
Talking about a Revolution: New Approaches to Writing the History of Second-Wave Feminism

Catherine E. Rymph. *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2006. xi + 338 pp.; ill. ISBN-10: 0-8078-5652-5 (cl).

Anne Enke. *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. xvi + 369 pp. ISBN-10: 0-8223-4083-6 (pb).

Ronnee Schreiber. *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women & American Politics*. New York: Oxford, 2008. x + 178 pp. ISBN-10: 0-1953-3181-8 (cl).

Stephanie Gilmore, ed. *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. x + 307 pp. ISBN-10: 0-2520-7539-0 (pb).

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Babyboomers who remember a time before the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s transformed U.S. society know how recently it has been since women have obtained basic civic, social and economic rights: things like the right to vote, to hold political office and to serve on juries; the right to bring criminal charges against violent husbands; the right to terminate unhappy marriages; the right to open a checking account in one's own name; the right to borrow money from lending institutions without having to get a male relative co-sign for the loan; the right to attend colleges and graduate schools on the same basis as men; the right to practice the so-called "male" professions—like law or medicine; the right to appear alone in public, without male escorts and not be subjected to catcalling and verbal abuse; the right to work in an environment that is free of sexual harassment; the right to earn equal pay for equal work. Ask students to raise their hands if they agree that women are entitled to these rights, and all the hands go up. Tell students that feminists are responsible for the widespread change in social attitudes that made such rights possible (although gender discrimination is still widespread) and looks of surprise or puzzlement will appear on many faces. Ask who would call him or herself a feminist, and most of the hands go down.

The discussion that follows invariably begins with the statement, "I'm not a feminist . . . but"—a sentiment often attributed to the backlash against feminism that grew in virulence during the 1970s and 1980s and which is now common among a younger generation of students who grew up during a so-called "post feminist" age. In the 1960s and even more so during the 1970s, the media used the label "feminist" to mock, criticize, belittle, and antagonize women who were challenging sexist and heterosexist norms. In common parlance, a feminist connoted a man-hating, angry, ugly, aggressive woman. It was not unusual to hear that feminists despised men so much that they chose to become lesbians. In a phrase, feminists were constructed as selfish, castrating bitches—selfish for making their own rights and wellbeing their first priority, castrating for insisting that men respect and satisfy women's sexual desires; bitches because they would not massage male egos, instead challenging men for access to arenas from which women had previously been excluded.

Yet as the books under review here make perfectly clear, the refrain "I'm not a feminist but," has had a long and anointed history. Many women who organized among themselves to bring about social and political change also disavowed the feminist label. In Stephanie Gilmore's words, "feminist activism" occurred "in places we do not expect and among women who do not necessarily embrace the term but who do the work of feminism" nonetheless (3). Or, as Anne Enke concludes in her remarkable study, the history of feminism is not just "a history . . . of established institutions that bore the name 'feminist' and left records to that effect. Feminism was in fact constituted . . . [by] people who eagerly identified as feminist, people who uncomfortably identified as feminist, and people who disavowed political identification altogether" (254).

The historiography on second-wave feminism has been a rich and growing field since its inception, emerging along with the diverse social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Much early scholarship focused on white women's struggle for rights, and explored the links between the abolitionist and suffrage/temperance movements in the nineteenth century and between civil rights and woman's liberation movements in the twentieth century—what historians now refer to as the first and second waves of feminism respectively. These initial narratives were immediately challenged and supplemented by accounts that focused on the contributions of working-class women, women of color, and lesbian women—showing us how different groups of women took separate roads to feminism. Gilmore's edited anthology *Feminist Coalitions* contributes valuable insights to this strain of feminist historiography, increasing our appreciation of the frequency with which women of different races, classes

and sexual orientations/gender expressions worked in conjunction with one another to challenge inequalities and injustice. Re-examining identity politics, the contributors to Gilmore's collection help retrieve some of the complexity of the interracial and cross-class dynamics within second-wave feminism, while remaining cognizant of the reality that women as social actors are always *situated* within existing racial, class, gender, and sexual hierarchies. Enke's monograph, *Finding the Movement*, on the other hand, shows scholars how they might expand the concept of identity beyond the usual construction of it as multiple and intersectional. In Enke's hands, the *situatedness* of women is taken literally, as identities are seen as "an effect of spatial practices" (9, emphasis in original). "Feminism," Enke states, "took shape as a popular movement around the limitations and possibilities of local geographies" as women in the 1960s and 1970s "faced exclusions and hierarchies" that were deeply embedded in public spaces (9).

