

Spring 1997

IRW NETWORK

Letter from the Director

On the occasion of our twentieth anniversary, I am delighted to announce the new IRW Research Fellows Seminar "Women in the Public Sphere: Power, Practice, Agency" which will begin next year. There has long been a need for a funded seminar devoted to research on women and gender at Rutgers; it is highly gratifying to have such a seminar established at last. The development of this seminar has been the result of the sort of collaborative effort that has taken the women's community at Rutgers so far over the years. I would like to thank everyone involved in carrying this project through to fruition, particularly **Mary Hartman**, Director of the Institute for Women's Leadership.

Looking back over our file of early correspondence for what was originally called the Women's Studies Institute, as well as at the impressive record of IRW's accomplishments over the past twenty years, I am struck by many things. First, by the consistent substance, diversity, and high quality of IRW's programs. And tied for first, the level of commitment on the part of Rutgers faculty, students and staff, year after year after year. The hours spent, the letters written, the phone calls made (especially before e-mail), the proposals developed and applications submitted, the programs mounted. A great deal of this effort, especially in the mid-70s years leading up to the establishment of the Institute in 1976-77, was entirely voluntary. And what good fortune that the level of commitment was matched by the incredibly high level of the work done, both scholarly and administrative.

I am struck by the excitement visible in these documents--the tone of urgency, of pride in this Institute as embodiment and realization of the new movement that was changing not just scholarship but lives, culture, politics, society. As it has from the beginning, the IRW reflects very directly the growing strength, groundbreaking impact, brilliance, diversity and presence of gender scholars and women's activism on the Rutgers campuses, throughout the state, the region, the country, and increasingly, the world. As part of our celebration of our history, we've invited former directors of the IRW and the Women's Studies Institute which preceded it to share recollections of the challenges and accomplishments of their terms in this anniversary newsletter.

As we know, for many years the IRW has been fortunate to be part of the network of women's programs, centers, and institutes on the Rutgers campuses, each with its own particular field and contribution, that combine to make Rutgers a nationally and internationally renowned leader in scholarship on women and gender. This context enhances the pleasure, already very great, of celebrating the coming of age (coming to age?) of the IRW. I hope you will all be able to join us in that celebration at our party on May 1 at 27 Clifton Avenue, an address that figures largely in our 90s incarnation. But ultimately, it is the community of faculty and graduate students at Rutgers that is the IRW, and always has been. Please come and be celebrated!

--Marianne DeKoven

Join Us!
20th Anniversary Celebration
May 1, 1997 6:00 p.m.
27 Clifton Avenue

◆ Institute for Research on Women ◆ 27 Clifton Avenue ◆ Douglass College ◆
 ◆ Rutgers University ◆ New Brunswick ◆ New Jersey ◆ 08903 ◆
 ◆ 908/932-9072 ◆ FAX: 908/932-0861 ◆ irw mail@email.rutgers.edu ◆

Mary S. Hartman (1975-1977)

When Marianne DeKoven suggested that I make a few comments on the beginnings of the Institute for Research on Women, I had to admit--and I am an historian, egad--that I wasn't sure whether it was 1975 or 1976, or even whether I was actually the first director! I promised to do some checking, and I can at least report some definitive answers on these burning issues. (I found the documents in a box in the basement, NOT the first box I pawed through; and I know there is another box in there somewhere with much more data on "the early years," but there is a deadline on this thing, so here is what you get now.)

First, I remember that the whole idea was that those of us doing Women's Studies in New Brunswick wanted a coordinating body to help us as much in internal planning for courses, speakers, etc. (the four New Brunswick colleges all had Women's Studies faculty, and three of the four had formal programs) as to provide forums for our research and a more visible launching pad for grant proposals. My search yielded various draft proposals for grants from the late seventies and early eighties that went out over the Women's Studies Institute name, including one to NEH that I recall that was subsequently funded on "Comparative Studies of Women and Social Change" (History, Anthropology, Political Science and Economics cooperating) and "Theories of Female Creativity" (English, Foreign Languages, Literature, History, and Psychology cooperating.)

