Challenging Times

The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States

Edited by Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty

This page intentionally left blank

Challenging Times

The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States

EDITED BY
CONSTANCE BACKHOUSE
AND
DAVID H. FLAHERTY

McGill-Queen's University Press
Montreal & Kingston • London • Buffalo

ISBN 0-7735-0910-0 (cloth)
ISBN 0-7735-0919-4 (paper)

Legal deposit third quarter 1992
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper
Reprinted in paper 1993, 1996

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:
Challenging Times
Includes index.
ISBN 0-7735-0910-0 (bound) – ISBN 0-7735-0919-4 (pbk.)
1. Feminism – Canada. 2. Feminism – United States.
I. Backhouse, Constance, 1952– . II. Flaherty, David H.
HQ1154.T54 1992 305.42'0971 C92-090235-9

Typeset in Palatino 10/12 by
Caractéra production graphique inc., Quebec City.

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

The Centre for American Studies and the Centre for Women's Studies and Feminist Research, both at the University of Western Ontario, are respectively engaged in the two areas from which the present volume initially drew its major scholarly resources: the study of the United States from a Canadian viewpoint and the study of women's issues. The conference in May 1989 that led to this volume was a product of a collaborative consultation among faculty and students at Western who are associated with these two centres and who do research and teach on aspects of the women's movement in Canada and the United States.

Begun in 1984, the Centre for American Studies is an interdisciplinary working unit of scholars at the University of Western Ontario, primarily in the fields of history, law, business, political science, geography, and economics, who are interested in studying the United States. The Centre for Women's Studies and Feminist Research was established in 1987. Its purpose is to promote scholarly research and teaching in the field of women's studies and feminist research.

The central objective of the present volume is to examine the women's movements in Canada and the United States with a particular emphasis on the last generation, since the movements became highly visible. At the most general level, two questions are explored: what have been the achievements and experiences of the women's movements to date, and what remains to be accomplished?

Reliance on a comparative perspective between Canada and the United States is one attractive and informing aspect of the present

volume, especially since so little comparative work has been done on the women's movement in general. One way of outlining the volume intellectually is as an assessment of the similarities and differences among Canadian and American feminists who live on the North American continent. It contributes to greater communication between academic feminists in North America with a direct examination of commonalities and differences in their respective experiences. As the following pages demonstrate, contributors from Canada are more likely than Americans to have knowledge of the development of the recent women's movement in both countries. This collection of essays may assist, at least in part, in redressing the balance.

As a joint project of the Centre for Women's Studies and Feminist Research and the Centre for American Studies, the co-editors are grateful to the then directors of the respective centres, Kathleen Okruhlik and David H. Flaherty, for their contributions to the enterprise. The administrators of the centres, Julie Ashford and Frances Kyle, made similarly essential contributions. Fran Kyle, in particular, handled the multiplicity of chores associated with dealing with individual authors and producing this book; her contribution was invaluable. Kirstin Fogg helped with the details of organization for the 1989 conference at the University of Western Ontario.

Essential financial support came from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Renaissance Campaign of the University of Western Ontario; the Naruth Foundation, courtesy of Nancy Jackman; the U.S. Information Service, through the good offices of the American Embassy in Ottawa; the Human Rights Fund of the Canadian Department of Justice; and two partners of Lerner and Associates in London, Ontario.

The co-editors appreciate the personal, intellectual, and financial contributions of all of those involved in the shaping of this volume, including, in particular, the participants in our 1989 conference. They also wish to acknowledge the valued assistance of the reference librarians of the D.B. Weldon Library at the University of Western Ontario; they responded to innumerable queries with their customary professionalism.

Contributors

CONSTANCE BACKHOUSE is Associate Professor of Law, University of Western Ontario. She is the author of *The Secret Oppression: Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, with Leah Cohen (1979); *Sexual Harassment on the Job*, with Leah Cohen (1981); and *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (1991).

THE HONOURABLE MONIQUE BÉGIN, a sociologist, is Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Ottawa. She held the Joint Chair in Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University from 1986 to 1990. In the government of Pierre Trudeau, she served as minister of national revenue (1976–77) and then as minister of national health and welfare from 1977 to 1979 and then from 1980 to 1984. She served as executive secretary and director of research for the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. Her recent publications include *Medicare: Canada's Right to Health* (1988); "Debates and Silences – Reflections of a Politician," in *Daedalus* (Fall, 1988); and several texts on women and health.

NAOMI BLACK is Professor of Political Science at York University. Her publications include: *Canadian Women: A History*, with Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, and Wendy Mitchinson (1988); *Social Feminism* (1989); and "The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave," in Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, and Lindsay Dorney, eds., *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* (1988).

