

**ENGENDERING AN INTELLECTUAL SPACE:
The Development of Women's Studies at Yale University
1969-2001**

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Introduction

*"A curriculum is a map of reality. It presents a categorical series of unities of life, world and thought divided by time, place and manner of investigation, and united into disciplines according to people's experience of truth. As changes in disciplinary boundaries illustrate, the experience of truth is a social experience."*¹

-Catharine MacKinnon, November 1978.

A university is a powerful entity – an Ivory Tower – pristine, solid, rare, and unbreakable. Universities create and disseminate the world's truths while educating an elite class of truth-tellers – leaders imbued with the substance of their education. From cures to formulas to theories, the influence of the university is far-reaching.

Change the analogy. The university is no longer an Ivory Tower, but a map, as Catharine MacKinnon asserts above. On the surface, a map defines our basic concept of reality, giving direction, projecting scale, and influencing decisions. Delve deeper, and the map shifts. New landscapes emerge, borders blur, frontiers expand, beauty is magnified, as well as imperfection. The map projects the landscape, but first the landscape defines the map. The flow of influence is reversed.

In reality, the university operates as both a solid tower and a mutable landscape. Yet, at few points in the history of the American research university has MacKinnon's map analogy worked as well as when she wrote it in the late 1970s as a Ph.D. student and lecturer at Yale University. MacKinnon, like many of her peers, had been influenced by the powerful 1960s and '70s resurgence of the Women's Movement, which, combined with the Civil Rights Movement, empowered new voices, motivated the widespread questioning of conventional truths, and galvanized sweeping changes within the academy.

Truth, as MacKinnon saw it, was defined outside of the academy. Universities like Yale served to articulate, interpret, and evaluate those truths as conveyed through such

vehicles as politics and the media, as well as through students and teachers who had been personally touched by outside movements. In the mid-'60s, feminist students and scholars began systematically questioning the universality of academic truths, given the large extent to which women's experiences had been excluded from the "canon."² Many called for the establishment of a corrective entity to monitor the expansion of scholarship about women in the form of a field called Women's Studies. Far beyond the initial goal of correcting the curriculum, Women's Studies elicited the discovery of new truths, resulting in new systems of thought and new questions, which demanded exploration.

This essay explores the history of Women's Studies – and the adaptability of the curricular map – at one of the world's most prestigious academic institutions, Yale University.

In late August 1969, 230 freshmen, 154 sophomore, and 204 junior women took part in Yale University's undergraduate matriculation ceremony, breaking down the gender barriers to an education that for over a quarter of a century had been provided only to men.³ Signs hanging above Phelps Gate – the new students' entrance to their dormitories in Vanderbilt Hall on Yale's Old Campus – welcomed the "Guys and Dolls" of the Ivy League's newest co-educational class.

¹ Catharine MacKinnon, Memo to the Committee on the Education of Women, re: "Notes Toward an Argument for Women's Studies," 1 November 1978. Women's and Gender Studies Files (WGSF).

² Comparable analogies to MacKinnon's have called the curriculum a "mirror" of reality. For example, Ellen Carol DuBois writes, "When feminists within academic institutions directed their attention to the scholarship conducted within their fields of study, they found an intellectual mirror of sexism in society ... this intellectual reflection of social prejudice was far from inconsequential. It provided continuing ideological support for conditions and policies oppressive to women; certain stereotypes and misapprehensions could even be used to justify women's marginal status in the academic world itself." From Ellen Carol DuBois, Gail Paradise Kelly, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, Carolyn W. Korsmeyer, and Lillian S. Robinson, *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

³ University Committee on the Admission of Women, Mary Arnstein. Chair, "The Admission of Women to Yale College" ("Arnstein Report"), 1974. DeVane Lecture Document Collection.

Just two years earlier, in a groundbreaking letter to Director of Admissions John Muyskens, Yale President Kingman Brewster encouraged continued active recruitment of minority male students into Yale College, espousing the principle of “equality of opportunity for admission to Yale.”⁴ Despite his emphasis on “openness” of the Yale community, as well as “variety for its own sake,” Brewster limited his vision to “Yale men.” In many ways, the prospect of co-educating Yale’s campus proved far more controversial than racial and socio-economic diversification of the College’s male student body, particularly among alumni. As early as 1924, *Yale Daily News* columnist Frank Ashburn decried the possibility of co-educating Yale College in response to the small, but growing admission of women into the various graduate schools. “Fortunately,” he said, “undergraduates would rebel at an invasion of their particular precincts by ladies.”⁵ Thirty-eight years later, after a report on co-education commissioned by President A. Whitney Griswold recommended the acceptance of undergraduate women, a precipitation of alumni complaints caused Griswold to put the findings of the report to bed.⁶

Upon Yale’s admission of women, some alumni voiced their strong opposition to the disturbance of the “Old Blue” – Julien Dedman, Class of 1949, claimed that Brewster’s actions “emasculated Yale’s most time-honored tradition – its 267 years of maleness.”⁷ On the other hand, Yale’s faculty, many members of which had been profoundly influenced by the social movements of the 1950s and ‘60s, were strongly in support of co-education.⁸ Regardless of opinion, Yale’s admission of women, compounded by the growing attention paid towards racial diversification of the student body, indicated that the University was entering a phase of development from which it could never return.

⁴ Kingman Brewster, letter to John Muyskens, Jr., 15 March 1967. DeVane.

⁵ Frank Ashburn, “Ah! Les Femmes” (*Yale Daily News*, 8 March 1924).

⁶ Arnstein Report, 1974. DeVane.

⁷ Julien Dedman, *The Rape of Yale*, pamphlet, 1969, printed by the author. DeVane.

On a national level, the admission of women to Yale coincided with the popularization of a field known as “Women’s Studies.” In its earliest incarnations, scholarship that fell under the rubric of Women’s Studies sought to uncover the hidden worlds of women in history, literature, science, and the arts, while valorizing gender as a category of social, cultural, and intellectual analysis. Heavily influenced by the 1960’s resurgence of the Women’s Movement, a new generation of feminist scholars expressed the need for a structured space within the academy to accommodate scholarship on women.⁹

Three-thousand miles away and one year following Yale’s acceptance of women undergraduates, the United States’ first integrated Women’s Studies program was launched at San Diego State College (now San Diego State University).¹⁰ SDSC’s institutionalization of Women’s Studies elicited national attention; a *Newsweek* article about the program released on 26 October 1970 called the emergence of Women’s Studies “one of the hottest new wrinkles in higher education.”¹¹

Whether intentional or not, the author’s invocation of the unflattering term “wrinkle” appropriately indicated that the growth of Women’s Studies was far from universally popular. The decidedly political underpinnings of most Women’s Studies scholarship caused

⁸ Interview with Gaddis Smith, 22 March 2001.

⁹ In an early compilation of writings on Women’s Studies, Kathleen Blumhagen and Walter Johnson emphasize the inextricable relationship between Women’s Studies and the Women’s Movement. Women’s Studies “represents a realization that the principles upon which the movement flourished rest on a strong intellectual base and that the need for knowledge about women and for women has a legitimate place within academia.” Source: “Introduction,” by Kathleen O’Connor Blumhagen and Walter D. Johnson, eds. *Women’s Studies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978) p. 7.

¹⁰ Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women’s Studies in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) p. 7.

¹¹ “Women’s Studies” (*Newsweek*, 26 October 1970), p. 61.

concern over its longevity; many discounted the field as a “fad” and questioned the academic rigor of related classroom teaching.¹²

Beyond the Women’s Movement, other concurrent, controversial movements within academia aided the task of Women’s Studies proponents, including the growth of interdisciplinary studies, the emergence of the “new social history,” and the “theory” movement in literature.¹³ Nonetheless, the institutional growth of Women’s Studies was largely predicated on the existence of female students, a development that did not affect elite research universities like Yale until nearly a decade after the first wave of the Women’s Studies movement.

While the co-education of Yale College resulted in immediate social adjustments to accommodate women, the admission of women also generated increased concern over the integration of women into the canon, the curriculum, and the classroom. Although efforts towards social integration reigned over concomitant academic concerns, the admission of women immediately triggered the creation of a small number of courses related to women. Administered primarily under the aegis of the recently created Residential College Seminar program and taught mostly by female graduate students, courses related to women hovered in the single digits during the first five years of coeducation. As the U.S. Women’s Movement peaked in volume during the mid-’70s, women at Yale became more comfortable voicing concerns over their persistently androcentric academic environment. Most significantly, a small but growing number of women on Yale’s faculty, versed in Women’s Studies, began teaching and writing in the direction of feminist scholarship.

¹² Such critiques have been revived in the 1990s with the emergence of the so-called “new orthodoxy,” which indicts “Politically Correct” curricula. For an excellent example, see, John Leo, *Two Steps Ahead of the Thought Police* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

¹³ For an excellent treatment of the changing climate of the U.S. research university since WWII, see Roger L. Geiger, *Research and Relevant Knowledge: American Research Universities Since World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

program, the university – transformed by the forces of the 1960s and 70s – was in a good place to host the ambitious, entrepreneurial growth of Women's Studies.

Nonetheless, a multitude of forces in the last two decades has influenced the “success” of Women's Studies at Yale. It would be inaccurate to depict the history of Women's Studies as an unswerving, exponential growth curve. Whether due to the turnover endemic to any program that relies upon junior faculty, restriction of university financial support, general apathy amongst students, or sheer exhaustion on the part of the program's founders and administrators, the growth curve of Women's Studies has witnessed plateaus and even depressions. Certainly, these fluctuations occur within every department at Yale; however, these moments of depression prove particularly strenuous for any academic program, like Women's Studies, that rests upon strong ideological foundations.

Because of the multiple identities of Women's Studies – a field that is at once corrective, theoretical, provocative, independent, inter-disciplinary, political, and pedagogically challenging – practitioners have been remarkably aware of the evolution of the field, despite its relatively short existence. Although few, if any, concentrated programmatic histories have been written, the proliferation of Women's Studies programs and scholarship has resulted in a significant amount of retrospective analysis in addition to the wealth of theoretical, methodological, and administrative writing.¹⁵

Few developments in Women's Studies have gone without formal analysis. For example, educational researchers, including Barbara Luebke and Mary Ellen Reilly, have explored the fate of Women's Studies graduates, as well as the experiences of majors while

¹⁵ Nationally, the field experienced explosive growth. There are now approximately 615 programs in the U.S.; the Department of Education has estimated that 12 percent of all undergraduates receive course credit for classes in women's studies; and women's studies has the largest student enrollment of any interdisciplinary field. Source: Florence Howe, ed., *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers* (New York: The Feminist Press of The City University of New York, 2000).

enrolled.¹⁶ Scholars have written developmental histories of feminist scholarship in specific disciplines, the earliest example of which is the 1985 *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe*, written by a group of professors from SUNY-Buffalo.¹⁷ Others have written surveys exploring Women's Studies' intersections with other fields, including Johnnella Butler's collection on Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies.¹⁸ And, of course, the field has had its vocal critics, including such luminaries inside the academy as Camille Paglia, who has charged Women's Studies with "reverse sexism"; recently, Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge have released several anecdotal books and articles decrying the damaging effects of Women's Studies on students.¹⁹

As many of the field's pioneering programs near their thirtieth anniversary, more attention is being paid to the history of Women's Studies programs. Two recent works are of particular importance: Marilyn Jacoby Boxer's 1998 survey, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* and Florence Howe's collection of testimonials from Women's Studies founders, published in 2000, *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*.²⁰ In the introduction to her collection, Howe chides Women's Studies participants for focusing too little attention on the field's history:

¹⁶ Barbara F. Luebke and Mary Ellen Reilly, *Women's Studies Graduates: The First Generation* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1995). Luebke and Reilly's comprehensive survey follows cohorts of graduates from the 1980s through the mid-1990s, analyzing career patterns, family patterns, etc., applying such variables as race and sexuality.

¹⁷ Ellen Carol DuBois, Gail Paradise Kelly, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, Carolyn W. Korsmeyer, and Lillian S. Robinson, *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985). This book explores the development of feminist scholarship in five disciplines: anthropology, history, literature, philosophy, and education.

¹⁸ Johnnella E. Butler and John C. Walter, *Transforming the Curriculum: Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, *Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women's Studies* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994).

²⁰ Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Florence Howe, ed., *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers* (New York: The Feminist Press of The City University of New York, 2000).

No one denies the impact of women's studies on university life. Its detractors see it as "wrecking" or "trivializing" the curriculum. Some of its promoters strive to legitimize women's studies through its admittance as a "discipline" into departmental status. But neither of these groups, nor those who fall outside these tensions, have concerned themselves with the history of women's studies. Though one of the enormously important lessons we have learned from women's studies has to do with knowing one's history – because without it, one is doomed to repeating especially its failures – the history of women's studies has remained obscure.²¹

Reflective of this broader trend, perhaps the most profound pattern throughout the history of Women's Studies at Yale has been the program's built-in anxiety over its own history. Women's Studies was founded as an explicitly transformative entity, which over the years has magnified any gaps between the program's mission and accomplishments. The initial 1979 proposal for Women's Studies outlined the following four "objectives" for the Program:

1) to stimulate and promote new scholarship in the area of Women's Studies; 2) to insure the inclusion of scholarship on women in the traditional course offerings and to encourage new work within existing departments; 3) to make Women's Studies material as widely available to the Yale community as possible (through the participation of non-Women's Studies majors in Women's Studies courses, as well as through workshops and conferences); and 4) to make it possible for students who wish to concentrate or major in Women's Studies to do so within a comprehensive and coherent program that coordinates existing courses and encourages courses in unrepresented areas.²²

Only one of the four stated objectives – the last – involved the establishment of a Women's Studies major. The first three aimed to promote the spread of Women's Studies scholarship across the curriculum in order to touch the highest number of syllabi and students possible. This "two-pronged" basis of the Program underscores the primary conflict of any field aimed at reshaping academic curricula to include diverse perspectives.²³ As complementary and sensible as this approach seems on paper, the actual tension between Women's Studies as simultaneously internally and externally focused has proven taxing. Too much internal focus risks isolation, while too much external focus risks a diffusion and distortion of purpose. The Program's history reveals that it has prospered when efforts are balanced between the mainstream and the margins.

²¹ Howe, p. xi.

²² Nancy Cott, et al, "Proposal for a Women's Studies Program at Yale." April 1979. WGSF.

Women in a Male Society (RC)	M: 5	F: 6	Total:11
Women in the U.S. Economy (RC)	M:2	F:8	Total:10
Images of Women in Literature (RC)	M:4	F:11	Total:15
Psychology of Women	[no numbers listed]		

Given the low number of women undergraduates and faculty members, the enrollment in Women's Studies courses was surprisingly high, and demonstrated the strong interest of many male students.

