

## PREFACE

Our issue opens with a refreshingly unconventional essay by Gianna Pomata that is at once a review of new textbooks in women's history and a groundbreaking reconsideration of feminist historiography. Linking the erasure of women from "history" to the emergence of positivist historiography in the nineteenth century, Pomata demonstrates the existence of earlier traditions of history-writing in which women were surprisingly well represented. Against this background, she critiques contemporary feminist textbooks which, even as they integrate women for the first time into history curricula, reproduce the universalizing discourse of pedagogical conventions that hide gaps in historical knowledge, elide tensions and differences in historical experience, and, ironically, close off the very opportunities for innovative research that feminist studies intended to foster. Pomata's suggestion that feminists reexamine conventional pedagogical practices is relevant not only for historians but for scholars in other fields as well.

This issue also contains five articles that share a concern with women's political consciousness and practices, each exposing the dynamics of personal politics and collective action in a specific historical context. Two of these essays focus on Germany, the first in the 1920s and 1930s, and the second during and after reunification. Atina Grossmann's discussion of women physicians in the Weimar Republic and during the rise of nazism offers a richly textured portrait of the complex personal and professional lives of women who were actively involved in movements for reproductive rights and, to a degree that is surprising in view of their privileged class position, in providing medical care to working-class women. Their successful negotiation of tensions among work, politics, and family commitments was shattered by the rise of fascism; and for many, exile abruptly ended the professional lives they had led in Weimar Berlin. Many of the women who emigrated to the United States, for example, were pressed for the first time in their experience into an all-encompassing domesticity. Myra Marx Ferree's essay on "mommy politics" in the former German Democratic Republic takes up these same issues of work and domesticity half a century later. Ferree shows how GDR women of all classes were able, despite undeniable patriarchal constraints, to combine commitments to work and motherhood in ways that reunification ultimately destroyed. Initially, the collapse of communism galvanized

women to form feminist organizations on a large scale, but this activism was soon eclipsed with the transition to capitalism and the political incorporation of Eastern Germany into a Western political hegemony.

The essays by Suzanne M. Marilley and Annelise Orleck engage a different kind of women's politics rooted in domesticity rather than paid employment and centered in the United States. Feminists today are familiar with the ways in which the New Right has mobilized women in an *antifeminist* direction on the basis of fear and in the name of domesticity. Marilley shows how, on the same basis but in a very different historical context, Frances Willard built a type of feminist movement within the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the most successful white, middle-class women's organization of the nineteenth century. Fifty years later, in the 1930s, working-class housewives around the United States also mobilized on the basis of domesticity for political ends. Orleck's research shows how, under communist leadership, these women organized as consumers and tenants in response to the economic deprivation of the Great Depression. Their activism led them to see inextricable links between daily life in the home and large-scale political and economic institutions. Although they did not think of themselves as feminists, these women challenged the marginalization of women within struggles for social change.

Cynthia D. Schrager's reading of the women's self-help books that are so popular in our own day makes visible the ways in which collective politics has been supplanted in the past decade by a purportedly feminist discourse of personal liberation. Like Freud's famous essay on Dora in an earlier period, Schrager argues, books like *Women Who Love Too Much* end up sustaining rather than challenging oppressive gender relations by producing an image of the "healthy" woman that functions as a form of containment rather than as an impetus for social change.

Questions of work and family, community and political activism converge with the dynamics of class and ethnicity in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's review of recent social science books on Latina women. The essay highlights the nuances introduced in recent literature on this subject while at the same time pointing to areas—specifically, citizenship and sexuality—that have so far received little attention from scholars in this field.

Finally, this issue includes poetry by Robin Pastorio-Newman

and Margaret Hanzimanolis and an art essay by Helen Glazer. Newman's poems revise images of three biblical women—Eve, Dinah, and Tamar—by investing them with modern voices that turn a satiric eye on patriarchal traditions. Glazer's powerful paintings, four of which are reproduced here, also demythologize patriarchy in order to create a space for female autonomy. In a very different idiom, Hanzimanolis's poem, "Days Like Rags," evokes the predicament of "vagabond women" on the contemporary landscape, providing a vivid reminder of the challenges that the new administration must confront if it is to fulfill the hopes it has raised among so many of us.

Sue Lanser and Ruth Milkman,  
for the editors