MARJORIE GRIFFIN COHEN is an economist who is Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. She has held various executive positions in NAC and is the author of *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (1988); and *Free Trade and the Future of Women's Work: Manufacturing and Service Industries* (1987).

MICHELINE DE SÈVE is Professor in the Département de science politique, Université du Québec à Montréal. She has written *Pour un féminisme libertaire* (1985) and *L'Echappée vers l'Ouest* (1991).

MICHELINE DUMONT is Professor in the Département de sciences humaines, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines, Université de Sherbrooke. She is an author of *Women of Quebec: A History* (1987); and has written *Le Mouvement des femmes hier et aujourd'hui* (1986); and *The Women's Movement, Then and Now* (1986).

MARGRIT EICHLER is Professor of Sociology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the University of Toronto. She has written *The Double Standard: A Feminist Critique of Feminist Social Sciences* (1980); *Nonsexist Research Methods: A Practical Guide* (1988); and *Families in Canada Today: Recent Changes and Their Policy Consequences* (1988).

SARA M. EVANS is Professor and Chair, Department of History, University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Born for Liberty: A History of American Women* (1989); and *Wage Justice: Comparable Worth and The Paradox of Technocratic Reform*, with Barbara J. Nelson (1989).

MARIANNE A. FERBER is Professor of Economics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has written *Women and Work, Paid and Unpaid: An Annotated Bibliography* (1987); and *The Economics of Women, Men and Work*, with Francine D. Blau (1986); and edited *Work and Family: Policies for a Changing Workplace*, with Brigid O'Farrell and LaRue Allen (1991).

DAVID H. FLAHERTY is Professor of History and Law at the University of Western Ontario, where from 1984 to 1989 he directed its Centre for American Studies. His writings include *Protecting Privacy in Surveillance Societies: The Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden, France, Canada, and the United States* (1989); and "Who Rules Canada?" in *Daedalus* (Fall, 1988). He also co-edited *Southern Exposure: Canadian Perspectives on the United States* (1986), with William R. McKercher.

M. PATRICIA FERNÁNDEZ KELLY is Research Scientist, Institute for Policy Studies and Associate Professor of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University. Her writings include *For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier* (1983); "Broadening the Scope: Gender and International Economic Development," in *Sociological Forum* 4, no. 4 (1989); and *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor*, edited with June Nash (1983).

LORRAINE GREAVES is Professor of Sociology at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. She is currently completing her Ph.D. at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. She is the author of *Taking Control: An Action Handbook on Women and Tobacco* (1989); and "Reorganizing the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, 1986–1988," in Jeri Wine and Janice Ristock, eds., *Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada* (1991).

MARJORIE HEINS is Director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Arts Censorship Project. She was director of the Civil Rights Division for the Attorney-General's office in Massachusetts in 1990–91 and staff counsel with the Massachusetts Civil Liberties Union until 1989. In 1987–88, she was a visiting professor of law, Boston College Law School. Her writings include *Cutting the Mustard: Affirmative Action and the Nature of Excellence* (1987).

CATHARINE A. MACKINNON IS Professor of Law at the University of Michigan. Her books include *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (1979); *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (1987); *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality*, with Andrea Dworkin (1988); and *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (1989).

PATRICIA A. MONTURE-OKANEE is Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa Law School; she received her LL.B. from Queen's University in 1988. Her writings include "Ka-Nin-Heh-Gah-E-Sa-Nonh-Yah-Gah," in the *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 2, no. 1 (1986); and "A Vicious Circle: Child Welfare and the First Nations," in the *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 3, no. 1 (1989).

ARUN MUKHERJEE is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at York University. One of her major research interests is the issue of race in feminist literary theory. She is the author of *The Gospel of Wealth in the American Novel: The Rhetoric of Dreiser and His*

Contemporaries (1987); and *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition: Essays on Literature, Criticism, and Cultural Imperialism* (1988).

GRETA HOFMANN NEMIROFF holds the Joint Chair of Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University. She has edited two books on women in Canada: *Women and Men: Interdisciplinary Readings on Gender* (1987); and *Celebrating Canadian Women: Poetry and Prose by and about Women in Canada* (1989). Her latest book is *Reconstructing Education: Towards a Pedagogy of Critical Humanism* (1992).

JEAN F. O'BARR is Associate Professor (Adjunct) in the Department of Political Science, Duke University. She is the editor of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. She has written *Restructuring the Academy: Women's Education and Women's Studies*, with Elizabeth Minnich and Rachel Rosenfeld (1988).

CHRISTINE OVERALL is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Queen's University. She has edited *The Future of Human Reproduction* (1989) and *Perspectives on AIDS: Ethical and Social Issues* (1991); and is the author of *Ethics and Human Reproduction: A Feminist Analysis* (1987).