On the issue of when we got underway, I found only two documents, but they were enough. One was a letter to then **Provost Kenneth Wheeler**, dated February 18, 1975, from my wonderful colleagues **Nancy Bazin**, English, Rutgers College; **Kate Ellis**, English, Livingston College; **Elaine Showalter**, English, Douglass College; and **Judith Walkowitz**, History, University College. It all came back in a rush when I read this carefully worded letter, from these women designating themselves the "representatives of the incipient Rutgers University Women's Studies Institute." This was my tenure year, and at the time they were writing, my candidacy was far from going well, my book *Victorian Murderesses* had not been accepted for publication, and I was a basket case. This may explain my blanking out on 1975-76.

Anyhow, they begin by saying "we would like to inform you of our strong support for Dr. Mary Hartman as a candidate for a tenured position in the Department of History at Douglass College. Though we are still in the process of drawing up by-laws for the Institute, we have also given serious thought to the position of coordinator, and feel the Dr. Hartman's qualifications would ideally suit her to the position." (They were not very many, to tell the honest truth, although my friends were dear to go on about my "scholarly reputation," and such. I along with many others



here had been caught up in all the enthusiasm of those years, and I had co-founded the Berkshire Conference on Women's History with **Lois Banner** in 1973--which did result in the edited collection *Clio's Consciousness Raised*. But then I had decided to ditch the political biography I wrote for my dissertation and go into the new field of women's history, so things got right down to the wire before the book was accepted that spring and tenure came through.)

By the following year (we get to the second document I mentioned) we were happily ensconced as the Institute at 132 George Street on the second floor (that is I and a graduate student, **Jack Fisher**) and among other projects including lining up speakers who agreed to come without honorariums, we produced the first directory of affiliated scholars of the Women's Studies Institute (the second document!) In those days, we had a telephone line and an annual budget of three hundred dollars, which just about paid for the telephone.

We had a big celebration when we moved into those headquarters on the corner of George and Jones, and I recall that Rutgers Board Member **Adrienne Anderson**, Provost Wheeler, and **Vice President Henry Winkler** all showed up on a beautiful spring day. We handed out tee shirts to all, with that joyful Matisse print of women dancing round in a circle, all in the feminist colors of purple and green. Some time later, I recall that when I went on leave to have the baby who turned out to be Sam, **Dee Garrison** took over and held down the fort, persuading **Natalie Davis** to come up for a marvelous talk that helped to bring in more resources.

The glory days of the Institute came after my time, I can assure you, when Kate and Carol and all the rest took over and put us on the map. I think that our contribution in those days was seeing the need to work together to pull off something special, and getting the network going. They were good times, but the richness was all in wisdom and spirit. We needed cash. We still do. But hey, it was fun.

E. Ann Kaplan (1979-1981)

As Acting Director of the Women's Studies Institute, my main task was to set the stage for selecting the first outside director. In those days, the Institute was located in a tiny space in one of those little wooden old-fashioned houses on the Douglass Campus. I did organize a speaker series which included talks on women and sexuality, violence, and feminism and socialism, but we had virtually no budget for anything major.

The WSI was the umbrella organization for a grant from the Women's Educational Equity Program for a two-year project promoting non-sexist physical education in middle schools. As part of a curriculum development grant directed by **Joan Burstyn**, WSI members met over the year to discuss pilot interdisciplinary women's studies courses. I was therefore involved in the activities of those important projects. I also worked closely with the burgeoning Women's Studies curricular programs, which were mainly in English and History at that point.

I would say that my main triumph for my WSI investment in those years was being on the Search Committee that selected **Catharine Stimpson** to be the first IRW director. I marvel at the tremendous growth in IRW since those early beginnings in those tiny old rooms and congratulate all the subsequent directors for building up IRW into what it is today.

[ed. note: In 1980-81, the WSI was reorganized and named the Institute for Research on Women. With Catharine Stimpson's appointment as the inaugural Director of the IRW came additional University support and increase in staff. **Phyllis Mack** and **Lourdes Beneria** served as acting directors in 1983 and 1986. From 1985 to 1994 **Ferris Olin** was the dynamic (although half-time) Executive Officer of the IRW, working in close partnership with the Directors and playing a crucial role in the Institute's success.]