Over the last two decades or so, scholars have also examined the ways in which conservative and antifeminist women have employed their own forms of woman-centered rhetoric to advance women's interests. The books by Catherine Rymph and Ronnee Schreiber each take part in this larger effort to analyze women's contributions to right-wing politics. Rymph, a historian, offers a brilliant account of both antifeminist and feminist women in the Republican Party, demonstrating how women's engagement with these ideologies impacted the party itself. She reminds readers that feminist organizations in the 1970s drew bipartisan support, as the Republican party under the leadership of President Gerald Ford supported the Equal Rights Amendment and women's right to choose an abortion—before feminists within the party were pushed aside with the rise of the New Right. Schreiber, a political scientist, brings this history into the present in her examination of two contemporary conservative organizations, reminding readers that there is as much division among women on the right as there is among women on the left, and helping us to understand the seeming conundrum that much continued opposition to organized feminism comes from women themselves.

The strengths of Schreiber's account lay in her careful analysis of the different policies espoused by two contemporary conservative organizations, Concerned Women for America (hereafter, CWA) and the Independent Women's Forum (hereafter, IWF). The CWA, founded in 1979 to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, is now a multi-issue interest group with approximately 500,000 members and a budget of eight million dollars. Composed mostly of evangelical Protestant women, the CWA is concerned primarily with public and private morality—it opposes abortion as well as homosexuals' right to marry; it advocates for prayer in public schools and for

the strict regulation of pornography. In contrast, the IWF, which emerged in 1992 to support the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, is composed of economically conservative women, with approximately 20,000 members and a budget of a million dollars (26–27). Focused on the economic impact of governmental policies, the IWF calls for limited federal social programs, fewer business regulations, and increased private sector involvement in the provision of public goods and services.

According to Schreiber, the differences between the CWA and the IWF emerge most clearly when it comes to their position on identity politics. The CWA, in common with a certain brand of radical feminism, believes in a female essence that connects women, renders them different from men and correlates specifically with women's expressed interests and needs. However, the CWA invokes these beliefs to contest feminist policies (e.g. pro-choice) and to re-align feminist messages with its own values (sanctity of life, women's primary roles as wives and mothers) (118). On the other hand, the IWF criticizes sex-based claims and assesses proposed policies in terms of economic principles. Although their constituencies and philosophies differ, these two conservative organizations sometimes adopt similar positions: both organizations oppose affirmative action programs and gender-integrated basic training in the military. At other times, they have disagreed: for example, the CWA supported the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 while the IWF opposed it, arguing that it was a waste of taxpayers' money (121).

Rymph's book is indispensable to historians interested in what happened to women's involvement in politics after their enfranchisement in 1920, as suffragists, labor leaders, and other activists divided over whether to join the two-party system or to continue to operate outside it. Rymph identifies two alternative strategies used by women to gain political power within the Republican Party. The first of these, integration, was exemplified by career women like Marion Martin and Elizabeth Farrington, who became important party leaders intent on demonstrating that women could compromise and subject themselves to party discipline, just as men did. The alternative strategy, separation, or operating through an independent women's club movement, enabled women—both black and white women—to retain a measure of autonomy as they attempted to maneuver in a political realm that many found morally corrupt as well as dismissive of them as women. Rymph is careful to point out that these two strategies were not mutually exclusive, that even in women's efforts to assimilate into party structures there was a measure of enforced separation they could never entirely overcome. Moreover, in Phyllis Schlafly, Rymph offers an example of a woman who was initially a party loyalist but who would eventually

form an organization that was independent of the Republican Party, while still retaining her Republican identity and affiliation.