GLENDA SIMMS has chaired the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women since December 1989. A teacher in her native Jamaica, she moved to Canada in 1966. She has taught at the University of Lethbridge and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, and is currently on leave from the Faculty of Education at Nipissing University College. Simms was a founding member of the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada and has served as president of the Congress of Black Women of Canada.

MARIANA VALVERDE is Associate Professor of Sociology at York University. She is the author of *Sex, Power and Pleasure* (1985); and *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada 1880s–1920s* (1991).

JILL VICKERS is Associate Vice-President (Academic) and Professor of Canadian Studies and Political Science at Carleton University. Her publications include *Taking Sex into Account: The Policy Consequences of Sexist Research* (1984); and *An Examination of the Scientific Mode of Enquiry in Politics* (1991).

Abbreviations

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
AFEAS	Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale
B&B	Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, Canada
CECM	Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal
CEW	Committee for the Equality of Women, Canada
Clio	Collectif Clio, Quebec
CR	Consciousness raising
CRIAW	Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
CRTC	Canadian Radio-television Commission (now the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission)
DAWN	DisAbled Women's Network of Canada
DOB	Daughters of Bilitis
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, U.S.
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment, U.S.
FFQ	Fédération des femmes du Québec
FLQ	Front de libération du Québec
HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee, U.S.
ILO	International Labour Office
IVF	*In vitro* fertilization
MP	Member of Parliament

NAC	National Action Committee on the Status of Women, Canada
NDP	New Democratic Party, Canada
NOW	National Organization for Women, U.S.
POW	Participation of Women Committee, Canada
PTA	Parent-Teacher Associations
RCSW	Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society, U.S.
SNCC	Student Non-Violent Co-Ordinating Committee, U.S.
UAW	United Auto Workers
VOW	Voice of Women, Canada
WAM	Women's Action Movement, Montreal
WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union
WEAL	Women's Equity Action League, U.S.
WJC	Women's Joint Committee, Canada
WLG	Women's Liberation Group, Toronto
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement
WSP	Women's Strike for Peace, U.S.
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

This page intentionally left blank

1 The Contemporary Women's Movements in Canada and the United States: An Introduction

CONSTANCE BACKHOUSE

The contributors to this volume of essays were all participants at a conference held at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada in May of 1989.[1] The theme of the colloquium was a comparison between the contemporary women's movements in Canada and the United States. As presenters of papers or as commentators, all attempted to answer pressing questions about the nature of feminism in its current forms, the interrelationship and tensions between different portions of the movement, and prospects for future growth.

As an exercise in purely comparative analysis, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this volume of essays constitutes a definitive examination. The feminist movements in each country are sufficiently complex and unwieldy to defy the sweeping generalizations and categorizations which necessarily precede detailed comparison. Furthermore, although many of the Canadian contributors make valiant efforts to draw comparative conclusions, the American authors tend to be somewhat more insular in their writing. The articles do, however, offer extremely useful implicit comparisons, allowing readers to draw conclusions of their own regarding the distinctive originating forces, factors shaping the direction of feminist philosophy and activism, and issues provoking unity and dissension within the women's movement in each country. Furthermore, it becomes obvious from the text of some of these essays that certain political and theoretical issues transcend international borders, ebbing and flowing between the two countries in symbiotic fashion.

The critical starting question, of course, must be how to define "the contemporary women's movement." This perplexing matter is far from a pedantic query. Scores of women, young and old, who have freshly discovered their own affinity to feminism face the bewildering prospect of trying to find answers to such questions as "Where is the women's movement?" and "How do I sign up?"

On some level, the question is unanswerable. Naomi Black suggests that the women's movement is a complicated web of consciousness-raising groups, task forces, collectives, women's caucuses, women's centres, women's studies programs, and feminist publishing houses. One could easily expand this list to include women's conferences, feminist marches, feminist cultural events such as music/theatrical/film festivals, feminist bookstores, and women's shelters. Inclusion of "direct action" initiatives would require listing the countless "everyday acts and outrageous rebellions" where women individually and in concert have triumphed over oppression.[2]

Intriguingly, Micheline Dumont suggests that the search to define "the women's movement" may be entirely misplaced. Perhaps we would do better to examine the perspectives of women who disclaim the movement. "Thousands of women say 'I am no feminist, but ... ' Why? We must learn about their motives, not about our interpretations," claims Dumont. Women who define themselves as being outside of the feminist movement could indeed tell us a lot about the nature of our work and the gaps it conceals.