The preponderance of graduate student instructors, however, foreshadowed high rates of turnover and inconsistency in Women's Studies teaching. These early concerns over Women's Studies teaching reflected larger concerns regarding the minimal female participation in Yale's faculty as a whole. In May 1971, the Committee on the Status of Professional Women at Yale released a report to President Brewster's office stating that "a genuine problem does in fact exist." Two years after coeducation, nineteen women sat on an appointed faculty of 488, only one of whom, Marie Borroff, was tenured. In an attempt to explain such an overwhelming imbalance, the Committee concluded that it was less "due to conscious prejudice or deliberate discrimination than to long-ingrained habitual assumptions about women as professionals, assumptions which correspond less and less to reality." The Committee emphasized that the virtual absence of senior women was causing "anxiety for women students and younger faculty" and urged Brewster to publicly commit to the promotion and employment of women both as professors and administrators.²⁹

Given the distinct gender imbalance within Yale's faculty, women professors were forced to bear multiple burdens beyond their contractual departmental commitments. In addition to the inherent pressures of being such a minority within the faculty, a series of regulations passed at the time of coeducation mandated female representation on all faculty committees; consequently, women professors were also asked to assume large administrative

responsibilities.³⁰ Added to all this, the responsibility of teaching Women's Studies courses was often taxing and frustrating. For example, after teaching the course, "Women in Politics," for the first time in the spring of 1972, Political Science Professor Celia Ussak announced to Wasserman that she would not teach the course again. Ussak was frustrated by the lack of coordination of Women's Studies courses and was concerned that her course had been a "waste of time" due to "overlap with other women's courses."³¹ She indicated that Wasserman's Committee needed to "coordinate such courses" to prevent overlap and to limit frustration amongst the faculty. Although Ussak's complaints yielded few immediate results, her concerns reflected the immediate need for administrative support in coordinating the efforts of faculty concerned with Women's Studies.³²

Despite such immediate barriers, over the next four years, with the strong participation of graduate students teaching Residential College Seminars, the number and range of courses related to Women's Studies slowly expanded. The quality of scholarship within the loose collection of Women's Studies courses was extremely high, and Yale hosted many of the nation's then and soon-to-be feminist academic leaders. In Fall 1974, visiting lecturer Betty Friedan taught "The Sex-Role Revolution: Stage II; in Spring 1974, graduate student Catharine MacKinnon taught "Political Theory of Contemporary Feminism" and continued to teach courses until 1980; both semesters that same year, then Lecturer Cynthia Russett taught the first Women's Studies survey course, "Women in America"; and in Spring

²⁹ "A Report to the President from the Committee on the Status of Professional Women at Yale," Thomas M. Greene, Chairman, May 1971.

³⁰ Interview with Ingeborg Glier, 16 March 2001.

³¹ Barbara Deinhardt, Administrative Assistant to Elga Wasserman, note to Wasserman re: "Women's Studies," 14 July 1972. WGSF.

³² In February 1973, the office of the Special Assistant to the President for the Education of Women was disbanded, causing Elga Wasserman to lose her position. The office was replaced by a Committee on the Education of Women, led by Mary Arnstein until 1974. In the years after 1974, Committee work continued, often under slightly altered names. In 1978, as a result of lobbying efforts by the Undergraduate Women's Caucus, Judith Berman Brandenburg was hired as Associate Dean of Yale College for Women's Affairs. Brandenburg left her position in the mid-'80s.

1976, then Assistant Professor Nancy Cott taught “Topics in the History of American Family Life.”³³

Mobilization and Organization: 1976-1979

Fueled by the growing popularity of Women’s Studies courses – from Fall 1971-Spring 1976, student enrollments in relevant courses grew from 179 to 472 – as well as the infusion of new feminist scholars into the faculty, the Committee on the Education of Women added discussions concerning the possibility of a coordinated Women’s Studies program to their agenda. Professor Ingeborg Glier, hired in 1972 as the third tenured woman at Yale, sat on the Committee. Upon hearing discussions about Women’s Studies, she thought, “This must be a practical joke! Women’s Studies at Yale – you must be kidding!”³⁴ Yale was “still very much a male bastion,” she says. Yet as discussions progressed and Committee members learned more, they were “suddenly woken up to the enormous potential of the field,” says Glier. On a personal level, Glier expanded her work to teach a Fall 1977 class on contemporary women writers in East and West Germany.

Independent from the work of the Committee, women graduate students, faculty, and staff had convened in a group called the Women’s Forum. That spring, the Forum decided to appoint a “Women’s Studies Task Force,” composed of Nancy Cott, John Winkler, an assistant professor in Classics, and two delegates from the Undergraduate Women’s Caucus, Carol Mostow, Class of 1977, and Ruth Borenstein, Class of 1978. As her first task, Mostow attended a conference on Women’s Studies at Brooklyn College, which brought together scholars and administrators from across the country to discuss their work. Mostow was the only representative from an Ivy League institution, as well as the only participant from a

³³ “Courses in the Area of Women’s Studies Offered at Yale 1971-79.” WGSF.

school without a Women's Studies Program. During the conference, Mostow recalls that "the relative nature of what we learned at Yale versus what existed hit me." She was embarrassed that Women's Studies had no programmatic foundation at Yale: "Yale represented the pinnacle of Western learning, and yet there were these huge gaping holes that needed to be redressed. Fifty percent of the population was being disregarded. It was embarrassing."³⁵

While there was a feminist presence within the student body, Cott says, "I don't think that the level of student demand for women's studies was as high as, say for black studies ... Women at Yale College on the whole felt incredibly privileged to be here in the highest years of the Women's Movement."³⁶ Abbe Smith, a 1978 Special Divisional Major in Women's Studies who participated in the effort to form a full program, attributes this phenomenon to Yale's slow adjustment to co-education. "Yale wasn't even that comfortable with *women* at the time, much less Women's Studies," she says. "I wouldn't say it was a time of great receptivity for feminism or Women's Studies, but those who were involved were very passionate."³⁷

During the spring semester of 1976, the Task Force drafted recommendations for a "Program of Study About Women," and submitted their ideas to the Office on the Education

³⁴ Interview with Glier.

³⁵ Interview with Mostow.

³⁶ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000. Note: although there is not space to expand on it in this paper, the development of Black Studies programs in the 1960s eased the way for the subsequent development of Women's Studies programs in the 1970s and '80s. Says Johnnella E. Butler, one of the nation's foremost scholars in Black Studies and Women's Studies: "The Black Studies movement served as a catalyst for ... Women's Studies to challenge gender bias in the academy." Moreover, the administrative and curricular design of Black Studies provided distinct models for Women's Studies, says Catharine Stimpson: "Black studies and the larger black power movement ... made several significant contributions to the theory and practice of women's studies, providing an intellectual agenda for women's studies in its initial stages." For more on the subject, see, Johnnella E. Butler, "The Difficult Dialogue of Curriculum Transformation: Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies," from Butler and Walter, eds., *Transforming the Curriculum: Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991) p. 1, or Catharine Stimpson, *Women's Studies in the United States* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1986), p. 11.

³⁷ Interview with Abbe Smith, 16 March 2001.

of Women, then directed by Connie Gersick. After defending the principles of Women's Studies, the proposal outlined the framework for a program:

"The program here offered is designed to provide students with the assistance necessary to develop a course of study leading to advanced work on the experience of women. The program will coordinate courses about women, and permit students to progress through stages of increasingly demanding work. By fostering a community of scholars with shared interests, the program will introduce students to the contemporary investigation of important issues, stimulate research, and advance knowledge."³⁸

Upon their receipt of the proposal, the Committee encouraged the Task Force to focus on the development of a core introductory course in Women's Studies before attempting to create a full program. In April 1976, with the support of the Committee, the Task Force applied for \$4400 from the Moore Fund (an internal Yale fund devoted to curricular enhancement) to support the development of the core course. In a letter to the Yale College Steering Committee expressing support for the Task Force, Professor Kai Erikson, Chairman of the Committee on the Education of Women, stressed the importance of a "more systematic approach to women's studies" in order to "coordinate the haphazard array of short-lived courses that now constitutes Yale's offerings in the general area."³⁹ As the first step in the process of designing a program, the letter stated, the core course would "expose students to relevant findings and approaches to the study of women in a number of different fields."⁴⁰

While the Committee pursued normal channels to apply for initial funding, Mostow and other concerned undergraduates took a more controversial approach. At a rally outside of Woodbridge Hall during a meeting of the Yale Corporation, Mostow spoke about the importance of Women's Studies, and managed to arrange a meeting with the Corporation to lobby for financial support. The participation of undergraduates on the Task Force was "convenient," says Mostow. "We were the consumers," she says, "consequently, we could

³⁸ Yale Women's Studies Task Force (Nancy Cott, Jack Winkler, Carol Mostow, Ruth Borenstein), "Yale Women's Studies Task Force Recommendation for a Program of Study About Women," Spring 1976. WGSF.

³⁹ Kai Erikson, Chair, President's Advisory Committee on the Education of Women, letter to Yale College Steering Committee, re: "The Moore Fund," 6 April 1976. WGSF.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

act adolescent and noisy without getting any of the faculty into trouble.”⁴¹ This distinction would become increasingly important as the Committee neared a formal proposal to the University. With few exceptions, faculty on both the Task Force and the Committee were committed to presenting Women’s Studies as a purely academic venture, minimizing the field’s political undertones. “We purposely pitched the program, at least in all of its public justifications, to be as consistent with Yale’s aims as possible,” says Cott. “We did *not* pitch it as a feminist program.”⁴²

The core course, entitled “Feminism and Humanism,” was designed to be multidisciplinary, and the Task Force hoped to incorporate the expertise of faculty across Yale’s departments as guest lecturers. The original model was broken into seven sub-sections:

- I. Introduction: The Approach
- II. The Biological Basis
- III. Acculturation
- IV. Social Organization
- V. Production and Control of Resources
- VI. Sexuality
- VII. Feminism Around the World⁴³

Cott successfully negotiated for the course to be taught under American Studies, but the Task Force met numerous “roadblocks” in finding a lead instructor, including Cott’s inability to extract herself from departmental duties to teach the course.⁴⁴ Due to her support of the Task Force as well as earlier teaching, Catharine MacKinnon, a Law student and Ph.D. candidate in Political Science, was selected as the lead instructor. In its final report to the President in July 1977, the Office on the Education of Women praised the establishment of the new Women’s Studies course as groundbreaking:

Unlike most new courses, the appearance of this course represents at least three years of work by substantial numbers of women and a few men – students, faculty and administrators. On top of the

⁴¹ Interview with Mostow.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Women’s Studies Task Force, “Feminism and Humanism: An Introduction to Women’s Studies,” Original Proposal for Syllabus, 1976-77. WGSF.

⁴⁴ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

scholarly effort of the course designers, it required three years of carefully documented and plotted augmentation and a remarkable persistence of enthusiasm from the “grass roots.”⁴⁵

For a brief span from 1976-79, MacKinnon – now one of the nation’s foremost feminist scholars and legal experts – played a charismatic role in the formation of Yale’s Women’s Studies program. Even as a graduate student, MacKinnon had created a prominent place for herself as an activist and scholar at Yale and within New Haven. In Fall 1976, she taught a Residential College Seminar entitled “Socialism and/or Feminism.” Abbe Smith was a student in the course. At the time, she says, MacKinnon told the class that she defined herself as a Marxist, not a feminist, and the course focused in part on the experiences of women in China and Vietnam. Smith says that MacKinnon was a “brilliant seminar teacher,” yet she “questioned her commitment to Women’s Studies as a field.”⁴⁶

Upon her appointment to teach the core course MacKinnon became a lead figure in the Task Force and on the Committee for the Education of Women. In Fall 1977, American Studies 295a, “Feminism and Humanism,” was taught for the first time. Despite the careful planning efforts of the Task Force, MacKinnon “pretty much eviscerated the course that we had spent an entire year designing,” says Cott.⁴⁷ Mostow recalls observing the course with great dismay: “I had major problems with how she taught it. It felt much more like a political theory course, and didn’t have any of the overall well-roundedness that we had worked so hard to incorporate.”⁴⁸ The course attracted forty-four students and met mixed reviews.⁴⁹ Smith, who acted as a Teaching Assistant for the course, says, “I loved her, but

⁴⁵ Office on the Education of Women, Connie Gersick, Director. “Final Report,” July 1977. WGSF.

⁴⁶ Interview with Abbe Smith.

⁴⁷ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mostow.

⁴⁹ “Women’s Studies Course Data 1971-1979.” WGSF.

she stunk as a large classroom teacher. She's a very different, wonderful lecturer now, but she should have stuck with a seminar format."⁵⁰

Based upon criticism from the first run of the course, the next year, MacKinnon restructured the course, eliminated the high number of guest lecturers, and spread the content over two semesters. In her design of the course, MacKinnon emphasized the multiplicity of feminisms, and chose to analyze each section by employing three "approaches to feminism – liberal, radical, and left."⁵¹ MacKinnon's emphasis of multiple viewpoints was emblematic of the different and sometimes divergent perspective that she brought to the expansion of Women's Studies.

While members of the Task Force focused their energies on the development of the core course, planning for a full program in Women's Studies continued. In a March 1977 report to the Yale Corporation from the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus, Mostow wrote an impassioned plea for university support of a Women's Studies program. Building upon Cott's notion of a two-pronged program focused both on the specialization of a major and on curriculum-wide integration, Mostow wrote, "Although Yale has been slow to make an overall commitment to women's studies, there already exists here much potential for an exciting program, one which would both inform the broader curriculum and allow interested students to pursue advanced investigation in the field."⁵² "We knew that we really needed a base of strength," she says, "but if you were only that, then you were doomed to never make an impact."⁵³ In the closing sentences of her report to the Corporation, Mostow berated the

⁵⁰ Interview with Abbe Smith.

⁵¹ Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism and Humanism: An Introduction to Women's Studies," syllabus, Fall 1978. WGSF.

⁵² Carol Mostow, "Women's Studies," taken from "A Report to the Yale Corporation from the Yale Undergraduate Women's Caucus," March 1977. WGSF.

⁵³ Interview with Mostow.

University for its insufficient efforts to accommodate women undergraduates and faculty members:

The problems which have plagued women's studies at Yale are those which are basic to the status of women at Yale: the nagging marginality of women faculty enforced by tokenism, rapid turnover, isolation, the lack of an overall structure and the unwillingness of a male institution to reexamine its assumptions and priorities. A commitment to women's studies is both a commitment to women at Yale and a sign that the University is willing to engage in the fundamental task of higher learning. Yale must not only open classrooms, dormitories, playing fields and health services; it must also open minds.⁵⁴

In addition to lobbying for a Women's Studies program, members of the Caucus urged the Dean's office to hire an Associate Dean to serve as an advocate for women on campus. Following Wasserman's departure in 1973, no administrator had focused specifically on the concerns of women undergraduates. Carol Mostow, Ruth Borenstein, and Abbe Smith all sat on the committee to hire the new Dean. "We started thinking, 'why are we doing all of this for ourselves?,'" says Mostow. "We realized that we needed to try and make the institution start doing some of the things that we as independently organized undergraduates were doing."⁵⁵ The Caucus's efforts resulted in the hiring of Judith Berman Brandenburg as the Associate Dean of Yale College for Women's Affairs.