Rymph also does an excellent job of contrasting white women's and black women's clubs (the club movement was segregated for much of its history), reminding readers that while white women were divided in terms of party affiliation—some joining Republican clubs, some Democratic clubs, some remaining nonpartisan—the vast majority of black women remained loyal to the Republican party—the party of Lincoln—during the 1920s and into the 1930s. As Rymph argues, black and white women who chose to enact their politics through partisan clubs, were continuing forms of political engagement that women in the nineteenth century had developed in their nonpartisan campaigns for temperance, abolition, and suffrage. Believing in women's moral superiority to men, white Republican clubwomen framed their commitment to politics in terms of a mission of good versus evil, while white women who pursued membership into the Republican party's official bodies generally de-emphasized women's differences from men, finding the rhetoric of female moral superiority a liability, as it "presented women as uncompromising in their politics and therefore as unreliable partisans" (6).

Rymph goes on to explore how the Republican party increasingly found itself having to turn to (white) clubwomen for assistance in grassroots organizing to counter the Democratic party's use of labor unions, particularly after World War II. By the 1950s, local organizing and fundraising were clearly identified as women's work, although Republican clubwomen were still not recognized as having legitimate claims on patronage or power (as labor was by the Democrats). Frustrated by this lack of recognition, Republican clubwomen staged organized revolts, first during the presidential campaign in 1964, when they threw their support to Barry Goldwater, enabling him to win the Republican party's nomination, and then again in 1967 during Phyllis Schlafly's failed bid to become the leader of the National Federation of Republican Women. In describing Schlafly's success in mobilizing a new—more conservative—grassroots constituency, Rymph is careful to show that the struggle was not simply between moderates and conservatives within the party, but also involved women's attempts to counter party men who were working "to keep Republican women neutralized" (Rymph, citing Schlafly, 182). Rymph concludes the book with an illuminating analysis of how the emergence of liberal feminism in the 1970s, "presented a new political context in which the National Federation of Republican Women was no longer the most important means for Republican women to participate in [national] politics" (188).

Together, the works by Schreiber and Rymph greatly enlarge our understanding of women's opposition to organized feminism. But it should be

noted that these books are largely conceptualized within the historiographic tradition that teaches, in Stephanie Gilmore's words, "about feminism and its 'waves,' framed by woman's suffrage [in the nineteenth century] and women's liberation" in the twentieth century (1). As Gilmore argues, this standard narrative has made it difficult to see the vast and diverse women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s for what they actually were: *the largest and farthest-reaching social movement of the era*—involving millions of women of diverse racial and social backgrounds—not just a small cadre of white middle-class women. The works edited by Gilmore and authored by Enke make visible the multitudes of women who challenged patriarchal, racist and heterosexist practices and norms by creating new institutions (battered women's shelters, rape crisis centers, feminist lending institutions to name a few) and new commercial and civic spaces (bars, ball fields, bookstores, collectives, and coffeehouses) where women could assemble, socialize, drink, dance, and organize.

Gilmore's anthology, *Feminist Coalitions*, showcases work of historians already well known for their studies of social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, containing excellent contributions by Cynthia Harrison, Amy Farrell, Wendy Kline, Premilla Nadasen, Maria Bevacqua, and Anne Valk. Gilmore also includes path-breaking research by young scholars, including Tamar Carroll (National Congress of Neighborhood Women), Marisa Chappell (Full Employment campaign), Andrea Estepa (Peace movement), Caryn Neumann (Church Women United), and Emily Zuckerman (EEOC vs. Sears case). Of central interest to a number of these contributors are the ways in which white women had their racial consciousness raised and their political perspectives broadened as they worked with women of color, both within groups that explicitly identified as feminist (Women's Action Alliance, Boston Women's Health Collective, *Ms Magazine*, and the anti-rape movement) and groups that did not (Women's Peace Movement, Christian Women United). Various chapters explore how specific groups of white women strove, if not always successfully, to make their organizations more inclusive as they came to understand that "women's issues" could not be addressed separately from racism, imperialism, and poverty.