And as Lorraine Greaves cautions, the subjectivity of the women doing the defining is typically determinative. She correctly reminds us that when those giving meaning to the term are "predominantly white, apparently heterosexual, usually educated, articulate, verbal women," they tend to locate the women's movement within their own ranks. This volume must, then, be considered a very partial presentation. It is important to emphasize that the writings collected here represent the views of only some of the participants and members in the women's movement, who are attempting to review the past and analyse prospects for the future from their own individual points of reference. There is no detailed examination, for example, of lesbianism or the role of organizations for women with disabilities in either the Canadian or American setting. The treatment of racism is not sufficiently integrated throughout the volume, undoubtedly reflecting the reality of the women's movement in both countries as well. The essays here represent only a beginning and they discuss only a few portions of the larger web, slowing to scrutinize some of the rents and some of the seams along the way.

Yet despite all of the necessary disclaimers, the enterprise in which the contributors to this volume are engaged is of fundamental importance. The current wave of feminist activity began in the 1960s in the United States according to Sara M. Evans, in the same decade in English Canada according to Jill Vickers, and in the 1940s in Quebec according to Dumont. Today we constitute a relatively mature, extensively institutionalized movement, with a rich history behind us. Many of the contributors have lived through and personally shaped this unfolding drama. It would be unreflectively short-sighted for us not to attempt to scrutinize the terrain of these past decades, to set down our account of the central events.

New generations of feminists will soon be replacing us. We had the luxury, however misguided, of thinking that we worked on a fresh slate, that we stood exhilaratingly as the first feminists of this current wave. Many of those who join us now find our knowledge, our process, and our structures to be confusing and, at times, intimidating and silencing. We have an obligation to set down how we think we have arrived at this place, documenting our sense of victories, challenges, and defeats. The greater the access to these recollections, the more quickly incoming feminists will be able to take their place as full participants, questioners, and challengers to our understandings and ideas.

To this end, Dumont and Micheline de Sève provide remarkably helpful background on the feminist movement in Quebec. For unilingual anglophones, these essays collectively furnish some of the only such work accessible. Challenging commonly held myths that, owing to the stranglehold of the Roman Catholic church, feminism in Quebec was late in appearing, Dumont describes the stubborn refusal of the rural women's groups, les Cercles des Fermières, to obey the edicts of the bishops in the 1940s. Women's study-groups, some defiant and some compliant with church demands, broke much new ground between 1940 and 1960. They paved the way for the explosion of feminist activity after the Quiet Revolution of the early 1960s.

The centrality of nationalism for Quebec women is a matter beyond debate. Even Greta Hofmann Nemiroff, a bilingual Quebec "Anglophone," who argues from personal conviction that "nationalism of any sort is anathema," concedes that the cause of nationalism is inextricably woven into current realities. Nationalism is "part of our identity," explains de Sève, "and an important form of self-assertion, just as it is for a Black woman to define herself as Afro-American or a Native woman to become a member of the Assembly of First

Nations. All are ways for a feminist living under Canadian rule to claim full recognition of her own specific voice inside the women's movement."

Both Dumont and de Sève attempt to correct the erroneous understandings of many English Canadians about the Quebec scene. Feminists both nourish and oppose the nationalist movement, they note. As one example, they cite the position of women on the Quebec referendum, held in 1980 to determine whether Quebec should seek to alter the constitutional framework with the rest of Canada by implementing an arrangement for "sovereignty-association." At the "Yvette rally" in Montreal in 1980, well publicized in English-Canada, fourteen thousand Quebec women congregated to support the No vote. Ten days later, at Place Desjardins, fifteen thousand women chanted "Yes" in a rally that was given much more subdued coverage in English-language media. Feminists were active on both sides.

Since that time, the position of Quebec feminists has become more unified, as the recent debate on the Meech Lake constitutional amendment so dramatically illustrates. The ratification of Meech Lake, with its recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society," became the cornerstone of demands almost universally put forward by Quebec feminists. As Dumont notes, this principle was simply "indispensable" for women who wished to remain both feminists and Quebecers. The reluctance of many English-Canadian feminists to accept it created severe blockages between "the two solitudes," which require our most urgent attention now that the Meech Lake accord has failed and constitutional reform is again on the national agenda. Unless English-Canadian feminists become significantly better versed on the perspectives of Quebec women, something which has been more the exception than the rule to date, the outlook for future relations is bleak.

The English-Canadian feminist movement often recognizes the gulf between the Quebec and Canadian perspectives, even as it seems unable to bridge it. Vickers suggests that Canadian political culture is built upon the recognition of division and differences between people. She identifies "a belief in dialogue," "a willingness to engage in debate," and an acceptance of those differences that are "not dissolvable" as hallmarks of the current feminist movement. Vickers points to the strength of feminist umbrella groups which represent ideologically diverse interests and linguistic groups as proof of her assertion. Whether francophone Québécoises would agree with this assessment is somewhat problematic. And Vickers herself concedes that our alleged tolerance of diversity may fail to withstand

the challenge of women of colour, immigrant women, and women of the First Nations.