While the Task Force continued its efforts to design a program, MacKinnon retracted her support for a Spring 1978 proposal to the Course of Study Committee. Despite the efforts of the previous year, the ingredients for a successful program had not yet been gathered, said MacKinnon in a letter to the Task Force.⁵⁶ Her letter recommended that the proposal be delayed until the spring of 1979. MacKinnon's sentiments reflected the frustration of countless, sometimes fruitless, meetings and planning sessions:

As a group, we are small, not "impressive," and lack experience working together. Internally, we have not yet established coherence, considered our differences in approach or established political priorities for this program and our strategy for justifying it. Externally, we need to consolidate more backing and to build more legitimacy. Very few faculty support, or even know about, women's studies – which

⁵⁴ Mostow, "Women's Studies," March 1977.

⁵⁵ Interview with Mostow.

⁵⁶ Catharine MacKinnon, letter to Women's Studies Task Force. Fall 1977. Cott files.

is not surprising, since on the whole they were not brought here to do it. But we have to get the program through this faculty. I feel we are in no position for "the spring offensive."

Beyond her frustrations, MacKinnon voiced critical qualitative concerns for the program.

"Women's studies must be a good program if we want it to last. Its quality and survival are linked, both for good and bad reasons," she said. Based upon her suggestions, as well as shared concerns of other Committee members, efforts to submit a proposal were delayed until the spring of 1979.

During the spring of 1978, the Task Force's concerted planning efforts were paralleled by an increased emphasis on the issue of Women's Studies within the Committee on the Education of Women. Active members of the Committee included MacKinnon, Brandenburg, Borenstein, Daniel Rosner (Chemical Engineering), David Pilbeam (Anthropology/Geology and Geophysics), Silvia Arrom (History/American Studies), and Catherine Skinner, Master of Jonathan Edwards College, as Chair. The Committee focused on structural concerns such as funding, faculty participation, and course offerings, taking into account student interest based upon surveys and course evaluations from previous years. In addition, Committee members confronted central theoretical issues in Women's Studies as a means of educating themselves and as preparation to defend any future proposal before the Yale administration. During a Committee meeting run by MacKinnon in March, members discussed:

A. Justifications and criticisms of Women's Studies as a scholarly pursuit: to what social and intellectual needs is Women's Studies a response? Is it a valid one?

B. Women's Studies as a discipline versus Women's Studies as a subject area, with administrative parallels: a major? a joint major? a program? a department? assimilated into all courses? a concentration within existing major(s)?⁵⁷

Upon the recommendation of David Pilbeam, the Committee surveyed male and female faculty members about their opinions of Women's Studies in order to build a more

⁵⁷ Catherine MacKinnon, Memo to the Committee on the Education of Women re: "Women's Studies at Yale: A Suggested Discussion Outline," 8 March 1978. WGSF.

substantial base of support. Those who responded to the survey were, in large part, supportive. In a memo to the Committee, Cynthia Russett urged pragmatism over idealism in establishing the program, emphasizing the importance of diplomacy in approaching the Yale administration for support. "It is probably prudent not to scare the administration by making maximalist demands," she said.⁵⁸ On the premise that "there will always be those who doubt the wisdom of women's studies, or indeed of women's anything," Russett suggested that the Committee move away from theoretical discussions to focus on impending difficulties, primarily in faculty support of an inter-disciplinary program given "conflicting loyalties and commitments." She cogently outlined key concerns:

On the assumption for the moment that women's studies will be relying on extant faculty, what are there [*sic*] primary commitments? My own, to be perfectly frank, would, I think, continue to be to the history dept. I consider myself primarily a historian, who happens to have a lively interest in the kind of history that takes women into account. So whatever courses I might offer, I would think of them as history courses crosslisted in women's studies ... And since the history dept. is paying my salary, I'm sure that would be their expectation as well ... Last year Nancy Cott was strongly urged by undergraduates and interested faculty to take on the coordination of the core course in women's studies ... she finally had to decide that she could not, as it were, resign from, or secede from, American Studies and history, ... but had to meet her contractual obligations to those depts. ... It would be entirely counterproductive for women's studies to lose the services of interested faculty because they had failed to meet the criteria of their depts.⁵⁹

In a complementary survey of undergraduate organizations on campus, the Committee received support mitigated by concerns about the quality of teaching within Women's Studies courses. A letter from Yale College Council Vice-Chairman Chris Coley emphasized the qualitative problems of relying upon visiting lecturers and graduate students to teach the majority of Women's Studies. The Committee, he said, "should seriously examine the possibility of forming a separate Women's Studies Department with its own major. This would greatly enhance the chances of attracting the best professors to Yale, one of the current problems with Women's Studies."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Cynthia Russett, "Random Thoughts on Women's Studies," Spring 1978. WGSF.

⁵⁹ Russett, "Random Thoughts on Women's Studies," Spring 1978.

⁶⁰ Chris Coley, Vice-Chairman YCC, letter to Catherine Skinner, 3 April 1978. WGSF.

Unfortunately, Coley's call to hire the "best professors" in no way corresponded to Yale's strict hiring procedures. Even members of the Committee in support of Women's Studies emphasized that program-specific hiring would be virtually impossible, given departments' reluctance to share faculty hiring slots, compounded by a university-wide lack of resources. In response to a proposal within the Committee that faculty slots be donated to Women's Studies from other departments, Daniel Rosner, Professor of Chemical Engineering and a devoted member of the Committee, wrote a concerned memo to Skinner stating,

At a time when the Yale History of Science and Medicine Department is being dismantled, I cannot support any document that recommends "the creation of one new full time equivalent position in Women's Studies." To me, the fact that most Yale women will not assume leadership roles in the science and technology of tomorrow ... is far more important than whether or not our humanities-oriented freshmen have a wider variety of Women's Studies course offerings and faculty from which to choose!⁶¹

Rosner's letter indicates that many senior faculty were willing to support the establishment of Women's Studies, but only to a certain point. Moreover, Rosner's letter underscored a key dilemma: would the few women on Yale's faculty do more for women within their own departments or within Women's Studies? Harking back to Russett's concerns over "conflicting loyalties and commitments," it was becoming increasingly clear that Women's Studies would be supported only if it did not threaten to remove resources from other departments.

Based upon results of the student and faculty surveys, the Committee's Spring 1978 report stated, "a Program in Women's Studies leading to a major in Yale College should be instituted in 1979-80; it should be evaluated in 1984-85."⁶² In his response to the report, Yale College Dean Horace Taft indicated his personal support for the effort, while emphasizing the extent to which faculty politics would sway the Course of Study

⁶¹ Daniel Rosner, Memo to Catherine Skinner re: "Committee Recommendations," 5 June 1978. WGSF.

Committee's decision on a Women's Studies proposal. He encouraged the appointment of more senior faculty to the Committee and recommended that the position of Chairman be given to "a professor from the Humanities or the Social Sciences ... in order to maximize the impact of the Committee's recommendations."⁶³

In an effort to complement programmatic planning efforts, during the 1977-78 academic year, Nancy Cott had arranged for a set of ten Women's Studies courses to be offered during the 1978 Summer Term.⁶⁴ Women's Studies courses were listed together in the summer Program of Study guide, and Cott in her official role as "Program Coordinator" coordinated faculty participation and monitored student response; the Summer Term acted as a kind of test run of a Women's Studies program. Courses included John Winkler's "Sexual Politics in Literature," Mary Poovey's "Three Major Women Novelists: Austen, Eliot, Woolf," Faye Crosby's "The Psychology of Women," and Cott's "Women in the United States in the Twentieth Century," yielding a total enrollment of 119 men and women.⁶⁵

Evaluations circulated to students and faculty at the end of the summer term expressed general enthusiasm for the courses and strongly praised the structured coordination of the program. Faculty evaluations stressed the importance of integration across Women's Studies courses. Said one faculty member: "students appeared to be integrating concepts and knowledge from a variety of courses." Others voiced praise about the "colleagueship" generated between professors as a result of offering multiple courses simultaneously.

⁶² "Report from the Committee on the Education of Women at Yale: Spring 1978," pp. 5-10.

⁶³ Horace D. Taft, Dean of Yale College, letter to Catherine Skinner, 22 June 1978. WGSF.

⁶⁴ The entire 1978 Summer Term was somewhat experimental to see if a more robust summer term should be offered by Yale, says Cott. More academic courses were taught than usual, and faculty were allowed to exchange teaching during the summer term with teaching during a regular term.

⁶⁵ "Yale College Summer Term 1978," course listings under the heading "Jointly Sponsored Programs (Humanities - Social Sciences): Women's Studies," pp. 61-63; Nancy Cott, "The Women's Studies Program, Summer Term 1978," appendix to the Proposal for a Women's Studies Program at Yale, Fall 1978. WGSF.

Faculty respondents voiced mixed feelings about the inter-disciplinary nature of the Women's Studies offerings. Said one response, "Students came from many outside disciplines, as usual. Makes for less homogeneously-grounded but more interesting group." The one recurring complaint was that students did not take courses listed under women's studies as seriously as courses within traditional disciplines. "While [students] were most interested in women's issues, they seemed to not take the subject too seriously," said one instructor. And while all faculty expressed support for the establishment of a Women's Studies program at Yale, a few voiced corresponding concerns about academic rigor. Said one, "if a program were established, a lot of less serious students might flock to it as an apparently (deceptively) easy major."⁶⁶

Students echoed the mixed reactions to the diverse backgrounds of those interested in Women's Studies offerings. Far more pronounced, however, were many students' concerns over certain faculty members' lack of training in Women's Studies. Wrote one: "I have reservations now because faculty seem ill-prepared to do it at this point." "One factor that I feel must be considered ... is the instructor's qualifications," said another. Another response suggested that instructors tried to transfer the lessons of their disciplines to Women's Studies without understanding concepts and techniques specific to the field: "... the teachers must be carefully selected and must know what women's studies is – see it as a part of a complete social criticism and awareness, not just as pat formulas."

On the other hand, when asked whether or not Yale should offer a program in Women's Studies, student responses were overwhelmingly positive. The following is a sampling of responses:

- "A women's studies program would encourage the development of a sound, flexible theoretical framework for studying the role and function of women in society."

⁶⁶ All results taken directly from anonymous student and faculty evaluations; I sampled 8 faculty evaluations and 73 student evaluations in total. WGSF.

- "I think women's studies is 'real' and valuable in its own right. How would I justify some other valuable course – why someone benefits from reading Shakespeare or studying economics or the French Revolution?"

- "Formerly, I would have objected to a program based on sex, but this course convinced me that there is much more to women's studies than a chance for hot headed feminists to study feminism ... I strongly feel that the peculiar absence of references to women in history in a meaningful way affects the current nature of male/female roles, and women's studies can be useful to both men and women who want a clearer understanding of how they are currently affected by the historical inequality of the sexes."

That summer, Cott also worked to bring national attention to Yale's Women's Studies efforts, and with the support of the Summer Planning Office, she organized an "Open Conversation" with Catharine Stimpson, founder and editor of *SIGNS* and one of the nation's leading scholars in Women's Studies.⁶⁷ Bringing a prominent figure such as Stimpson to Yale sent a strong message connecting Yale with the cutting edge of the Women's Studies movement. "Everything that we did in forming Women's Studies was with a consciousness that we were a part of a national trend," says Cott.⁶⁸

In line with Cott's vision for Yale's program, Stimpson emphasized the importance of academic rigor in Women's Studies teaching and scholarship.⁶⁹ Cott and Stimpson discussed the foundations and challenges of Women's Studies before a group of students and faculty members; the conversation was recorded and publicized. Many of Cott's questions, including "What is the influence of the political on Women's Studies?" and "Should Women's Studies be institutionalized within the academy?," steered Stimpson towards responses that might allay the fears of those reluctant to accept such a relatively new field into Yale's curriculum.⁷⁰ The two-hour conversation touched upon countless themes relevant

⁶⁷ Founded in 1975 by Stimpson, *SIGNS* was the first widely respected journal focused on feminist scholarship. Cott says that the formation of *SIGNS* was very helpful in demonstrating to Yale's faculty that feminist scholarship could pass academic muster. Says Cott: "*SIGNS* was important because it was very high brow and had very high intellectual content and research content." Source: Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

⁶⁸ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ "A Conversation between Nancy Cott and Catharine Stimpson," June 1978, quotes transcribed from taped conversation. Tapes courtesy of WGSF; The following are excerpts from Stimpson's responses to the two questions: (1) "There are people who believe ... that if an academic movement has [a political movement] as one of its historical causes, it must necessarily be distorted and biased – that you cannot be politically

to Women's Studies, including Black Studies, cultural and historical periodization, "the redemption of the everyday" in literature and history, women's subculture, homosexuality, and images of women as victims versus heroes.⁷¹ During the discussion, Cott demonstrated her mastery of the field, sometimes even correcting Stimpson about authors and dates, adding to her growing reputation as a leading figure in Women's Studies. Following her visit to Yale, Stimpson would continue to be involved in Yale's program as a participant and evaluator.

Throughout that summer, members of the Committee on the Education of Women and the Women's Studies Task Force continued planning efforts to submit a full proposal to the Course of Study Committee the following scholastic year. During this time, rifts within the committee became particularly pronounced. Glier, who was working with the Committee, recalls disagreements between "those who were more activists and those who were more scholars," as well as divisions over the extent to which the Committee should play into the "politics" of the university.⁷² In a fiery letter written to Catherine Skinner in September 1978, MacKinnon heavily criticized an early draft of the Women's Studies proposal:

I am somewhat disturbed by the overall tone of merchandising and elitism with which the arguments are presented – the combination of let's make sure we don't miss out on this exciting new development with here's one more way we can consolidate our position at the top. I would have preferred a stronger emphasis ... upon the intrinsic merits [of Women's Studies] ... I know that this was a conscious decision on your part, and that it was done intentionally and strategically, thinking that this was the most persuasive way to address the audience we need to move. If I were they, I would see right through it.⁷³

committed to feminist causes and wholly objective in academic terms. I happen to believe that's false"; (2) "What women's studies has done that makes it different is its systematic quality. So that the people in Women's Studies are not the first to say 'we must rethink these issues,' but that it has a systematic and institutionalized quality that it lacked before."

⁷¹ On "redemption of the everyday," Stimpson says, "One of the things that Women's Studies is asking us to do ... is to redeem the ordinary – the redemption of the everyday ... and to see the texture of history as consisting of small and domestic details. It's making the trivial lyric ... rethink[ing] our notion of scales in historical and cultural terms." Source: "A Conversation between Nancy Cott and Catharine Stimpson," June 1978.

⁷² Interview with Glier.

⁷³ Catharine MacKinnon, letter to Catherine Skinner, 1 September 1978. WGSF.