Catharine R. Stimpson (1981-1985)

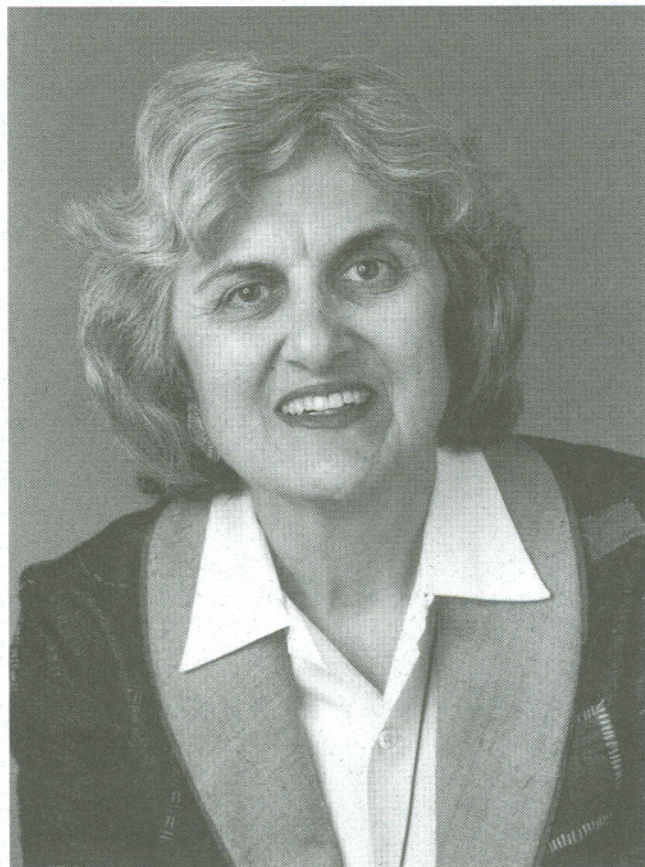
By 1981, when **Kenneth Wheeler**, then the Provost of Rutgers/New Brunswick, asked me to direct the Institute for Research on Women, the pioneers of women's studies at Rutgers had created their extraordinary record. My job was to build on this legacy. Doing so, my co-builders and I confronted a question that then pervaded women's studies, "What next? After the ground-breaking, after the foundation-laying, what next?"

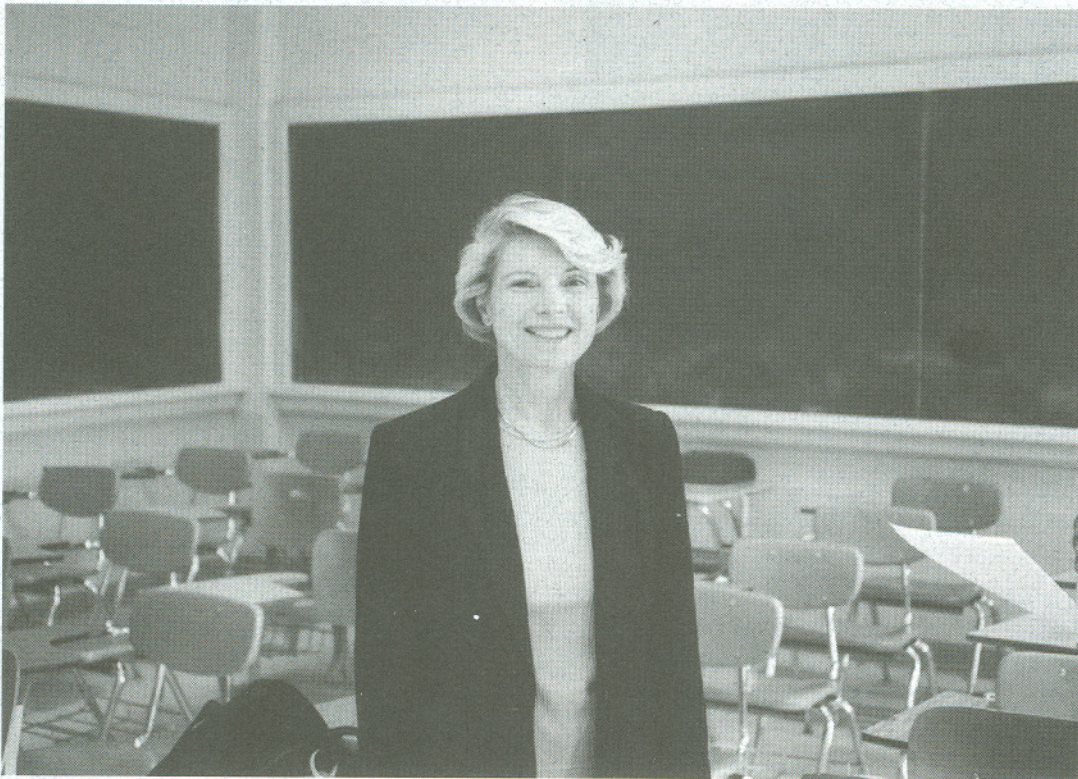
We came up with at least three answers. The first was to select an intellectual focus that was spacious enough to include many diverse women, nationally and internationally. We chose as our first focus work and the connections among