Vickers argues that home-grown influences were quite likely strong at the origin of the Canadian women's movement. She credits particularly the women's caucuses of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party (the predecessor to the current New Democratic Party [NDP]), which dated from the 1920s, and the women's peace movement (Voice of Women), from the 1950s, as true antecedents of contemporary Canadian feminism. Documenting the unusual case of Marlene Dixon, a radical American feminist transplanted from Chicago to Montreal in the 1960s, Vickers suggests that American influences were dramatic, but unlikely to take root. For Canadians nurturing their own nationalist apprehensions vis-à-vis the overweening American culture, this will be reassuring.

The Canadian-American similarities are more obvious in the accounts of the two governmental commissions on the status of women: the Presidential Commission in the United States reported in 1963, the Royal Commission in Canada in 1970. Sara Evans credits the American commission with politicizing large numbers of women to the extensiveness of sex discrimination. Monique Bégin notes that the hearings and discussions surrounding the Canadian commission "played a key role in creating and accelerating the process of a feminist evolution in Canadian women's associations."

Naomi Black also attempts a direct comparison when she juxtaposes the failure of the American Equal Rights Amendment campaign and the success of Canadian women's fight to have equality provisions enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. This was not a case of superior feminist strength in Canada, she asserts, but merely the result of two quite different battles. The sheer length of the process in the United States permitted a mobilization of ideological right-wing factions that was not duplicated in Canada. By contrast, within a relatively short time framework, a self-appointed elite group of Canadian feminists was able to mobilize pressure on executives who could move without consulting their legislatures. Black asserts that the machinery of the American National Organization of Women would have been superbly effective had they been engaged in a similar enterprise south of the border.

The explicitly comparative approach is a topic that seems to hold the attention of Canadian writers rather more obviously than their American counterparts. In her analysis of the contemporary women's movement in the United States, Evans cites various factors of influence, all of them American-based. She describes the clash between

changing labour force participation of women and the stultifying domestic ideology, the "grass-roots" community activism of women against the House Un-American Activities Committee, and the anti-segregation efforts of the African-American women, as events which came together in the late 1950s to repoliticize American women as a group. While Evans notes the parallels with Canada in the important role played by the President's Commission on the Status of Women appointed by President John F. Kennedy, the American commission preceded the Canadian one by a full six years. "The influence has been largely if not entirely one-way," postulates Black, noting the earlier visits of Canadian feminists such as Emily Howard Stowe and Letitia Youmans to seek training and inspiration south of the border. Perhaps one can be forgiven for wondering whether or not such powerful women might have left behind some nuggets of insight or strategic advice that served their American sisters well, unattributed though this foreign influence may have been.

One obvious locus for cross-fertilization between the women's movements in Canada and the United States is the academic field of women's studies. Both countries boast a burgeoning complement of women's studies courses, instructors, and programs. Margrit Eichler notes that women's studies has achieved "some degree of institutionalization in the Canadian university and college system," while Jean F. O'Barr states that approximately half of American campuses have courses on women and programs in women's studies. Certainly Canadians are well versed in the texts and periodical literature coming from the American movement. American feminist journals such as *Signs* have Canadian feminists on their board of international correspondents.

The ultimate assessment of the importance of academic women's studies to the mission of feminism is difficult. Are we sufficiently powerful, sufficiently learned, and sufficiently visionary to claim to be training the next generation? We can document our rites of passage, with research and courses on women at first segregated – often viewed as "fringe" to central academic matters – and then integrated into previously "malestream" curricula and research. The prospects of remaining true to feminism despite the "institutionalizing" tendencies of the academy are unquestionably problematic. The barrenness of the environment plagues all of us, and tenuous feminist networks often provide the only slender ties to reality that exist.

The scholarly agenda which drives us is, according to O'Barr, typically borrowed from personal involvement in the wider women's movement. Eichler analyses Canadian data which show that women's studies instructors are unusually active within an array of women's

organizations, and that they see a high degree of mutual interdependence between the academic process and the activist movement. Lorraine Greaves questions whether feminist activists who are not within the colleges and universities feel the same. The elitism of Canadian and American higher education is undoubtedly a grave barrier to most women. Feminist researchers must make their work accessible, according to Greaves, and she lists a spectrum of possibilities from video and theatre to pamphlets and Braille.

The importance of recognizing diversity within the women's movement is a theme which is clearly prominent in both countries. It is tempting to suggest that the current wave of feminism is more sensitive to this than earlier manifestations. Nancy Cott, in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism,* has reminded us that nineteenth-century women consisently used the singular word *"woman,"* symbolizing their conception of the unity of the female sex. The very language used by "the *women's* movement" which sprang to life in the 1960s and 1970s encompassed greater potential to comprehend "plural forms."[3]

Yet O'Barr suggests that it has taken us well into the current wave to begin to "shift away from an undifferentiated concept of women." Arun Mukherjee describes the "invisibility" of Black women and other women of colour in American women's studies courses and programs, and the failure of white feminists to critique feminist writing that is racist. Mariana Valverde calls for a transformation of women's studies curricula away from ethnocentric bias. "Gender does not transcend race," claims Patricia Monture-OKanee.