Despite inter-personal conflicts, the restructuring of the Committee for the 1978-79 academic year raised the prospects of pushing through a proposal. Of key importance, Dean Horace Taft joined the Committee and encouraged several other senior faculty to add their names to the proposal. In a letter to Cott (who was on leave during the fall term) following the first meeting of the new Committee, MacKinnon wrote, "We have the support and clout we just did not have last year to make me conclude ... that we should go straight ahead."⁷⁴ In another letter to Cott later that fall, MacKinnon reiterated the importance of strong administrative and senior faculty support. "I am just somewhat overwhelmed at the difference it has made to have built in some senior support, to have some people with some clout on our side – including Taft, really – It lifts the whole cycle of depression/powerlessness/despair/inferiority etc. that somehow hung over the task force. That I felt when I called off the whole initiative last year," she said.⁷⁵

Despite renewed optimism, MacKinnon was worried about the ability of current Yale faculty members to effectively teach Women's Studies, underscoring the need for outside funding to support new hiring.⁷⁶ The minutes of the October 10 meeting at which Taft spoke reinforced this concern: "[Dean Taft] saw two problems facing Women's Studies: 1) academic approval and justification, and 2) funding ... It is not a good time at Yale for new proposals. Even if the Committee would produce a good case, the faculty will argue they don't have funds or teachers to spare."⁷⁷

By the beginning of 1979, part of the Committee began concerted work on drafting a proposal to be submitted at the end of the semester. At the same time, other Committee members tried to ensure that the Program could be carried out upon approval through faculty

⁷⁴ MacKinnon, letter to Cott, 10 October 1978. Cott files.

⁷⁵ MacKinnon, letter to Cott, 2 November 1978. Cott files.

⁷⁶ MacKinnon, letter to Cott, 10 October 1978.

⁷⁷ Committee on the Education of Women, "Minutes of the Meeting," 10 October 1978. WGSF.

recruitment efforts within Yale, curriculum planning, and outside funding inquiries. During this time, growth continued on the classroom level, aided by the appointment of new faculty members, including Margaret Homans in English.

In early April 1979, the Committee on the Education of Women and the Women's Studies Task Force formally submitted a proposal for a Women's Studies Program at Yale. In the approved terms of the proposal, the program would "operate on an experimental basis for five years."⁷⁸ The proposal outlined the objectives of Women's Studies as aimed at both specialization, with the hopes of eventually establishing a major, and integration across the curriculum; this two-pronged mission would be carried out, in part, through the interdisciplinary nature of the affiliated courses. The lengthy proposal included past listings of Women's Studies courses, evaluations from the Summer 1978 term, proposals for new courses, statistics on student interest and enrollment, sample major paths, and national comparisons of Yale's program to those at other prestigious universities.⁷⁹

On 30 April 1979, David Pilbeam and Judith Brandenburg released the following statement to the Committee on the Education of Women:

We are delighted to report that, based on the proposal of the Committee on the Education of Women, the Course of Study Committee will recommend to the faculty the establishment of a Women's Studies Program at Yale for 5 years and has approved in principle the establishment of a Women's Studies major to be formally proposed or 1980-81.⁸⁰

"The program easily went through. We didn't have a lot of difficulty," says Cott.⁸¹

Nonetheless, the challenges of creating a sustainable program with firm scholarly and administrative grounding remained.

⁷⁸ Committee on the Education of Women, David Pilbeam, Chairman, "Proposal for a Women's Studies Program at Yale," April 1979. WGSF.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ David Pilbeam and Judith Berman Brandenburg, Memo to Committee on the Education of Women, re: "Women's Studies Proposal," 30 April 1979. WGSF.

⁸¹ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

Implementation and Capacity Building: 1979-1989

The program operated on a small scale during its first year. French Professor Gillian Gill agreed to serve as the program's D.U.S. and History Professor Emilia da Costa filled the need for senior faculty as the Director. But without a major or designated faculty appointees, structural changes comprised little more than the addition of an upper level seminar, the designation of a Women's Studies Council, a D.U.S., and a small office space.⁸²

Nonetheless, the Committee had succeeded in breaking down the largest barrier in the path towards building a strong program. An early 1980 progress report stated that in the past year "simply by gaining a label and an administrative façade comparable to other programs, Women's Studies became a more prominent feature of the Campus landscape and a more common topic of discussion in the press, in the college dining halls, senior common rooms, and student suites all over Yale."⁸³

As anticipated, young, untenured faculty taught the majority of Women's Studies courses. "It was a group who didn't have a lot of stability at Yale," says Cott, "but we had a lot of energy, and we had these classes we wanted to teach, and so that was our major stake in the program."⁸⁴ Although the Council was comprised of senior faculty members who supported Women's Studies, few actually taught courses within the program.⁸⁵ The Core Faculty Committee, consisting of Silvia Arrom, Nancy Cott, Faye Crosby, Margaret Homans, Barbara Johnson, Lydia Kung, Catharine MacKinnon, Susan Olzak, and Mary Poovey, represented those most active in teaching courses.

⁸² Gillian C. Gill, "Report and Recommendations on the Status of the Women's Studies Program," 13 February 1980. WGSF.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

⁸⁵ Gill, "Report and Recommendations on the Status of the Women's Studies Program." 13 February 1980. WGSF.

In order to fulfill the second piece of the program's mission – the integration of scholarship across other disciplines – the Women's Studies Council and Core Faculty encouraged outside faculty to list relevant courses under Women's Studies. In addition, as an effort to "facilitate communication among people interested in this area," surveys were sent to faculty and graduate students in all departments asking if they "would be interested in doing research related to women and women's studies," the surveys received many positive responses.⁸⁶ Several respondents informed Gill of work they had already been conducting that related to Women's Studies or, more broadly, to women's issues.

At the beginning of the spring term, Women's Studies faculty and students began evaluating the program's first months in order to develop a plan of action for the coming scholastic year. An assembly of concerned students called the Women's Studies Student Advisory Group highlighted the critical need for a major: "the Special Divisional Major has proven bureaucratically cumbersome ... [each major] has to form her own intellectual community, which isolates her and limits her support in the university."⁸⁷

The Advisory Group also expressed concern over the uniformity and merit of courses listed under Women's Studies. Based upon the program's first semester, the Advisory Group questioned whether faculty who had received no specific training in the field could credibly participate in the program. In response, they suggested: "Courses to be listed/cross-listed under Women's Studies should be subject to rigorous examination to determine their

⁸⁶ Brandenburg, on behalf of the Women's Studies Council, Memo to Department and Program Chairpersons, Deans of the Graduate and Professional Schools, re: "Research interest in scholarship on women," 8 November 1979. WGSF. Note: One must assume that those who chose to respond had a strong interest in Women's Studies; those who were opposed or indifferent to the new program likely chose not to respond to the survey. Sample response from Joseph F. Lowenstein, Professor of English, 14 November 1979, to the question, Are you interested in developing future research, offering a course, or making other contributions to the new Women's Studies Program?: "Yes, very much. I'd be interested in working up a course on Images of Women on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage, and also would like to try an upper-level composition course in Writing on Feminist Issues." WGSF.

⁸⁷ Women's Studies Student Advisory Group, "Statement of Goals," 11 February 1980. WGSF.

appropriateness for the discipline/endeavor of Women's Studies."⁸⁸ While seemingly logical, the Advisory Group's proposed solution overlooked the challenges of creating a new program. The program needed to be able to list a critical mass of related courses in order to support their upcoming bid for a major.⁸⁹ Moreover, says Glier, "What we wanted to avoid from the very beginning was having some kind of censorship – maybe looking back on it we should have been a bit stricter – but we were very reluctant to be that kind of censor – the idea was sort of to nurture and protect this huge field, and to nurture *by example*."⁹⁰

In her discussion of leading "by example," Glier cites Cott as the prime model of a faculty participant who fulfilled all of the demands of her department while contributing to Women's Studies. Upon her return to Yale in the spring of 1980, Cott reestablished her central role within the program and began lobbying for faculty appointments. Cott possessed both a firm understanding of the idiosyncratic operations of a university and a no-nonsense entrepreneurial drive – a rare and powerful combination in an academic setting, which helped to jumpstart the program as it entered its second year.

As of February 1980, prospects of gaining a much-needed junior faculty appointment looked dim. In a letter to the Core Faculty, D.U.S. Gill said, "It seems virtually certain that the incremental Junior Faculty half-slot urgently requested this year and last year by the Council of Women's Studies will be rejected by the Provost."⁹¹ Taking advantage of concern over departmental sharing of faculty with Women's Studies, Cott successfully

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ "Brandenburg pointed out that what strengthens the push for a major in any discipline is the availability of courses, that Women's Studies cannot afford to be too restrictive, and that solicitation for courses in Women's Studies must bear in mind the academic freedom of instructors, to prevent their resistance and further their cooperation with the Program." Source: Women's Studies Core Faculty, "Minutes of Meeting," 13 February 1980. WGSF.

⁹⁰ Interview with Glier.

⁹¹ Gill, "Report and Recommendations on the Status of the Women's Studies Program," 13 February 1980.

convinced newly appointed Dean Howard Lamar to grant half of a junior position to

Women's Studies. In a February 1980 letter, Cott demonstrated her savvy negotiating skills:

Only the creation of a Women's Studies position whose occupant would be DUS and teach the two-semester introductory course (and another course either for Women's Studies or for a department) will allow the Program to proceed with certainty from year to year. In the absence of such a position, filling the needs of the Women's Studies Program requires attracting faculty members away from their loyalties and obligations in their current departments (repeatedly, year after year), and relying on those departments good will and sacrifice to provide released time."⁹²

With Lamar's approval, Cott began searching for a department with which to share an appointment. At the time, MacKinnon was the prime candidate for the position as she could easily fill the roll of D.U.S. and instructor of the two-term introductory course. Cott first approached David Mahew in Political Science, asking if the department would be interested in "hiring '1/3 of [MacKinnon]'" to fill their need for a "public law" specialist.⁹³ Soon after Cott's petition, MacKinnon accepted an offer at Stanford, and Political Science offered the "public law" position to Rogers Smith.⁹⁴

Independent of the faculty search, Cott and the Women's Studies Council began looking for outside financial support to fund the program's expansion. In the spring of 1980, Cott submitted an application for a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) "Pilot Grant" to fund a Faculty Development Seminar, as well as other discrete costs. The grant was approved for \$42,000 that summer. The purpose of the seminar was: "to enable its participants to develop their expertise in Women's Studies within their own disciplines and in interdisciplinary pursuits; to serve as a forum for discussion of the methodology and intellectual foundations of Women's Studies; and to outline the design of an advanced course for senior majors in Women's Studies to be offered in the fall of 1981."⁹⁵ The grant provided funding for "released-time-slots" in the spring of 1981, enabling faculty members to reduce

⁹² Cott, letter to Howard Lamar, 21 February 1980. WGSF.

⁹³ Cott, letter to David Mayhew, Chairman, Political Science Department, 15 April 1980. WGSF.

⁹⁴ David Mayhew, letter to Nancy Cott, 5 May 1980. WGSF.

⁹⁵ Cott, letter to the Core Faculty in Women's Studies, 16 October 1980. WGSF.

their course loads while taking the seminar.⁹⁶ The grant also provided for visiting lecturers, guest speakers, and the expansion of Sterling Memorial Library's services to host Women's Studies researchers.

In addition to Cott's efforts as a driving force in Women's Studies teaching and administration, strong support from the Dean's office facilitated the program's expansion in its second year. "Howard Lamar was a crucial presence and an amazingly good ally," says Cott, "I don't think we would have even gotten off the ground without his support."⁹⁷ Lamar, a colleague of Cott's in History, clearly respected her efforts to strengthen Women's Studies. In a May 1980 letter to Cott confirming her appointment as Chair of the program, he said, "Whether or not we get the NEH grant, I am excited by the prospect of a strong Women's Studies Program at Yale. If we do it right the program will be internationally famous."⁹⁸ In the same letter, he emphasized his office's support of the program:

Every new program needs allies to forward its goals. I hope that you will consider the Dean's Office as such an ally. Not only am I personally committed to developing the Women's Studies program, I know that my colleague, Judith Brandenburg, will do everything possible to support it. In order to assist you in the most efficient way I would like to continue her as a member of the Women's Studies council. Her office can be invaluable when it comes to grants, University contacts and the like.⁹⁹

In Fall 1980, the program offered three new core courses, including Margaret Homans' "Women's Perspectives on Literature" and Cott's "Women's History: Methodological and Comparative Inquiry." In October, the President's office decided to allot a portion of a \$1.5 million Mellon Foundation Grant to junior appointments in Women's Studies. Cott proposed that the funds support three junior half-slots in French, Philosophy,

⁹⁶ In her 1980-81 Annual Report to the President, Cott discussed the seminar: "The Seminar was a resounding success, an intellectual goad to all the participants. The group met weekly and shared readings and discussions of texts, themes, and questions in Women's Studies ... The Seminar necessitated thinking not only about specific curricular offerings but about the intellectual foundations of Women's Studies ... The Seminar provided a forum for testing ideas, an opportunity for exchange, a mode of commitment to Women's Studies. Its aims, to stimulate the teaching and research of its participants, to articulate goals and procedures for the undergraduate program, and to improve and solidify the design and content of the Women's Studies senior seminar ... have all been realized."

⁹⁷ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

⁹⁸ Howard Lamar, letter to Nancy Cott, 9 May 1980. WGSF.

and History of Science. She encouraged the development of half-slots over full slots, stating, "the interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies is best served by a Program format using the talents of faculty members jointly with other departments and programs." Her other arguments for half-slots were that they would solve the continuity problem of a rotating D.U.S. position by increasing the number of faculty participants, disperse "new scholarship on women" into several departments, and help Yale increase its total number of female faculty members. In the final paragraph of her Mellon proposal, Cott made a powerful pitch for support of Women's Studies. Far from a fledgling entity, Cott said, Yale's Women's Studies program could be a forceful presence both on campus and nationally:

The remarkable progress that Women's Studies has made at Yale in the past few years, despite budgetary constraints, owes to its inherent intellectual force. In every field scholars concentrating on women's presence, roles or issues have compelled their colleagues to look at received knowledge anew; have initiated searches for new data; have hypothesized new paradigms. The transformation in knowledge that Women's Studies will cause to evolve may be as great a one as the transformation of the religious/classical curriculum by scientific knowledge one hundred years ago. Yale will want to remain on the frontiers of this new knowledge ... Yale does not have the first Women's Studies Program, but it may yet be said to have the best in the country if a few crucial resources are provided.¹⁰⁰

Despite Cott's defense of the program, the university provided funding for only one half-slot in French, which was given to Helene Wenzel.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, Cott's statements demonstrated the strong, enterprising spirit that she and her colleagues brought to the expansion of the program.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Cott, "Women's Studies Program Proposal for use of Mellon grant funds," submitted to Ellen Ryerson, Associate Provost, 13 November 1980. WGSF.