One essay in particular, that by Tamar Carroll, is especially helpful in deepening our thinking about the situatedness of women—not just in relation to a hierarchical social order, but in relation to physical location or place. Examining community organizing among women in East Harlem and Brooklyn in the mid 1970s, Carroll explains how these activists were resisting a "state-based attack on their neighborhoods" as New York City, implementing a strategy of "planned shrinkage," closed police and fire stations, schools, hospitals, bus routes and subway stations (Carroll, 198).

As a whole, *Feminist Coalitions* has a kind of double-consciousness; on the one hand, it presents many paths to feminism, understanding that it is reductive to try to map out a single route. On the other hand, this volume is also interested in how various paths intersected. Several chapters explore how separate organizations comprising activists of different racial and class backgrounds came together to form coalitions around what one scholar calls “bridge issues” (Bevacqua, p. 165)—thus bringing different perspectives to peace (Estepa), rape (Bevacqua), women’s health (Valk), and social welfare (Nadasen). In another chapter dealing with the movement for full employment, coalitions form—not around a unifying issue, but because “points of consensus” emerge, as different groups debate a range of social problems (Chappell, 255). As Chappell argues, the campaign for full employment attracted women (and men) with very different identities and priorities—self-defined feminist lobbyists, welfare rights advocates, labor union leaders, and so-called traditional women’s organizations, to name a few—eventually comprising over one million people. Because they spoke to one another from such different perspectives, participants were able to articulate key interconnections among seemingly distinct issues: the feminization of poverty, the rapid erosion of the male-breadwinner household, the antagonism of ethnic blue-collar workers towards liberal and left policies like affirmative action and welfare.

Thus, the essays in *Feminist Coalitions* provide useful evidence to counter a prevailing view that identity politics fragmented and permanently damaged the left. Yet, as sophisticated as this scholarship is in demonstrating how activists, white and black, were able “to move beyond parochial identities” (Carroll, 197), nonetheless students of this history need to be wary of something circular, if not essentialistic, in narratives that explain women’s political choices in term of their identities—as if women’s political commitments somehow emanate naturally from their social backgrounds.

Enke’s original and creative monograph, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*, helps historians avoid this theoretical conundrum and enables scholars to conceptualize identity in new ways. As Enke states in her introduction, writing the history of the “Second Wave according to feminist identity and ideological positions [has] had the effect of reifying the very identity politics most feminist historians seek to critique” (9). In Enke’s narrative, the focus is not on divisions caused by different identities, but on “sites of activism,” (bars, bookstores, parks, warehouses, coffeehouses, women’s centers, church basements—the scope of the book is extraordinary), out of which new identities emerge, generated as diverse people inhabit public spaces that are “already built around exclusions and privileged access” (9). As a result, we come to see clearly

how a category such as lesbian is insufficiently precise, encompassing such distinct identities as butch, fem, stud, lady, bulldagger, gay, bisexual, passing women, etc.—all of which disrupted the sexually unmarked (but presumed heterosexual) “woman” (10). Across race, across class, whether they identified as feminists or not, such women changed the public landscape creating new spaces—women-only spaces—in the process challenging assumptions of heteronormativity and shaping feminism as a mass social movement.

Enke begins her book by reminding readers that in the 1970s commercial and civic spaces were used to reinforce traditional gender and sex norms: respectable bars would not admit women who were unescorted by men; (eating alone in a restaurant immediately raised suspicions that the woman was a prostitute soliciting customers); public parks denied girls and women the use of playing fields; (athleticism being considered unfeminine); few commercial establishments were owned or controlled by women (since banks would not make loans or issue credit to women). As women “moved within and round these spatial conditions,” Enke argues, “they created a massive groundswell of feminist activism by directly intervening in the built environment” (7).