Valverde asserts that "racism is [currently] the major issue of the women's movement," and this is surely a phenomenon shared by both Canada and the United States. "Canadians pride themselves on being polite racists," claims Glenda Simms, but the roots of both countries go back to the enslavement of peoples of colour. Research in both countries must become more "race-conscious" in approach.

The response of the (largely white) women's movement to the claims of racism is instructive to those attempting to gauge its durability and strength. Mukherjee writes that, when "plurality and difference" split "feminism" into "feminisms" sometime in the 1980s, it was initially heralded as a sign of maturity. As the full implications began to sink in, however, white women reacted with guilt, denial, and hostility. Without question, as Mukherjee claims, this has culminated in a "crisis of legitimation," something that has greatly amused those most strongly opposed to feminism, whether or not they are anti-racist themselves.

But there are some encouraging signs of heightened sensitivity to racism, as more and more feminists become committed to taking account of the wide diversity of race among women. Valverde calls for white feminists to critique our earlier work from a racially conscious perspective and provides a model re-examination of her own research on sexuality. Greaves calls for a policy of affirmative action within the movement, to provide places and resources for women who have been excluded – because of race, class, disability, and heterosexism. Mukherjee urges the hiring of more Black women and women of colour in women's studies programs, the reformulating of anti-racist guidelines for feminist journals, and the inclusion of more writing by Black women. The extent to which we heed these calls over the coming years will be critical to the growth and survival of our movement.

Another hallmark of the current wave has been the focus on violence against women. There were antecedents from the turn of the century, of course, as Sheila Jeffreys has so clearly documented in *The Spinster and Her Enemies*.[4] The second wave began in the 1960s without much reference to violence. As Monique Bégin has reminded us, the Canadian Royal Commission made no mention of the issue. But by the 1980s, Catharine A. MacKinnon argues, a "distinctive feature of the contemporary women's movement is its focus on making sexual abuse visible."

Over the past several decades both Canada and the United States have witnessed the phenomenal growth of feminist-based rape crisis centres, battered women's shelters, and, incipiently, incest survivors' groups. The delivery of services to women and children who suffer from violence has been one of the prime goals of the women's movement. Our ability to continue and expand access to these services, and to do so within a feminist-defined framework, resisting the intrusion of the "professionalized" social service agencies, poses a critical challenge for the future.

Juxtaposed against service delivery have been twin efforts in the two countries to reform the law to reflect women's experience. Catharine MacKinnon surveys the results of these campaigns with respect to the law of rape. Despite the fact that criminal law in Canada is federal, while it is largely formulated state by state in the United States, the legal changes in both countries have been similar. In most jurisdictions rape has been redefined as "sexual assault" and the law has been rendered "gender-neutral." Conviction rates have not improved significantly, notes MacKinnon, who takes issue with much of this reform. "The problem is not gender-neutral, so the solution may not be either," she argues.

The place of law reform within the feminist agenda is a matter for some reflection. Feminism is a highly visible force in law schools in both countries, nurtured by a small group of dedicated female professors; feminist lawyers frequently take a central role within feminist organizations; much feminist energy has been directed into legal analysis. Disturbing questions remain about the representativeness of those who set the law reform agenda, however, and the prospect of achieving satisfactory results when working through classist, racist, male-dominated structures. As Monture-OKanee cautions, if rape laws are harshened, "First Nations men are going to be ... serving the sentences."

The questionable wisdom of a legal focus for feminists is underscored by Marjorie Heins's research on American Supreme Court jurisprudence. She dissects the seeming inability of the court under Chief Justice William Rehnquist to comprehend the historical and continuing racism of the United States. Heins suggests that we need sweeping changes to concepts of "excellence," "merit," and "qualifications" in order to deconstruct their current discriminatory application. The likelihood of accomplishing such tasks through law is a topic that bears further examination. Major dilemmas centre upon whom courts will recognize as authoritative witnesses and how enthusiastically judges will engage in second-guessing the hiring and promotion decisions of predominantly white, male institutions. The extraordinary cost and time commitment involved in litigation, not to mention the personal sacrifice demanded from litigants, will undoubtedly continue to limit the gains possible through these avenues.