¹⁰¹ Wenzel's joint French and Women's Studies appointment stipulated a three-year term with the possibility of reappointment/promotion; however, "for promotion to tenure it would be necessary to have a senior 'slot' available to the department in your field; it is only fair to say that from the present vantage point it seems unlikely that such a possibility for promotion into the tenure ranks would become available." Her responsibilities in Women's Studies were stated as: "you will teach the introductory course ... and either a course of your design or the advanced seminar, as your course load permits. Your responsibilities .. will often include the administrative position of Director of Undergraduate Studies ... There is a possibility that you will also be asked to chair the Women's Studies Program in the spring of 1982, when Nancy Cott is on leave of absence." Source: Charles Porter and Nancy Cott, letter to Helene Wenzel, 20 May 1981. WGSF.

By the end of the 1980-81 academic year, enrollments in Women's Studies courses had leapt from 571 to 811 students.¹⁰² In April 1981, the Women's Studies Council submitted a proposal for a major to the Course of Study Committee and to the Yale College Faculty. In designing the proposal, Cott had been instructed by Provost Georges May that the establishment of a major in Women's Studies could incur no additional costs for the University.¹⁰³ In a letter to May, Cott assured him that the major would be fiscally viable. "It should cost the University no more, as I see it, for the Women's Studies Program to offer a major than for the Women's Studies program simply to exist, as it now does," she said.¹⁰⁴ The program would seek continued outside funding, but as a trade off for incurring no University costs, Cott asked for May's strong support of the bid for a major. "I think that the establishment of a major in Women's Studies will be a compelling feature of future applications for outside funding ... all of the outside sources (governmental or private) will fund innovative academic projects or curricula only if they see that the institution involved is in full support, and is willing to continue the gains made through innovation."¹⁰⁵ Again, Cott closed her letter to May with a forceful statement about the place of Women's Studies at Yale:

The most cohesive approach to understanding the new scholarship on women lies in an interdisciplinary program such as the Women's Studies major proposes. Yale has the opportunity here to continue the tradition of innovative interdisciplinary studies that it established with American Studies in the 1940s, international area studies in the 1950s and 1960s, and Afro-American Studies in the 1970s. To abandon this possibility would be to sacrifice Yale's place at the forefront of scholarly advance.¹⁰⁶

Cott underestimated the full implications of her agreement with May, and the lack of expanded university financial support would prove increasingly detrimental to the program

¹⁰² Cott, "Report to the President and the Fellows of Yale University on the Women's Studies Program," June 1981. Women's Studies classes are counted as "courses mounted by the Women's Studies Program and those offered in other departments but listed as Women's Studies." WGSF.

¹⁰³ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Cott, letter to Georges May, 23 April 1981. WGSF.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

once Cott's fundraising efforts subsided in the late '80s. "I was young and naïve at the time," says Cott, "I don't think I realized at all what a big issue funding was, especially with regards to faculty appointments."¹⁰⁷

Due to a lack of time before the end of the year, the major proposal had to be resubmitted to the Course of Study Committee in October of the next term, at which point it was approved. In November, the proposal transferred to the Yale College Faculty for approval. Three days before the November 5 meeting of the Faculty, an anonymous note appeared in the boxes of all faculty members satirizing the Women's Studies proposal; it was soon discovered that the author was English professor Leslie Brisman. The memo stated:

Before a vote is taken on the proposed major in Women's Studies, the Committee for the Ruination of Academic Programs (CRAP) requests that you give no less serious consideration to the following:

Proposed Major in Grossness

Recent scholarship has made it clear that full understanding of human behavior, culture and society cannot be attained without investigating the phenomenon of weightiness. In the field of Studies in Grossness, size is proposed as a fundamental category of social and cultural analysis. This necessitates new empirical research on adiposity, skyscrapers, long novels, monstrous symphonies, Hegelian philosophy, inflationary economics, and a host of other phenomena whose complex interconnections are neglected by existing finds and theory ...

... In its gross delineation's ... the proposal has all the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal for an undergraduate major in Women's Studies, and the two proposals should stand or fall together at the meeting of the faculty on November 5.¹⁰⁸

Despite what she call "scurrilous" intentions, Cott says that the letter's appearance actually aided their proposal to the Faculty.¹⁰⁹ "People thought it was in such bad taste and had gone so far over the line that others didn't want to be heard badmouthing the Women's Studies proposal," she says.¹¹⁰ According to Cott, at the faculty meeting, several professors, including David Montgomery and Gaddis Smith gave "eloquent exhortations" in favor of Women's Studies, and the proposal was passed by a large majority. Nonetheless, Cott left

¹⁰⁶ Cott, letter to May, 23 April 1981.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous letter to Members of the Yale College Faculty, November 1980. Cott files.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

program had a lot to do with our not linking up with the Women's Center," says Cott. "Our relationship was pretty radically bifurcated ... it was kind of mutual – they had their agenda, we had our agenda ... the faculty agreed that the whole *raison d'être* of the student organization was different."¹¹⁶

Emboldened by the approval of the major, in Fall 1982, Cott sought to expand NEH funds to the program through a multi-year "Implementation Grant." With the support of the Women's Studies Council and Core Faculty, Cott became the Principal Investigator for the NEH grant and submitted a full proposal. In January 1983, the NEH announced that it would award Women's Studies \$170,044 for a three-year project entitled, "Strengthening Women's Studies at Yale."¹¹⁷ The primary goal of the Implementation Grant was to encourage faculty to either develop new courses in Women's Studies or to revise standard courses to include scholarship on women or feminist perspectives. Prior to applying for the grant, solicitations were sent to individual faculty members seeking applications to participate in the initiative. Several prominent professors on campus, including Gaddis Smith and Jonathan Spence applied to participate. Upon receipt of the grant, participants were given funds to support either summer stipends or graduate assistants to aid in the design/revision of their courses.¹¹⁸ Beyond monetary support, Richard Brodhead, an active English professor and participant in the grant, felt that the project's greatest accomplishment was bringing together a new intellectual community. "The fun of it was that you had these meetings and people could talk about their work ... there were real surprises, for example, when you discovered that Gaddis Smith was going to study women left at home on shore in his Maritime History class," he

support its claim that "A Women's Studies major offers solely an ideology" – and, indeed, cannot do so, for there is not supporting evidence in the structure or substance of the Women's Studies Program."

¹¹⁶ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

¹¹⁷ Yale contributed all of the "indirect costs" (i.e. infrastructural costs) of the grant, raising the total value of the project to \$340,968.

says.¹¹⁹ The grant also enabled the program to hire a part-time administrative assistant, to fund guest speakers and lecturers, and to expand the Women's Studies Lunchtime Series, which in Fall 1984 was opened up to graduate students as an effort to increase the program's presence in the Graduate School.¹²⁰

The NEH grant provided a major boost to the program at Yale; nationally, the program's successful attainment of such generous outside funding was considered groundbreaking. Says Cott, "Nationally, the grant made a big splash, and a lot of schools thought of Yale as a real leader in women's studies."¹²¹ Cott, perhaps modestly, attributes the attention more to "the power of elite institutions" than to genuine innovation on the part of Yale's program. "At the time, I thought that we were way behind national Women's Studies trends," she says.¹²² She admits, however, that the actual design of the grant to focus on both mainstreaming Women's Studies scholarship and making the program's offerings more robust was unique.

On the student level, Women's Studies was developing a small but devoted core of majors. Allison Coleman, Class of 1984, was part of the first group of majors. She says that she and many of her peers gravitated towards Women's Studies due to infuriation over the "lack of integration of women across the curriculum." Beyond expanding opportunities for gender analysis, Coleman says, "Women's Studies gave me the ability to think critically and creatively ... there was a constant questioning of the bounds of what we knew, and that has stayed with me for life." She also recalls that the program's early majors were very aware of

¹¹⁸ Cott, letter to All Faculty Associated with the NEH grant re: "Strengthening Women's Studies at Yale," 20 January 1983. WGSF.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Richard Brodhead, 22 March 2001.

¹²⁰ "In an effort to turn attention and resources to Yale women at the graduate level, the Women's studies Program is turning our Lunchtime Series for 1984-85 into an open forum for Yale University graduate students to present their research findings and works-in-progress (term papers, dissertations) dealing with any and all studies of women's lives and feminism." Source: Helene Wenzel, Memo to all Directors of Graduate Studies re: "Women's Studies Program Lunchtime Series 1984-85," 12 September 1984. WGSF.

¹²¹ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

their place as curricular trailblazers: "Everything was *new* and there was such energy ... Women's Studies was really reshaping how people thought."¹²³

In March 1984, Helene Wenzel and Nancy Cott submitted the program's five-year evaluation to the Course of Study Committee, as demanded in the 1979 approval of the program. The report discussed the program's continued problems of inadequate financial and administrative support from the University.¹²⁴ Chief among the complaints was Women's Studies' crippling lack of hiring power, which, according to Cott and Wenzel, prevented strong and confident administrative management: "The fluctuation in numbers of crosslisted courses indicates the passive position that the Women's Studies Program as an administrative entity occupies with regard to crosslisted courses. Without appointment powers or a hiring budget, the Women's Studies Program can exercise no control over fluctuation in numbers or quality of such courses."¹²⁵ Relying on other departments for the majority of cross-listed courses was increasingly frustrating; but at such a hierarchical place as Yale, junior faculty administrators and participants could not confidently monitor quality control of courses.¹²⁶ Cott and Wenzel expressed cautious hope that the NEH courses would heighten the quality and consistency of offerings.

In a response to Cott and Wenzel, Craig Wright, Chairman of the Course of Study Committee, praised the update's focus on both strengths and weaknesses in the program:

It would seem that the ultimate success of Women's Studies is almost wholly dependent on the allocation of positions exclusively to this program, so that those who direct it do not continually have to "beg, borrow and steal" faculty from other departments to staff courses. As you know, it is not within the powers of the Course of Study Committee to provide such teaching lines. We can only observe that from the point of view of academic soundness Women's Studies appears to be in excellent

¹²² Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

¹²³ Interview with Allison Coleman, 19 March 2001.

¹²⁴ Cott and Wenzel, Memo to Course of Study Committee re: "Women's Studies Program 1979-1984," 30 March 1984. WGSF.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Laura Green, a former assistant English professor who served as D.U.S. from 1998-2000, says that this problem persists: "I question whether or not junior faculty should even be D.U.S. because you are asked to make decisions that you don't have the authority to make." Source: Interview with Green, 19 March 2001.

health. It enjoys steady enrollments, a large and varied number of course offerings, and a leadership that seems thoughtful, creative, and energetic.¹²⁷

In addition to Wright's positive assessment, the April 1984 report of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Advisory Committee on the Education of Women (also known as the "Crothers/Borroff Report"), which addressed the University's desperate need for more tenured women, gave the program strong praise, emphasizing its importance to women faculty members: "Our discussions with both tenured and non-tenured women revealed the importance of the Women's Studies Program ... in influencing their perceptions of Yale. The Program brings together those who share an interest in scholarship on women, and demonstrates Yale's interest in this field."¹²⁸ The report recommended that the administration commit funds to ensure the program's longevity.

The success of the early '80s brought attention to Cott's presence in the program. "There would not have been a Women's Studies program if it weren't for the fact that Nancy [Cott] wanted to make it happen," says Margaret Homans.¹²⁹ A glowing *YDN* profile in February 1983 raved, "37-year old Cott has good reason for self assurance. She is one of the 16 women on Yale's faculty to hold a tenured position, and the only woman in Yale College to chair an academic program. Under her leadership, the Women's Studies Program, with a budget of over a third of a million, is growing rapidly."¹³⁰ The two-pronged approach that flowered during her time as Chair received national acclaim. An October 1983 *Newsweek* article credited Yale's program as being part of the effort to bring Women's Studies "out of the academic ghetto."¹³¹ Even Catharine Stimpson, one of Cott's early role models, recognized Cott's leadership. In her 1982 evaluation of the NEH Pilot Grant, Stimpson

¹²⁷ Craig Wright, letter to Nancy Cott and Helene Wenzel, 24 April 1984. WGSF.

¹²⁸ Report of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Advisory Committee on the Education of Women, Donald Crothers, Chairman, April 1984.

¹²⁹ Interview with Margaret Homans, 8 December 2001.

addressed Cott directly: "I admired the intellectual clarity and the deftness of your own leadership. The major question I had about it was who might replace you, when you wish to step down, and what planning for that unhappy eventuality might be going on."¹³²

Three years later, in her interim evaluation of the NEH Implementation Grant, Stimpson reiterated her concerns about the program's reliance on a small group of leaders, including Cott, and emphasized Yale's need to make a strong faculty commitment to the program:

The Yale Women's Studies program is one of the most reputable in the United States. However, as you know, the next year at Yale will bring some major administrative changes. You will be away for a year. Howard Lamar will leave his Deanship. Judith Brandenburg [sic] will have left the University altogether. Everyone concerned with the new scholarship about women will need to insure that a year of transition will end with the same degree of institutional support for women's studies as the year when it began ... The rigor and care and braininess of your program, and of your successor for the year, Margaret Homans, deserve no less than the maintaining of that momentum.¹³³

A few months earlier, Ingeborg Glier, then Chairman of the Women's Studies Council and a member of the committee that released the "Crothers/Borroff Report" eight months earlier, reiterated the danger of taking for granted Cott's commitment to the program.¹³⁴ Said Glier, "Women's Studies, now in its sixth year, is well-established as a program, yet it remains paradoxically fragile ... Its fragility became especially clear on a recent occasion when Nancy Cott, its first and only director, received a Guggenheim Fellowship and we found it very difficult to propose a temporary replacement for her."¹³⁵ Glier, on behalf of the Council, requested that the University commit at least two tenure-track

¹³⁰ Sarah Oates, "Cott adds new dimension to program as chair of Women's Studies at Yale" (*Yale Daily News*, 22 February 1983).

¹³¹ Dennis A. Williams with Marsha Zabarsky, "Out of the Academic Ghetto" (*Newsweek*, 31 October 1983).

¹³² Catharine Stimpson, Evaluation, submitted to Nancy Cott, 8 March 1982. WGSF.

¹³³ Catharine Stimpson, Interim Evaluation, submitted to Nancy Cott, 10 January 1985. WGSF.

¹³⁴ In April 1985, following the Crothers/Borroff Report, University Provost William Brainard announced that Yale would seek to double the number of tenured women on the faculty by 1990, reinforcing the University's commitment to affirmative action. For reference, see the following articles: Hilary Appelman, "College will double number of tenured women on faculty" (*Yale Daily News*, 19 April 1985); "Tenured Female Faculty Will Be Doubled by 1990" (*Yale Weekly Bulletin and Calendar*, April 22-29, 1985).

