another day. That was a turning point that led to all the others.

Q: What do the papers reveal about your creative process, as a songwriter, novelist, cultural writer?

continued on next page
How has that process changed over the years?

A: That I write many, many, many drafts. That I sketch ideas that I don’t choose to fully explore. That I do not write to publish out of my psychological experience. I write extensively, and privately, as part of an ongoing self-analysis that doesn’t seep into my public writing. The process hasn’t changed much; the genres change. I get one version of the whole down. Then I expand. Then I refine. Along the way I translate from a private language to my public language.

Q: What discoveries await the researcher who studies these papers compared with the reader or listener who knows only your books or songs?

A: Friendship has been critically important to me. I love and treasure deep, long friendships. I don’t write about friendship. I live friendship. I think the papers will give a sense of how several extremely important friendships are the central private story of my life, the thing, along with being the mother of Caroline [Caroline Randall Williams ’10], that has made my life, despite a whirlwind childhood, eclipsingly sweet.

Q: Are there ways in which a broader African American history over the past 50 years is reflected in this collection?

A: Want to know something about the social life of bourgeois black Americans in the mid-South at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st—what we cooked, how we entertained, how the vanishing art of the thank-you note looked in its death throes, how we volunteered? Poke into my papers. Want to know more about Detroit in the ‘60s? Take a look. Seeking to understand how the damimonde stays in conversation with the bourgeoisie, or black hippie life in Washington in the late ‘60s and ‘70s, or Nashville’s Music Row in the ‘80s and ‘90s? Or to understand friendship across ethnicity, or how artists not born to money balance creativity and commerce, or how suing an author is akin to censorship? These papers may be worth a look. Artistic life outside of New York City, outside of Chicago or Los Angeles—all of that is on display here. Engagement between art and law and art and psychoanalysis. Documents that touch on all of those themes appear in this collection.

One of the things the papers will do is complicate the understanding of what was called, in certain 20th-century circles, “Negro geography.” Who is connected to who, and where? The locations that are important to me include Detroit, Washington, D.C., Nashville, Los Angeles, and Cambridge. But they also include Tokyo.

“I think the papers will give a sense of how several extremely important friendships are the central private story of my life.”

St. Petersburg, Russia, the southwest of France, Manila, where my child was conceived; Martinique, where she took her first steps, and many other places where I lived a black life and searched for others who were black in those places.

Q: As a deeply experienced, versatile, and accomplished storyteller yourself, do you have any specific hopes for how scholars tell your story?

A: I hope researchers who come to view my papers come prepared to complicate their understanding of the African American experience, and come to the papers with a strong foundational knowledge of the black American experience in the second half of the 20th century. My world is the street. My world is the academy. My world intersects with Wall Street. My world is Tuskegee and Booker T, and it is W. E. B. It is Lil Hardin and Hank Williams. My world is black Hollywood. My world is a couch in an analytical office. My world is hippy-dippy Washington. Once upon a time the great Texas singer-songwriter Guy Clark said to me, “I’m not counting on you to keep my secrets, I’m counting on you to tell it,” and when you ’tell it,’ tell it true.” I’ll add this to that: I’m counting on scholars to illuminate multi-meanings of the singular text that is Alice Randall.
So Funny, So Filthy

It started with Dr. Demento. Growing up, Robin Bernstein—now the Dillon Professor of American History and a professor of African and African American studies and studies of women, gender, and sexuality at Harvard—was a fan of the famously offbeat radio show, which opened her mind (and ears) to the work of Belle Barth, Moms Mabley, LaWanda Page, Pearl Williams, “and lots of other deliciously filthy female comedians” from the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s. The records were cheap—“usually only a couple of dollars,” Bernstein says—but the rewards were lasting. In time, she would add openly lesbian comedy albums by Kate Clinton, Robin Tyler, and others to a collection she recently donated to the Schlesinger.
The tiny leather wallet contains business cards (approximately 2 in. x 1 1/2 in.), advertising the sewing business of Goldie G. Bruce, (1899-1937) who at the time lived in Somerville, Massachusetts. The artifact—along with 25 years of Bruce’s diaries, financial information and work documents, a ledger, correspondence, including from women’s clubs and civic associations; and photographs—can be found in the Linda Cricklow White Papers, which is a family member.

Cover image: NOW March/April 1972. Photo by Bettye Lane (1930-2012)

The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America

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