Heins also describes the recent Supreme Court treatment of an affirmative action program designed to aid racial minorities in the City of Richmond case in 1989.[5] There the American court invalidated the program, subjecting it to the same sort of tests used to scrutinize discrimination directed against racial minorities. As Heins notes, this indicates an inability to appreciate the difference between the "hateful, invidious racial discrimination against Black citizens that stains United States history, and remedies designed in some small measure to correct the continuing effects of that past discrimination."

In Canada, affirmative action has had a significantly longer history. From the nineteenth century, attempts have been made to secure special status for Roman Catholic education and the French language. Regional representation was the cornerstone of Senate and Supreme Court appointments. In the twentieth century, the federal government has developed policies to integrate Francophones into the public service. A "Canadians-first" hiring policy for universities has been

in effect since 1981 as part of a response to concerns about the "Americanization" of post-secondary education. Canadian human rights legislation and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms make specific accommodation for affirmative action. Whether this will result in more benign treatment of affirmative action programs in Canadian law awaits further examination.[6]

Marjorie Cohen argues that economic issues should be central to the current feminist agenda. She notes that obvious problems, such as the wage gap between men and women, have traditionally occupied feminist attention, but suggests that since the 1980s, a more sophisticated feminist movement in Canada has begun to address broader economic policy such as the budget, trade policy, privatization, deregulation, and the general economic structure. Citing earlier disagreements between feminists over whether these matters are really feminist issues, Cohen suggests that the Canadian women's movement has become more aware of the "structural nature of women's oppression." She places the locus of this change within the executive of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, where an increased number of "left-oriented" women have come to power.

In direct contrast, Marianne A. Ferber documents the perspectives of American feminists on economic issues. The two countries obviously share many problems, such as occupational segregation by sex and race, disparity in wages, insufficient child-care facilities, and the burden of housework falling predominantly to women. Both feminist movements labour mightily to secure greater equality in pay and access to a wider array of occupations. Both allocate some (if not enough) attention to the status of women working without pay in the home. Yet there the similarity stops. While Canadian feminists begin to tackle wider economic issues, such as the free trade policies implemented by the Mulroney government, American feminists are visibly halted by the strident resistance of "determined advocates of the free market" who oppose such preliminary measures as pay equity.

Perhaps this explains the amazement with which many Canadian women watched the unfolding of the emotional debate between American feminists over the question of pregnancy leave. In 1986 the United States Supreme Court heard the California Federal Savings case, which considered whether a law requiring employers to offer four months' pregnancy leave to women was discriminatory.[7] Before the law was eventually upheld, some American feminists (significantly, those who controlled the National Organization of Women) argued that such leaves offended the concept of equality and would

inhibit the hiring of women. The different economic and social context in Canada has fostered an entirely different feminist climate. Here, pregnancy leaves have been a matter of law for decades, funded through government-administered unemployment insurance benefits. The feminist focus in Canada was on the expansion of the leaves and their funding, rather than a debate over the potential difficulties of programs directed entirely to women. Perhaps this explains the ferocity with which many Canadian feminists opposed free trade with the United States, fearing that the extensive (if insufficient) net of welfare provisions which we have come to expect would be at risk as businesses from the two culturally different countries began to compete directly.

Reproductive freedom has also been a central preoccupation of the contemporary women's movement in Canada and the United States, as Christine Overall notes. Access to birth control and abortion has mobilized thousands of women on both sides of the border to challenge government legal prohibitions and male-dominated medical circles. The historic *Roe* v. *Wade* decision in the United States in 1973 predated the Canadian *Morgentaler* ruling of 1988 by some fifteen years. It created a one-way flow of women from Canada seeking abortions, who obtained the procedure in one of hundreds of American abortion clinics dotting border cities from coast to coast. Now, as Americans witness continued challenges to *Roe* v. *Wade*, speculation has begun that the border traffic will reverse, with anxious Americans seeking, in Canadian clinics and hospitals, facilities that may soon be lost to them in their own nation. However the two countries weather the tenacious attempts to encroach upon access to abortion, their mutual dependence could not be starker.[8]

Thus Patricia Fernández Kelly's plea to re-examine the class roots of pro-choice and pro-life positions is important to feminists on both sides of the border. She argues that modern pro-choice discourse was formulated by a women's movement largely insensitive to class differences. Pro-life ideology has fed upon the mistrust that working-class women have long felt about feminism, and has staked out a high moral ground against allegedly individualistic, self-indulgent feminist claims.

Fernández Kelly takes issue with the feminist tendency to dismiss pro-lifers contemptuously as reactionary forces bent on maintaining women's subordination. She documents a profoundly anti-establishment strand of the pro-life movement and urges the women's movement to recapture this strand through a broadened redefinition of reproductive choice. "We should inquire about the conditions that make pregnancy and motherhood into a calamity for a large number

of women," she insists. This class dissection of abortion politics is a thought-provoking piece of work, which has important implications for women in both countries. Despite the claims of the Canadian women's movement to greater sensitivity on economic and class issues, we show no marked superiority in this field. The receptivity of Canadian and American feminists to Fernández Kelly's critique may prove the key to unlocking the polarization and deadlock over abortion in our two nations.