¹³⁵ Ingeborg Glier, on behalf of the Women's Studies Council, letter to A. Bartlett Giamatti, President of Yale University, 19 December 1984. WGSF.

half-appointments to Women's Studies. The following spring, Cott reiterated this problem in a letter to President Bart Giamatti. Following the University's announcement that it would raise the number of tenured women, Cott said, "the issues of increasing tenured women faculty, and of strengthening faculty appointments in Women's Studies are separable, and not coterminous."¹³⁶ The University could not pass off its commitment to Women's Studies through its commitment to hiring women faculty members, she said. More women on the faculty certainly might help Women's Studies, but that connection was not determinative because "women who were hired for regular tenured positions might very well be ones who were not at all friendly to Women's Studies."¹³⁷

Fortunately, Margaret Homans, although not yet tenured, was willing to fill Cott's duties during the calendar year of 1985. Homans' stint as Chair would not end there, and following Cott's resignation from the position in 1987, Homans would become the program's most stable administrative presence, serving as chair from 1987-89, 1993-95, and 1996-Present.

In March of 1985, Women's Studies hired Micaela di Leonardo in a joint appointment with Anthropology to replace Helene Wenzel. Di Leonardo brought much needed attention to the social sciences, while filling the role of D.U.S. and teaching the introductory course. Cott calls Di Leonardo's contributions to the program "pivotal."¹³⁸

Funding from the NEH grant ran out in the spring of 1986. Both the Final Report that Cott submitted to the NEH and news coverage following the grant's completion revealed that professors teaching newly designed courses were, overall, pleased with the final outcome of the project. Due to the participation of junior faculty, however, several of new courses were discontinued following faculty departures. Professors participating in the integration effort

¹³⁶ Cott, letter to A. Bartlett Giamatti, 4 March 1985. Cott files.

voiced concern over tokenism, disjointedness in teaching, lack of preparation, and, for men, discomfort teaching feminist subjects, with the notable exceptions of Margaret Homans and Christine Froula, who both revised long-standing English courses.¹³⁹ In the final words of the report, Cott said:

If the Yale College curriculum as a whole is far from “transformed” as a result, that was to be expected, for the impressive group of Yale faculty members who participated in the project are but a small minority, and their concerted efforts, individual and in sum, could make only a beginning. Project members can be proud, however, to have instigated a significant beginning to a major intellectual transformation.¹⁴⁰

Following the completion of the NEH grant, the program did not apply for more public funding, in part due to the entrance of the Reagan administration and the consequent constriction of public funds for Women’s Studies, and also due to exhaustion on the part of Cott, Homans, and other contributors.

Following the grant, the program would never again extend as much attention to the Yale College faculty at large. The process of instituting the grant focused attention on Yale’s participation in the program. Raising outside funding was not difficult, said Cott in an October 1986 *Yale Daily News* article, “what is more important is how much the university is willing to spend.”¹⁴¹

Integration and Frustration: 1987-1996

Following the program’s mainstreaming efforts, several developments encouraged a heightened internal focus, which would endure for the next decade: increased efforts to expand the program to include perspectives on race and sexuality, a late-’80s infusion of new junior faculty participants, and paralyzing budgetary and hiring restrictions.

¹³⁷ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

¹³⁸ Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

¹³⁹ See both Nancy Cott, “Final Report: ‘Strengthening Women’s Studies at Yale’” (WGSF); May 1986 and Richard Rothschild, “Grant aids Women’s Studies” (*Yale Daily News*, 9 April 1986).

¹⁴⁰ Cott, “Final Report,” May 1986.

In February 1986, Cott announced her intention to step down from the post of Chair due to “sheer burn out,” as well as to avoid becoming a singular figurehead for the program.¹⁴² In her resignation letter to Dean Sidney Altman, Cott said, “I now feel strongly that it is time for different leadership, for another faculty member’s initiatives, to take over for a while.”¹⁴³ Among the program’s core faculty participants, Cott had been the key proponent of mainstreaming efforts,¹⁴⁴ and, according to her successor, Margaret Homans, Cott had “always been the most ambitious when it came to funding and cultivating a strong external presence.”¹⁴⁵

Homans, who had already filled the role of Acting Chair in 1985, agreed to replace Cott beginning in the fall of 1987. Homans had been a member of the Core Faculty from the program’s earliest days, had participated in both NEH grants, and had designed and taught several of the program’s core and related courses. Although she had hesitations about taking on such a large administrative role, Homans was concerned about the longevity of the program, and, having received tenure in 1986, understood the importance of senior faculty presence. “Chairing Women’s Studies is kind of like a hot potato, and someone has to pick it up, but there are not many people willing to do that. I loved the program, and I wanted it to continue,” she says.¹⁴⁶

Coinciding with the Chair transition, the program began receiving funding from the Ford Foundation “Project on Women and Gender in the Curriculum in Newly Coeducational

¹⁴¹ Hillary Zellner, “Women’s Studies: Program commands respect” (*Yale Daily News*, 10 October 1986).

¹⁴² Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001. Note: Cott ended up staying through the ‘86-’87 scholastic year.

¹⁴³ Nancy Cott, letter to Sidney Altman, 27 February 1986. Cott files.

¹⁴⁴ Regarding mainstreaming, Cott says, “I always thought that if I had remained Chair for longer I would have done more with mainstreaming. I see it as very, very important, and I don’t see it as a compromise. I think that radical things have to be done and mainstream things have to be done, and that’s one of the double burdens of women’s studies. If you’re only preaching to the converted, it just isn’t going to change the world. By getting more acceptance of gender analysis in larger classes that aren’t specifically about women, there’s a much greater conceivable audience.” Source: Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Homans, 23 March 2001.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Institutions.” In the fall of 1984, Cott had started planning the grant with Women’s Studies directors at Colgate, Princeton, and Trinity College. Modeled on Yale’s NEH Implementation Grant, the Ford funding, which came in small allotments, supported faculty development and mainstreaming efforts at fourteen universities, including Yale. Cott says that the impetus for the effort was to build connections between Women’s Studies faculty at several prominent universities.¹⁴⁷ “It felt ... more altruistic than just helping things out at Yale,” she says.¹⁴⁸ With Homans taking over the Chair position, Cott was able to devote her energy to the Ford initiative’s five-person steering committee.

Although Yale received some funds from the two installations (in 1984 and 1987), the size of the grant was much smaller than the NEH grant; consequently, Yale’s portion of the grant went specifically towards integrating issues of race and ethnicity into the program.¹⁴⁹ The grant’s emphasis on diversification reflected the focus of many of the new junior faculty affiliated with the program, including Mahzarin Banaji in Psychology; Gloria Watkins (bell hooks) in English and Afro-American Studies, and Kathleen Daly in Sociology. Like the NEH grant, faculty members could submit proposals to receive stipends to fund course development efforts; for example, in 1987, Micaela di Leonardo designed a course entitled, “The social construction of the other: gender and race in the history of social theory.” The grant also supported the development of the Multi-Ethnic Women’s Organizing Committee (MEWSOC), chaired by Banaji.

MEWSOC, a faculty development seminar, aimed to “provide strategies for eradicating racism and ethnocentrism in Women’s Studies and in the general Yale

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Yale did not participate in the third round of the project due to general problems with the grant and because participants decided that the project was “too labor-intensive” and “too much work for faculty.” Source: Carla Kaplan, “Minutes of the Women’s Studies Council Meeting,” 18 January 1990. (WGSF).

curriculum.”¹⁵⁰ Discussions and public lectures revolved around four key themes: “Exploring our Experiences and Discovering Common Ground,” “Feminist Pedagogy: Classroom and Institutional Dynamics,” “Race, Gender, and Research: Confronting Differences,” and “Feminism: Diverse Conceptual Frameworks.”¹⁵¹ The 1998 addition of Emily Honig as the program’s second joint appointee in Women’s Studies and History, also contributed to the diversification of course offerings due to her expertise on women in China and on third-world women’s history.

Cott describes the expansion of the program in the 1980s as part of a shift away from the 1970s “Women’s Movement notion of women’s experience” to the more realistic exploration of “women’s experiences.”¹⁵² While the Ford initiative marked the program’s first concentrated effort to confront difference within Women’s Studies at Yale, the push to open up the field was far from new at Yale or nationally.¹⁵³ Several years earlier, Allison Coleman, ’84, decried field’s exclusivity in a *Yale Daily News* editorial:

Too often ... white feminists involved in Women’s Studies open the door only wide enough to let themselves inside. Failing to recognize the truly radical nature of its own initial vision, Women’s Studies allows itself to become White Women’s Studies, complete with all the race, class, cultural and heterosexist biases that traditionally accompany a narrow, self-serving approach to the world. The danger that Women’s Studies may simply create its own white, privileged, monoscopic vision exists in direct proportion to the seriousness with which it examines its own accountability.¹⁵⁴

In addition to opening the program up to minority perspectives, Micaela di Leonardo spearheaded efforts to involve more male students in the Women’s Studies introductory class. Di Leonardo conducted direct recruitment efforts, speaking at PROP (the pre-freshmen orientation program for minority students) and divestment rallies; she also strongly

¹⁵⁰ Mahzarin Banaji, “Multi-Ethnic Women’s Studies: A Faculty Development Seminar,” Program Description, Fall 1987. WGSF.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

¹⁵³ In her 1988 book, Smith College Professor Elizabeth Spelman said that in addition to Women’s Studies, feminism itself was exclusive: “Much of feminist theory has proceeded on the assumption that gender is indeed a variable of human identity independent of other variables such as race and class, that whether one is a woman is unaffected by what class or race one is.” Source: Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

encouraged curious men who viewed the class during shopping period to stay in the class for the duration. In a *Yale Daily News* article, di Leonardo described her inclusive technique: “Many [students who attended the first lecture] were surprised because of my emphasis not only on gender, but on race, class, and sexual identity – emphases that draw rather than repel students.”¹⁵⁵ Di Leonardo’s efforts earned her a reputation as “an intellectual spark-plug,” says Cott.¹⁵⁶

The number of junior faculty joining the program reinforced Women’s Studies’ role as a “home away from home” for young professors. Banaji, who arrived at Yale in 1986, in her own words, is “a perfect, textbook case of how a program like Women’s Studies changed and created the work I did ... being in Women’s Studies made me feel that I could be a part of Yale, even if I didn’t feel at home in my department.”¹⁵⁷ Prior to her arrival at Yale, Banaji had never incorporated gender analysis into her work. Once at Yale, she was asked to teach “Psychology of Gender” and sought support from Women’s Studies in designing the course, which she calls, “the most exciting course that I have ever taught at Yale.” Banaji’s encounter with Women’s Studies changed the trajectory of her work to focus on the influence of gender in patterns of discrimination, a field, which “at the time, was not appreciated in psychology.” Despite being told by the Psychology department “on more than one occasion” to “sever” her ties with Women’s Studies, Banaji became the D.U.S. of the program in 1989. “I knew Yale’s tenure system, and thought that I wasn’t going to be here for long ... so I took

¹⁵⁴ Allison Coleman, “Women’s Studies are explosive,” Editorial (*Yale Daily News*, 8 April 1983).

¹⁵⁵ Joanne Chen, “New mix in Women’s Studies: Program’s courses are attracting more men” (*Yale Daily News*, 28 January 1987). For more about di Leonardo’s efforts, see Jennifer Fleissner, “Not For Women Only” (*The New Journal*, 30 January 1987).

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Banaji.

a huge risk, and I would tell any young person that they should take the same risk," she says.¹⁵⁸

By 1988, the many positive developments in the program were mitigated by a series of tenure and hiring disappointments that would plague the program until Marianne LaFrance's appointment in 1998. "A problem that hasn't been solved in Women's Studies ... is that an individual gets promoted for what he or she does *in a department* ... the departmental baronies are still the foundations of power," says Gaddis Smith.¹⁵⁹ According to faculty in the program, many of the hiring problems stemmed from the administration's conviction that Women's Studies was not a lasting venture.¹⁶⁰ In March 1988, Homans wrote a stern letter to Provost William Nordhaus pleading for senior positions. She stated that she had "reluctantly" agreed to extend her term as Chair because she and Cott were the only senior faculty able "to offer the kind of intellectual leadership that our younger colleagues ... need and deserve."¹⁶¹ The administration's lack of support, she added, was causing Yale's program to fall behind its national peers:

In regard to Women's Studies, Yale is falling behind the schools with which we tend to compare ourselves. When Yale's Women's Studies Program was founded ten years ago, it was a pioneer among our peer institutions, and it has retained its original high standards of excellence ... But in recent years a number of universities have decided to devote their own resources and/or to raise outside funds to create tenured positions for nationally recognized scholars in Women's Studies.¹⁶²

Around the time of Homans' letter, Christine Froula in English and Faye Crosby in Psychology, both mainstays of the Women's Studies program were denied tenure.

Faculty problems in Women's Studies reflected larger trends at Yale. On the fifth anniversary of the Crothers/Borroff Report, by which point Yale was to have fulfilled its

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Gaddis Smith.

¹⁶⁰ Homans recalls debates with Deputy Provost Chip Long over his belief that Women's Studies should not have tenured positions because it would soon-enough be so well incorporated into the rest of the curriculum that it would no longer need to exist. Source: Interview with Homans, 23 March 2001.

¹⁶¹ Margaret Homans, Letter to William Nordhaus, 7 March 1988. Cott files.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

commitment to double its tenured women faculty members, Cott and Homans wrote a letter signed by thirty-nine other professors expressing their disappointment with the administration's efforts to follow through on their commitment. "The proportion of tenured faculty is still under 10 percent, a figure that remains woefully out of line with the proportion of women among undergraduates and graduate students, the untenured faculty, and the pool of eligible candidates for tenure. The number of minority women faculty is abysmally low," they said.¹⁶³ Cott and Homans cited problems with child care and maternity leave policies as discouraging prominent women scholars from pursuing opportunities at Yale. In honor of the twentieth anniversary of co-education, as well as the tenth anniversary of the Women's Studies program, they recommended that the university make a firm commitment to "increase faculty diversity" with the goal of "nothing short of parity between men and women on the entire faculty."¹⁶⁴

While the attainment of Honig's position was a positive step forward, a series of departures in the early '90s sent Women's Studies faculty members and students reeling. In the spring of 1990, associate English professor Harriet Chessman, who had served as the program's D.U.S., worked on the Women's Studies Council, and taught several of the core courses was denied tenure. Around the same time, Kathleen Daly in Sociology, a past D.U.S. of Women's Studies, was informed that her term would not be extended, signaling the department's intention not to consider her for tenure; the same thing happened to Leslie Rado, a Women's Studies participant, in American Studies. In May, Homans wrote an enraged letter to Schmidt asserting that recent denials of tenure were "part of a pattern of

¹⁶³ Nancy Cott and Margaret Homans, Letter to Benno Schmidt, Jr., 6 April 1989, signed by thirty-nine other faculty members. WGSF.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

prejudice ... against feminist scholarship at Yale.”¹⁶⁵ She questioned the administration’s understanding of new scholarship and called the University’s tenure protocol outmoded:

Feminist scholarship, although it is one of the most exciting intellectual developments across all fields today, often arouses animosity in, or is simply misunderstood or underestimated by, the senior (mostly male) scholars who judge it. Women’s Studies has lost, time and again, faculty whose work is deemed excellent by feminist scholars but that has been found lacking within the home department.¹⁶⁶

“The men in power did not know how to judge [feminist] work – they didn’t know the journals, and they certainly didn’t think of it as ‘peer’ work,” says Cott.¹⁶⁷

To make problems worse, in the fall of 1990, Anthropology declined to pursue a tenured position for di Leonardo, causing the program to lose one of its core professors. Di Leonardo’s imminent departure brought attention to the fact that no one from Women’s Studies sat on her tenure committee, despite her joint appointment. Fueled by the di Leonardo situation, upset students joined Women’s Studies faculty in their protests. Taking a more vocal approach, both graduate students and undergraduates sent petitions to the administration, and a group of undergraduates organized as “The Ad Hoc Committee for Women’s Studies” coordinated several protests and disseminated materials to students. Beginning on 4 March 1991, the Committee sponsored a “week of action” in an effort to force the Provost’s office to “start taking Women’s Studies seriously.”¹⁶⁸ Biting posters hung across campus politicized the program’s problems. For example,

Meet Jane.
Jane is an associate
professor at Yale
with a joint appointment
in Women’s Studies
and another department.