the sites of paid labor and the household. The second was to bring scholars to Rutgers who could both learn from and teach us, in brief to nurture an intellectual community. We applied for and won a Rockefeller-Humanist-in-Residence award during the first round of competitions for these grants. It permitted us to have such people as **Mae Henderson**, the black feminist critic, and **Carole Vance**, the anthropologist, on campus for a year.

The third answer was to create a spirited, inclusive forum in which many people could present their research, policy initiatives, and projects on behalf of women. This forum was also designed to show what a state university could do for the public that supported it. I named it "Celebration of Our Work," and only after the publicity went out did I realize that the acronym was COW. O, well, I said to myself, better cow than bull.

At first, we did not know if women and men in the state would wish to participate in our celebration, but proposals to speak poured in. I sat on the floor of the Institute's offices, then in College Hall on the Douglass campus. **Adrienne Anderson**, a generous and wise woman who supported women and women's studies at Rutgers, sat with me. We sorted out the proposals into piles, each a possible panel, and thus, C.O.W. was first designed. I like to think of it as one metaphor for women's studies: two women, their hands full of paper, not surprised but amazed by what other women were thinking and doing.





Carol H. Smith (1986-1992)

When Marianne invited former directors of IRW to reflect on highlights of their years in office, the clear choice for me was the *New Jersey Project*, which began the year I became director and ended as a Rutgers-based project about the time my term ended. (It is still alive and well, I am happy to report, at William Paterson College.)

Although IRW had other grant projects going on during that period, the New Jersey Project was by far the most ambitious project we had taken on. It was funded by a large grant from the New Jersey Department of Higher Education to carry out gender integration projects at colleges throughout the state. In addition to regular state-wide conferences and workshops, the core of the project was an annual two-week summer residence program for faculty teams from various state colleges. Their charge was to plan gender integration projects for their own campuses during the two weeks, to obtain their presidents' approval and funding, and to carry out the projects during the next year.

Our idea was to provide these teams in residence with state-of-the-art knowledge of gender research in a wide spectrum of disciplines provided by leaders in their fields. The outside speakers were asked to address the question, "How has gender research transformed your discipline?" The excitement generated by these sessions was intense and had much to do with the historical moment when gender studies was entering the mainstream in various fields.

Learning how to cope with the pressures of constant programming was the obvious challenge for all of us at IRW but the most important lessons we learned were about politics, not administration. We learned that when funding is concerned, timing is everything. The most creative grant proposal in the world won't gain major funding if the right supporters aren't in place and ready to fight for the grant against the many competing projects.

In the case of our grant, there was a core of enthusiastic supporters in the Department of Higher Education and they were looking for a major project to highlight the administration's commitment to gender. We also came to recognize the enormous influence generated by a state-supported project; college presidents looked with favor on local projects because of their relation to the state. But we also learned the dark side of state support; opponents of the administration were ever-ready to criticize, often in the press. The hardest lesson of all was that such magical moments of convergence of support can disappear just as quickly when priorities change.