Christine Overall's contribution provides a philosophical examination of the concept of "reproductive rights," a phrase which she claims encompasses two notions. Discussions of the "right to reproduce" have recently complemented the traditional focus on the "right not to reproduce." In its most obvious forms, according to Overall, the "right to reproduce" includes the right not to be interfered with in such ways as forced sterilization or coercive birth control programs. The current wave of the women's movement has witnessed many breaches of this right in Canada, the United States, and throughout the Third World. Glenda Simms refers to the discriminatory sterilization and birth control practices visited upon Black women in North America and Africa.

In recent decades, the explosion of reproductive technology has created considerable concern in feminist circles. A host of techniques such as *in vitro* fertilization, embryo freezing, contract motherhood, and other mechanisms have been developed to combat "infertility." It is intriguing to recall that Shalumith Firestone published *The Dialectic of Sex* in 1970, right at the outset of the current movement. In her important classic, she called for the elimination of childbirth by natural means, arguing that pregnancy remained an insoluble barrier to women's equality. Marge Piercy, in her influential feminist novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, published in 1976, postulated a feminist utopia in which all birthing took place through technological means.[9]

By the 1980s, the feminist perspective on reproductive technology in both countries had become far less sanguine. Overall notes the reluctance of feminists to advocate the end of infertility research and treatment, since they wish to allow infertile women to make autonomous decisions. However, she expresses concern with the perspective that children are "owed to each of us, as individuals or as members of a couple," and fears that some women's access to reproductive technology may require the violation of other women's right not to reproduce. Canadians who prize their medicare programs fear the "incursion of U.S.-style commercialization of reproduction and reproductive entrepreneurialism." And feminists from both countries decry the delivery of reproductive technology from a monopolized

medical system riddled with sexism, racism, homophobia, and other shortcomings. The prospect that reproductive technology will contribute to feminist goals seems increasingly unlikely.

In the end we are left with two contemporary women's movements in the United States and Canada, which share much and differ significantly. In origins, in the selection of issues for discussion and activism, and in the understanding of those issues, there is much similarity and marked division. Mutual influence, if predominantly one-way, has a long tradition and a promising future. As feminist activists in both countries come to appreciate the roots and agenda of their neighbours more clearly, an even greater potential for enrichment will undoubtedly unfold.

This page intentionally left blank

PART ONE

The Origins of the Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada and the United States

This page intentionally left blank

THE FOUR ESSAYS IN THIS PART ATTEMPT TO EXAMINE THE various factors that provided the originating impetus for the most recent wave of the women's movements in Canada and the United States. Monique Bégin and Jill Vickers describe the initial resurfacing of the organized feminist movement in Canada in the 1960s, Sara Evans portrays a similar burst of energy in the United States in the same decade, and Micheline Dumont recounts the somewhat earlier awakening of feminist activism in Quebec in the 1940s.

Monique Bégin writes from the perspective of one who lived in the centre of the resurgence. As a young Quebec sociologist, she was recruited to serve as the executive secretary of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1967–70). Unlike many Canadian royal commissions, this one did not prove to be a tedious retreading of old ground, fulfilling the twin functions of diminishing expectations and delaying reform. The hearings, research, and report of that Commission raised unprecedented public awareness of feminism, uniting English-speaking and French-speaking individuals and women's organizations from every corner of the country. With the passage of twenty years, Bégin (now dean of health sciences at the University of Ottawa) reflects upon the nature of that Royal Commission – its strengths, its weaknesses, and ultimately its symbolic meaning for the history of the Canadian women's movement.

Jill Vickers probes the less spectacular, more elusive "grass roots" underlying the rise of the current wave of feminism in Canada, while offering explicit comparison to the situation in the United States. Emphasizing the high degree of intergenerational continuity in Canada, she attributes an important role to the Voice of Women, the anti-war organization active from the 1950s. Vickers documents the gender struggles within the early women's caucuses of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). She stresses that the revitalized Canadian women's movement was committed to reform within the ordinary political process, tolerant of diversity but anchored by a fundamental belief in the welfare state. In contrast, she recounts that the American women's movement was influenced to a larger extent by a dynamic wave of grass-roots consciousness-raising groups. Small but extraordinarily influential groups of radical feminists denounced the major institutions of U.S. government and society, rejected reform through the traditional political process, and opted for the building of a counterculture.

Sara Evans writes from the perspective of having been active within one of the earliest consciousness-raising, women's liberation groups in the United States. She cites the influx of women into the paid labour force and their increasing antagonism towards the