See Jane work.
See Jane do research
on women’s history.
See Jane teach lots of

¹⁶⁵ Margaret Homans, letter to Benno Schmidt, Jr., 14 May 1990. Cott files.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

¹⁶⁸ Ad Hoc Committee for Women’s Studies, “For Women’s Studies at Yale, it’s the Best of Times and the Worst of Times,” pamphlet, March 1991. WGSF.

Women's Studies classes
every year.

See Jane come up for tenure review.
Oh, look! No Women's Studies
professors on Jane's
tenure review committee!

See Jane leave Yale.
Bye-bye, Jane.¹⁶⁹

Informational pamphlets, entitled "For Women's Studies at Yale, it's the Best of Times and the Worst of Times," distributed by the Committee discussed the ironic lack of support for Women's Studies during the period of highest enrollment in the program's history:

Last semester, nearly five hundred of us were enrolled in Women's Studies courses. Double that figure and you get a year-long total of almost 1,000 – fully one-fifth of the entire Yale College undergraduate enrollment. Currently, there are twenty students majoring in Women's Studies. An all-time high, this number has more than doubled since last year. And it's higher than the declared totals for twenty-one other departments, including Chemistry, Spanish, Classics, and Math.¹⁷⁰

In the spring of 1991, the University announced that it was facing its largest deficit in decades. As a response, the administration established a committee to restructure the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. All programs, including Women's Studies, were targeted for potential cuts or consolidations, and each Chair had to conduct an internal evaluation and submit a report to the restructuring committee. In her report to the committee, Women's Studies Chair Emily Honig stated that any cuts to the program would be "disastrous."¹⁷¹ She continued,

A reduction in any resource supporting the Women's Studies [sic] would be tantamount to dismantling the program. The Program works with an absolutely minimal operating budget ... If anything, the Program desperately needs more faculty positions, particularly at the senior level. At a time when the university is restructuring and cutting back, we believe that resources for Women's Studies should actually be increased, particularly as the number of majors is rapidly increasing.¹⁷²

Banaji, who served as D.U.S. during some of the program's most difficult years, says that protracted administrative negotiations and a decade of disappointments resulted in a

¹⁶⁹ Ad Hoc Committee for Women's Studies, poster, March 1991. WGSF.

¹⁷⁰ Ad Hoc Committee for Women's Studies, "For Women's Studies at Yale, it's the Best of Times and the Worst of Times," pamphlet, March 1991. WGSF.

¹⁷¹ Emily Honig, report to Wayne Meeks, 30 April 1991. Homans files.

¹⁷² Honig, report to Meeks, 30 April 1991.

program-wide loss of morale. "People within Women's Studies need to have a sense of their own importance, and that was lost," she says.¹⁷³

In the fall of 1991, members of the Women's Studies Council began efforts to negotiate a senior position in Women's Studies and History for Emily Honig. Honig had already been offered a tenured position at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Homans and Cott did not want to risk their opportunity to attain a senior position for the program. Cott sponsored Honig's tenure bid and chaired the review committee; Cynthia Russett and Homans served on behalf of Women's Studies. With strong support from both Women's Studies and History, Honig's tenure bid was successful; nonetheless, in November 1992, she announced that she would accept the UCSC offer, leaving her position at Yale vacant.

From 1992-93, Cott returned to the position of Chair, and before the news of Honig's departure was released to the student body, she negotiated for Women's Studies to retain a senior faculty half-slot. "Nancy [Cott] bargained with the administration, arguing that although the person we hired was a junior faculty member, the person we lost was a senior faculty member, and the University could do no less than to allow Women's Studies to maintain that position," says Homans.¹⁷⁴ Cott emphasized the need to quickly name a replacement; she said that if the new appointee came later than the 1994-95 academic year, the program would be in danger.¹⁷⁵ By that time, Laura Wexler had filled di Leonardo's junior position in American Studies and Women's Studies, leaving the program with one faculty member to teach the introductory course and serve as D.U.S.

¹⁷³ Interview with Banaji.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Homans, 8 December 2000.

¹⁷⁵ Nancy Cott, as quoted in Noah Bookbinder, "Women's Studies Professor to Leave: Scholars Say Loss Can Be Recouped With Quick Naming of Replacement" (*Yale Daily News*, 11 January 1993).

Homans returned to the Chair position in the fall of 1993 and commenced a senior faculty search that would take five years to complete, consuming the majority of Homans' and the Women's Studies Council's efforts. Upon approving the senior search, the administration stipulated that the new hire be appointed in the social sciences, due to the program's long-standing strength in the humanities. Finding departments to co-sponsor appointments was more difficult in the social sciences than in the humanities, and the characteristics that Women's Studies sought in a candidate did not necessarily mesh with those of a partner department.¹⁷⁶ During the first years of the search, Women's Studies forged a strong collaboration with Anthropology and made two separate offers, both of which were rejected. A subsequent joint offer in Political Science was also rejected. Glier, who served as Acting Chair from 1995-96, says that due to continued losses of junior faculty and the vacant senior seat, she had trouble finding instructors for the upper-level seminars. "I had to do a lot of arm twisting," she says, "the continued high turnover rates were devastating, and adapting to this ever-changing group of faculty was sometimes a high-wire act ... Improvising who was teaching what from year to year was a terrible, energy-consuming enterprise. And believe me, this is energy that could have been better spent."¹⁷⁷

Cott stresses that despite endless hiring difficulties, due to the leadership of D.U.S. Laura Wexler, the program remained strong for its students. "Laura [Wexler] was a saving grace," says Cott, "she did *a lot* at the undergraduate level and made sure that the program remained healthy."¹⁷⁸ As part of an effort to offer more courses in the hard and social sciences, Wexler convinced two professors, Janet Henrich from the Medical School and Linda Bartoshuk in Psychology, to design a course called "Women's Health."¹⁷⁹ The course

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Glier.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Homans, 23 March 2001.

was offered for the first time in Spring 1994, boasting an enrollment of 150 students. "If there is any course like this in the country, I do not know where it is," said Bartoshuk in a *Yale Daily News* article about the class.¹⁸⁰ Naomi Rogers, the program's current D.U.S. and co-instructor of Women's Health says that in addition to being academically innovative, the course generated "much needed numbers" for the program.¹⁸¹

Redefinition and Regeneration – Women's and Gender Studies: 1997-2001

During the mid-'90s, in tandem with efforts to incorporate non-humanities subjects into course offerings, the program began to accommodate growing scholarship on sexuality. Based upon demand from students and faculty, in 1993, Yale's Development Office established the Research Fund for Lesbian and Gay Studies (FLAGS). In 1994, FLAGS received an anonymous donation to sponsor five years of visiting professorships to teach subjects in Lesbian and Gay Studies. With the strong support of Homans, who repeatedly served on the FLAGS committee, visiting lecturers and their courses were listed under Women's Studies. The establishment of the FLAGS visiting professorship was one of the most important changes in the program's recent history, says Homans. "Once we had a visiting professor who was dedicated to teaching three courses a year related to sexuality ... it meant that we could reliably teach in these fields each year, and not just because it happened that some professor from some other department wanted to do it."¹⁸² Influenced by the growth of scholarship in sexuality studies, more of the program's offerings, beyond those

¹⁸⁰ Linda Bartoshuk, as quoted in Charlotte Akor, "Course addresses women's health" (*Yale Daily News*, 28 January 1994). Indicating the innovativeness of "Women's Health," most writers on Women's Studies believe that the hard sciences are the least likely academic divisions to be touched by feminist scholarship. Says author Christie Farnham: "The natural sciences may well be the last of the research disciplines to feel to impact of critical feminist scholarship. Compared to most of the social sciences and the humanities over the past decade, relatively few women's studies scholars and scholarly works have appeared in the natural sciences." Christie Farnham, ed., *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 111.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Naomi Rogers, 5 December 2000.

sponsored by FLAGS, surpassed a strict focus on women in order to confront larger issues of gender and sexuality.

This gradual expansion mirrored national debates between Women's Studies and Gender Studies that had been occurring among scholars for many years.¹⁸³ The theoretical debate between "gender" and "women" underscored the pressing, practical need for Women's Studies to perpetually reinvent itself – both in order to uncover ever more sophisticated elements of neglected scholarship, and to maintain its legitimacy within the academy. By the late-1990s, as many Women's Studies programs approached the thirtieth anniversary of much of their work, many administrators felt that Gender Studies provided the seeds for a re-vamping of traditional programs. Moreover, due to an increasing desire to accommodate difference – not just between men and women, but also amongst women based upon race, nationality, class, sexuality, and religion – many academics saw gender studies as a field providing increased possibility for inclusiveness of analysis. Numerous Women's Studies programs across the country changed their names or, at the very least, their mission statements to acknowledge the growing need for Women's Studies to embrace the study of sexuality, gender, and non-white, middle-class women's experiences.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Interview with Homans, 18 December 2000.

¹⁸³ Key reference works in the theoretical "debate" include, Joan Hoff, "Gender as a Postmodern Category of Paralysis," *Women's Studies International Forum* 17, 4 (1994): p. 446; Louise M. Newman, "Critical Theory and the History of Women: What's At Stake in Deconstructing Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 2, 3, (Winter 1991): p. 49; Sonya O. Rose, "Gender History/Women's History: Is Feminist Scholarship Losing Its Critical Edge?," *Journal of Women's History* 91, 5 (Spring 1993): p. 89; and Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹⁸⁴ Among the more radical shifts, the University of Chicago recently changed its program to the "Center for Gender Studies." Its reworded mission statement now places "womanhood" in between race and class as a category of analysis. The Center's mission is to focus on "gender and sexuality as primary objects of study and category [sic] of analysis."¹⁸⁴ New York University took a different direction, building an entirely separate "Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality," while leaving its Women's Studies program in tact. In the last year, Northwestern University decided to change its Women's Studies program to "Gender Studies." The program's website states, "Northwestern University is proud to announce the creation of the Gender Studies Program. Formerly the Women's Studies Program, Gender Studies at Northwestern University introduces students to a wide variety of gender scholarship. Students study gender, sexuality, and theory from an interdisciplinary perspective." Sources: "Program of Study," from "The University of Chicago Center for

In 1998, as Yale's program neared its twentieth anniversary, the Women's Studies Council, in collaboration with FLAGS, decided to change the program's name to Women's and Gender Studies. After over a year of deliberations, the Council's proposal to the Course of Study Committee, submitted by Homans and Wexler in February, stated that the purpose of the change was "to represent more accurately the field of study in its current state both nationally and at Yale."¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the proposal read, "'Women's Studies' has become an increasingly insufficient name for what we do." Qualifying the first two decades of Women's Studies scholarship as "the study principally of women's ... experiences," the proposal described the growing change in scholarly focus:

The field now centers on the study of gender as a primary mode of social differentiation that is both historically constructed and active in producing patterns of power. New theoretical paradigms enable scholars to uncover how much of what we take for granted in society and culture depends upon previously unexamined norms, norms that include gender difference and sexual identity. The proposed new name would indicate that, while building upon and retaining our traditional strengths in scholarship on women, our program also offers students exciting opportunities to learn about the ways gender and sexual identity organize human societies and cultures.¹⁸⁶

The proposal also called for a change of organization within the program, permitting majors to specialize in one of three tracks of study: Gender Studies, Women's Studies, or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies.

Despite the potentially controversial incorporation of sexuality studies into the revamped program, the proposal passed with virtually no problems. Yale College Dean Richard Brodhead says, "There was a strong sense at the [Yale College Faculty] meeting that this was an appropriate development, and if the program wished to do it, it would be fine ...

Gender Studies" at humanities.uchicago.edu/cgs/undergrad.html; "Northwestern University Gender Studies," taken from www.genderstudies.northwestern.edu.

¹⁸⁵ Margaret Homans and Laura Wexler, Memo to Course of Study Committee, re: "Proposed changes to Women's Studies Program," 27 February 1998. Homans files. Note: although not listed on the official proposal, Laura Green played a central role in the name change.

¹⁸⁶ Homans and Wexler, Memo to Course of Study Committee, 27 February 1998.

The printed mission from the following year, 1998-99, the inaugural year of the Women's and Gender Studies program, indicates the change:

The program in Women's and Gender Studies establishes gender and sexuality as fundamental categories of social and cultural analysis and offers new critical perspectives from which to study the diversity of human experience. The introduction of these perspectives into all fields of knowledge necessitates new research, criticism of existing research, and the formulation of new paradigms and organizing concepts. Gender – the social meaning of the distinction between the sexes – and sexuality – sexual practices, identities, discourses, and institutions – are studied as they intersect with class, race, ethnicity, and nationality.¹⁹²

Whereas gender is present in the earlier program description, what is most noticeable about the revised description is the near complete absence of the term “woman,” and the dominant presence of the term “sexuality.” This distinction is telling, as members of Yale's program seem to have equated the shift towards gender with new inquiry about *sexuality*.¹⁹³ Again, Homans says that this represented what was already happening in the program: “Sexuality and lesbian points of view have always been central to the theoretical perspectives of the program.”¹⁹⁴

Wexler, who was a pivotal force in the decision to change the name, says that the move towards sexuality studies revived the political undergirding of Women's Studies; yet, in the case of Women's and Gender Studies, the change reflects what Wexler calls a new civil rights movement. Insisting on the importance of outside activism in shaping the academy, she says, “We're in a post-Civil Rights era, and we're in a post second and third wave women's movement era ... And we're now being led by lesbian and gay civil

¹⁹² *Yale College Programs of Study*, 1998-1999, p. 543.