Nevertheless, projects of this scope have widespread influence and reach outside the university to build a loyal constituency throughout the state. In the case of the New Jersey Project, many of the state college faculty are still active in the current project and continue to work on gender projects at their colleges. The fact that the project just held its tenth anniversary celebration is testimony to its influence and its power of survival.

Cora Kaplan (1992-1995)

Thinking back on the challenges I faced during my time at IRW, I suppose the biggest was the most mundane--first keeping the funding from being cut further in a time of stringent retrenchment in the University, and, that accomplished, improving that funding and finding new sources, so that the Institute remained an independent unit and 'sustainable.'

That involved not only continuing to make an argument persuasive to Provosts as well as colleagues for IRW's importance within and outside Rutgers as my predecessors had done, but in building its programs from an already excellent base, something we were then well placed to do because we were now inhabiting the wonderful purposely designed Clifton Avenue building. This allowed us, for example, to be much more pro-active in seeking visiting scholars nationally and abroad, because we could house them in our state-of-the-art offices. The Clifton Avenue space also gave us both room and a base for widening our annual program.

I am most proud, I think, of three achievements: first, of the development of the *Towards 2000 Graduate/Faculty Seminar*, a less formal setting than our lectures for the presentation and discussion of work in progress from our own faculty, visiting scholars, and visiting speakers. It was an immediate success with faculty and students and worked very well in counterpoint with the IRW's lecture series *Thinking About Women*.

I was also very gratified by the success of our establishment of an annual graduate conference, organized by Rutgers graduate students across the disciplines, but bringing together young scholars and new work from institutions all along the Northeast Corridor. The graduate conference also provides a venue for a distinguished visiting lecturer. As conference keynoters, **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak** and **Deborah E. McDowell** gave two of the most memorable talks sponsored by IRW in my years.

These thematic conferences, addressing gender and diaspora, and identities and Americas, indicated some of the new directions and continuities of feminist scholarship; it was good to see that its participants included many men now working on gender issues. In addition to their substantive content, the conferences developed graduate students' skills in organizing, running and surviving such events, and set in motion practical collaboration of students across disciplines.

The third thing of which I am most proud to have been a part was our three-day international conference in April 1995: *Transitions, Environments, Translations: The Meanings of Feminism in Contemporary Politics* organized by myself and **Joan W. Scott** of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton which took place both at Rutgers and the Institute



for Advanced Study and brought together over thirty speakers from 16 countries. The book of the conference--a 400 page blockbuster--will be published this year by Routledge. Outside funding by Ford, Rockefeller and ACLS made possible this extraordinary, provocative event, full of spirited political and intellectual debate.

As Director of IRW I was extraordinarily lucky to be able to collaborate with the other members of the Institute for Women's Leadership at Rutgers to develop its mission and its activities. Nowhere else in academia on either side of the Atlantic will I be able to work on a daily basis with such an impressive and distinguished group of women: **Alice Kessler-Harris, Charlotte Bunch, Ruth Mandel, Sue Cobble, and Mary Hartman**. I am still learning from them.

Finally, I will always remember my time at IRW for the terrific cooperative experience of working with its staff, both permanent and part-time. **Arlene Nora** and **Beth Hutchison** in particular made the Institute work and the work worth doing.

Time Dated Material
Please Expedite Handling

Women's Activism--May 15

The Fifteenth Annual *Celebration of Our Work Conference* will be held Thursday, May 15 at Hickman Hall on the Douglass campus. Keynote speaker **Rebecca Walker** will discuss her work as a cofounder of Third Wave, a national, multicultural membership organization devoted to facilitating young women's leadership and activism.

Panel sessions will take up a variety of approaches to the theme "Women's Activism," including Thai Women and Activism; Women's Activism and the Law; Preserving and Disseminating the Diverse Voices of Activist Women; Radical Labor: Women's Agency at Work; Feminist Praxis and Gender Violence Among Teens; and Scholar-Activist Identities: Some Unavoidable Observations on the Feminist Theory/Feminist Practice Divide.

Rebecca Walker's lecture is free and open to the public; contact the IRW for information about registering for other sessions.

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