¹⁹³ Marianne LaFrance, the program's first senior appointee, divides the progression to Women's Studies into three stages. Says LaFrance, “Women's Studies was an entirely correct label early on because so much a part of the early work was to unerase and unhide and unmarginalize women who had been relegated to the sidelines ... The next phase in the scholarship – now that we have unearthed women from their positions of invisibility – is to say that now we need to understand something about the processes that made them invisible in the first place ... The next phase then starts to ask about *other* marginalized groups. Lesbians and gay men have often been evaluated on the basis of their missing the standard of heterosexuality ... the push towards Gender Studies is to allow a broadening of the lens to understand the system not just as the oppression of women by men, but a system that is structural and remarkably complicated and complex, in which anyone who is not white and male and heterosexual is regarded as a second class citizen.” Source: Interview with Marianne LaFrance, 4 December 2000.

rights.”¹⁹⁵ Harking back to MacKinnon’s map analogy, Wexler says, “the change is, in part, a reflection of what’s changing in the world outside the academy.”¹⁹⁶

Soon after the name change, the program finally secured its senior hire, bringing Marianne LaFrance, a psychologist who studies how gender distinctions are produced in social interactions, from Boston College to Yale. Although LaFrance was not involved in the decision to change the name, she was very supportive of the effort to expand opportunities to study sexuality within Women’s Studies. “Though Women’s Studies could easily incorporate the study of the experience of lesbians, it had, at best, ambivalence about dealing with gay men,” she says.¹⁹⁷

Despite the fact that Gender Studies could theoretically have subsumed Women’s Studies, members of the Women’s Studies Council decided that the term “women” needed to remain in the title. Founding members of the program felt protective of the entity that they had struggled to establish twenty years earlier. “Since we had fought so hard for Women’s Studies in the first place, we weren’t eager to let it go ... it still needed this space for itself,” says Glier.¹⁹⁸ The Council did, however, consider other proposals. Says Homans, “One of the very articulately defended proposals was that we would be the program in Sexuality and Gender Studies, and leave out women altogether.”¹⁹⁹ “I think any time the word ‘women’ disappears, there is a cause for concern ... [Women’s and Gender Studies] does not come trippingly off the tongue, but I think it says ‘do not make women once again invisible,’” says LaFrance, in a sentiment reinforced by several other professors. Homans builds off of this, citing the political importance of the word “women”: “Barbara Johnson [a professor at

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Homans, 18 December 2000.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Laura Wexler, 15 December 2000.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Laura Wexler, 15 December 2000.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Marianne LaFrance, 4 December 2000.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Glier.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Homans, 8 December 2000.

Harvard] made a very strong defense of keeping the word 'women' in the title because it is eccentric, it calls attention to unevenness, and Gender Studies, just by itself suggests that we're examining yet another universal phenomenon."²⁰⁰

Laura Green, a former assistant English professor who served on the FLAGS committee at the time of the name change and as Women's Studies D.U.S. from 1998-2000, says that although the transition to Women's and Gender Studies was relatively smooth, the implementation of the change has generated divergent visions for the future of the program. "The transition left a lot of questions unanswered," says Green, "and the program needs to work on building a more holistic and consistent vision for the future."²⁰¹ Green cites the equation of Gender Studies with sexuality studies as one of the dissonant elements of the program's intellectual framework. "A problem that hasn't yet been reconciled is that the change to Gender Studies seems to have elevated sexuality over race and ethnicity as a determinate of identity. This is apparent down to the level of the requirements," she says.²⁰²

In the fall of 1998, following the arduous processes of filling the senior appointment and changing the program's name, Homans and Wexler began exploring ways to expand the program's impact on graduate students. In 1998-99 and 1999-2000, Wexler and Joshua Gamson, an assistant Sociology professor and former Acting Chair of Women's Studies, operated a graduate student colloquium in Women's Studies. Around the same time, the Women's Studies Council began discussions about the possibility of offering a Master's Certificate in Women's Studies to graduate students. Homans describes the idea of the Certificate as "a kind of graduate minor," that students would receive in addition to their

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Interview with Laura Green, 19 March 2001.

²⁰² *Ibid.* Note: Although this permutation of gender studies was not emphasized as much as sexuality in Yale's transition to Women's and Gender Studies, it has been actively discussed in national books and journals. For excellent coverage of the multiple interpretations of Gender Studies, see Jane Aaron and Sylvia Walby, eds., *Out of the Margins: Women's Studies in the Nineties* (London: The Falmer Press, 1991).

Ph.D. The Certificate would indicate that “[students] have taken feminist theory, have studied the feminist angles on their discipline, have learned about inter-disciplinary feminist methodologies, and, therefore would be qualified to teach an introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies at whatever school wanted to hire them,” says Homans.²⁰³

The move to establish a graduate certification in Women’s Studies has the potential to fulfill one of the program’s initial goals of generating new scholarship. Says Cott, “I’ve always thought that it would take a graduate program of some kind ... to credibly say that we are stimulating new scholarship in Women’s Studies.”²⁰⁴ However, continuing patterns of the past, the effort has been delayed due to a lack of faculty support. “The Graduate School was eager to see the proposal go forward, but it became clear to me and Laura Wexler that we still didn’t have enough faculty effort at hand to actually put this program into effect,” says Homans.²⁰⁵

Conclusion: 2001 and Beyond

Twenty years after the founding of the Women’s Studies program, it is clear that efforts towards curriculum-wide integration have been slower to take root than expected. Reflecting on her early vision for the program, Cott says that she had not expected all four of her initial goals to happen in her lifetime. Particularly when it come to large-scale integration efforts, she now says, “I think it would be great if it could be done, but after a point, I didn’t want to be the one to do it – teach the unwilling, teach the reluctant.”²⁰⁶

Yet, whether or not the Program had someday hoped to be out of business due to its pervasive influence, few could question that Women’s Studies’ place at Yale is firmly

²⁰³ Interview with Homans, 8 December 2000.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Cott, 15 November 2000.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Homans, 8 December 2000.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Cott, 15 November 2000.

rooted. “It’s relatively easy to start a new program at Yale, the trick is making sure that anybody is going to be taking care of it five years later,” says Dean Richard Brodhead. “The process of institutionalization is a very slow one at Yale, but very solidifying once it happens. I can assure you, that Women’s Studies is a very durable program at Yale.”²⁰⁷

Quite apart from hopes of integration, a distinct and pioneering body of scholarship has emerged within Women’s Studies, both inside and outside of Yale. Both Cott and Homans call Women’s Studies a “victim of its own success.”²⁰⁸ “The field has proliferated so wildly that it’s hard to keep a common ground,” says Homans. “It used to be much easier to reach out to faculty outside the field because there were only a few key works which everyone had to have read.”²⁰⁹

Despite Women’s Studies’ success as an independent entity, both nationally and at Yale, many members of the Yale’s program still emphasize the importance of maintaining Women’s Studies’ connections to other departments and disciplines. – “I think that Women’s and Gender Studies will never really be a discipline or a department, and maybe it shouldn’t be,” says Glier. “Because once it becomes a department, there is a certain danger of *ossifying* – there is still plenty of research to be done, and it needs some sort of academic framework, but it should be a flexible framework.”²¹⁰

As the program’s history indicates, efforts to spread Women’s Studies’ influence across the University are arduous and time-consuming. Thus far, the program has relied upon the leadership of its founding generation – women, like Homans and Cott, who are tied to the program regardless of appointment. Unfortunately, this reliance is not a long-term solution to the program’s leadership needs. “We need to build people in so that they are just

²⁰⁷ Interview with Brodhead.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Cott, 13 November 2000.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Interview with Glier.

doing their jobs when they support the program ... we really need people beyond the initial stalwarts to be real linchpins in departments,” says Cott.²¹¹ Twenty years after the program’s founding, creating a new class of “linchpins” requires faculty appointments, which have clearly been hard to come by in the past. “Most people are not meant to stay in Women’s Studies forever – they should be drawn in, transformed, and sent back,” says Banaji. “But in order to do this, there needs to be a core of faculty members within the program, representing each of the divisions.”²¹²

Beyond the perennial need for more money and more faculty support, many opportunities line the program’s horizon. From building a graduate certification to creating a more genuinely inter-disciplinary core of classes, the possibilities for growth within the program are endless. While future prospects are auspicious, the program must continue to balance its dual internal and external roles. Lessons from the past indicate that the most profound truths are built through collaboration. We are all bound to the same landscape, but it is through our ability to find connections to one another that we create a map – a map that disseminates truth.

²¹¹ Interview with Cott, 28 March 2001.

²¹² Interview with Banaji.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

My choice to write about the history of Women's and Gender Studies at Yale stemmed from the convergence of an increasing personal interest in gender issues and the celebration of Yale's tercentennial, which has generated not only celebration, but also introspection amongst members of the student body, alumni, faculty, and administration. Yet, instead of exploring the much-touted legacies of Timothy Dwight, William Howard Taft, or Kingman Brewster, I wanted to investigate an *under-recorded* piece of the University's history – the short, but profound experience of women at Yale College. Having participated in the New Blue, Yale's first undergraduate women's organization, I felt that I had already devoted a great deal of attention to social and extra-curricular transformations after 1969, leading me to consider the academic experience of women undergraduates and faculty members. A wonderful conversation with Gaddis Smith, who I met as a student in his DeVane Lecture course on Yale in the twentieth century, steered my interests towards chronicling the history of Women's and Gender Studies.

Last semester, in addition to my essay research, I took Cynthia Russett's seminar, "Women's History: Methodological and Comparative Inquiry." My final essay for the class focused on the theoretical debate between "women" versus "gender" as historical subjects, using Yale's transition to Women's and Gender Studies as a case study of the intersections between academic theory and practice. Aided by the structure of Russett's seminar, I spent the majority of first semester conducting my secondary source research. Knowing that at least half of my primary research would come in the form of oral history, I wanted to be well acquainted with the field – theoretically, methodologically, and historically – before conducting all of my interviews with past and present members of the program. I read a lot of heavy theory – Johnella Butler, Judith Butler, Barbara Christian, Joan Hoff, bell hooks,

Joan Kelly-Gadol, Gerda Lerner, Louise Newman, and Joan Scott were my key guides – which, although hardly cited in my essay, familiarized me as a researcher and author. I felt much more secure in my interviews, primary research, and writing knowing that I understood the theoretical foundations of the field.

Beyond strict theory, I looked for other histories of Women's Studies, either of specific programs or of the field as a whole. Since 2000 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the first U.S. Women's Studies programs, I could not have chosen a better time to write on this topic. Five years ago, I would have had few, if any, historical sources to work from, but in the last two years, several retrospectives have been released, which were immensely helpful as I sought to tackle the field. Of particular importance was Marilyn Jacoby Boxer's *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (1998), a broad survey of the theoretical, administrative, and curricular development of Women's Studies, with a beautiful introduction by Catharine Stimpson.¹ Reading Boxer's work created an excellent base from which to work, providing insights into angles that I had not yet considered, as well as an invaluable list of suggested readings.

Last year, Florence Howe released an excellent collection of testimonials written by Women's Studies pioneers (although Cott is noticeably absent) entitled, *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*.² While Howe's collection is filled with rich insights, most of the reflections were too anecdotal to include in my essay – given the abundance of primary sources available about Yale's program, I struggled to find non-anecdotal material. Both Boxer and Howe discuss the “personal as political” conflict within Women's Studies in depth. I was unable to include more on the subject, given the

¹ Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

² Florence Howe, ed., *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers* (New York: The Feminist Press of The City University of New York, 2000).

already substantial length of my essay, although it provides some of the most fascinating questions in Women's Studies. What are the boundaries of the field? At what point can a Women's Studies professor let down her guard? Can one be a feminist personally, politically, and academically/professionally? Linda Anderson, the program's long-time Administrative Assistant gave me many wonderful reflections on this subject during our interview, which were heart-breaking to cut, primarily concerning the program's interaction (or lack thereof, in her mind) with the New Haven community and the Local 34 Union of clerical workers.

With the generous consent of Linda Anderson, Nancy Cott, and Margaret Homans, I was granted full access to the Women's and Gender Studies program files, housed in their offices on the top floor of WLH. The unarchived state of the files was a mixed blessing. On one hand, I avoided the hassle of checking out manuscript boxes, I could easily photocopy documents of particular interest, and, most importantly, I had a fresh, unfiltered view of the program's development on paper. On the other hand, the process of sorting through hundreds of files was incredibly time consuming, particularly since the high turnover of administrators in the program yielded little consistency in organization. Although I ultimately valued the uncensored nature of the files, it also meant that I had to determine which documents were more important than others. It took me several weeks to realize that I could not photocopy and include every piece of correspondence and activity; I became so attached to my research and the many hours spent in the W&GS office that I had a hard time cutting out documents when time began to wane. In addition to the central administrative files, both Nancy Cott and Margaret Homans graciously gave me access to their personal files, which filled in many factual blanks while providing a more personal feel to the evolution of the program through scrawled notes, affectionate letters between colleagues, and candid internal documents.

Since paper trails tell only part of a story, I conducted twenty-two interviews, both in-person and on the phone, which I completed at the end of March; the majority of my interviews were in-person, enabling me to both tape record and take notes on the discussions. In November, I conducted my first interviews with members of the program. I entered each interview with a set list of questions, but generally found that my best interviews turned into conversations, and some of the sharpest insights I received stemmed from tangents, stories, and unexpected moments when the tape recorder was off. I selected interviewees based upon their involvement in the program; however, I wanted a diversity of perspectives beyond those of the most active participants. Given limited time, my selection of interviewees also depended upon their availability. Going into the project, I underestimated the amount of time that would be consumed by the sheer logistics of arranging interviews. Sadly, I could not coordinate interviews with several key individuals: Catharine MacKinnon wrote that she was too busy to participate, Hazel Carby was suffering from pneumonia throughout second semester, and Cathy Cohen was on leave this year, to name a few. If I could do it all over again, I would seek more interviews from current students and graduates of the program. Unfortunately, graduates were the hardest to track down, either due to scheduling conflicts or incorrect contact information (I ended up finding Allison Coleman, '84, and Thamora Fishel, '88, on the Internet).

When it came to writing, I was often frustrated by the lack of models to reference given the general dearth of Women's Studies programmatic histories. Consequently, I looked beyond higher education and found two excellent models – Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* and Gerald Grant's

The World We Created at Hamilton High – both of which are profiles of U.S. high schools.³

These two books helped me better understand the sensitive task of institutional profiling, highlighting my responsibilities as an active researcher of an *operational* entity, something very different from researching, for example, the French Revolution. I also relied upon Glenda Gilmore's book, *Gender & Jim Crow*, which I discovered in Russett's seminar, as a model of exceptionally creative primary source work.⁴ I had never before worked with such an abundance of primary sources, and Gilmore's book gave me confidence that I could balance and interpret all of my materials. In addition, news articles and editorials from national and Yale publications helped contextualize my research, providing a helpful framework around which to structure my essay.

Although it is nerve-wracking to envision Nancy Cott and Margaret Homans reading this essay, which chronicles their creation, I will never regret my decision to write on such a contemporary subject. It is rare that any undergraduate has the opportunity to explore such exciting primary material, much less to meet so many remarkable individuals by gathering oral histories. The process of writing this essay has certainly been a journey, and I can only hope that my insights will benefit the program as much as learning about the program has enriched me.

³ Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* (New York: BasicBooks, 1983); Gerald Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁴ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).