In formulating this analysis, Enke conducted over 120 interviews with women of various racial and class backgrounds (American Indian, Latina, African American and white) who were resident in Chicago, Detroit, or Minneapolis-St Paul during the 1960s and 1970s, and the material derived from these interviews is fascinating. For example, from Peggy, a black woman, we learn about segregation and racism within lesbian bar culture in Detroit: “We didn’t have crossover bars: you had black bars for women; white bars for women So if you were a black girl and you went to the white bars, a lot of times they wouldn’t even speak to you . . . [T]he music was white music, so you really couldn’t dance. You went to the black bar to be amidst your own” (37). “Your own” in this instance meant a highly stylized ladies and studs subculture, which was very different from the lesbian subculture of white women in Minneapolis or the butch subculture of white women in Chicago. As Jackie, a black activist in Chicago elaborates: “You couldn’t be a white feminist and be *fem*. Feminists were so concerned with their looks, to cut their hair, to not wear feminine clothing . . . to create styles against the sexism that they experienced as white women For a black woman to dress up was not a betrayal of our movement. . . . To get dressed up to go out on a Saturday night was good, and empowering. Because Monday morning she was going to have to get up, go to work, and go back to being black trash. . . .” (55).

From two white narrators— butch women— living in Chicago, we learn how dress codes figured into police raids of white bars on the north side. Lori: “Oh you could wear pants, but only if the zipper was in the back,

because those were women's pants." Marge: "At the [bars] when somebody yelled Raid! ... you changed your shoes and turned your pants around [so the zipper was facing backwards] because they'd check: they'd stand there with the flashlight *on* your crotch. . . . And then they'd take you downtown and put you with the prostitutes" (50; emphasis in original).

Enke is masterful in contextualizing and analyzing such material, adding that police did zipper checks only in white bars on the near north side, ignoring black clubs on the south side. "Differential geographic police harassment," Enke argues, along with media that made "a spectacle of discipline" in white neighborhoods while ignoring homosexual congregation in black neighborhoods, "constructed gays and lesbians as white and punishable for their deviance" (51–52). These constructions had a lasting impact on popular understandings of feminism (and its association with white lesbianism) even though, as Enke explains "women of color were equally involved in expanding and making claims on the public landscape" (49).

Enke's best discussions are contained in two chapters focused on women's softball teams—as she compares the Motown Soul Sisters, a black team in Detroit, with their admired rival, the Avantis, a white team from Minneapolis. Like the community activists in Brooklyn that Tamar Carroll writes about, the Soul Sisters had to contend with the deterioration of black neighborhoods that were under assault by urban renewal programs. Often, civic athletic parks were the only part of inner-city Detroit neighborhoods to survive the destruction of highway construction and urban planning in the early 1970s, and these parks, Enke argues, were "historically created as male preserves," serving as locations for "teaching masculinity and heterosexuality . . ." (109). Thus, when the Motown Soul Sisters won the right to play on fields that were seen as men's turf, they were disrupting and refiguring gender and race relations in Detroit.

Moreover, both the Soul Sisters and the Avantis were ridiculed for their size and aggression and stigmatized as dykes—when, as one Avantis player recalled, "All we did to get that reputation, was, we played the game the way it should be played" (137). Nonetheless, many women involved in Detroit's African American queer subculture considered the Soul Sisters "their" team (126)—fems especially finding their desires stirred by watching the studs play. But other spectators reveled in the athleticism of upstanding heterosexual black women. Both responses were possible, Enke notes, because the team "put at least one heterosexual-appearing foot forward" even while pushing the "bounds of heteronormativity within both African American and white cultural contexts" (132).

Finding the Movement should be mandatory reading for anyone interested in understanding the extent and impact of second-wave feminism

on normative gender constructions. Not only does Enke show us how interventions in the public landscape gave shape to feminism as a mass movement, she is equally good at showing us how self-identified feminists “regulated gender *expression* as they produced their own boundaries” that were “integral to the formation of the feminist subject” (255; emphasis in original). Thus veteran feminists at a party held at the University of Chicago rejected a woman because she had big hair, wore false eyelashes and spoke in a southern accent—appearing to the northern, middle-class women to “‘buy into’ a sexist, objectifying, mainstream culture” (255). On the other hand, white lesbians managing A Woman’s Coffee House in Minneapolis, refused entrance to a potential customer because she looked too much like a man (253). By the 1970s, women-only spaces that served as hubs for the feminist movement were often created and run by lesbians so that women could have a woman-friendly space within a homophobic culture. As Enke explains, such women-only spaces could be both tremendously liberating and rigidly exclusionary (261), as women who were allowed access to them were required to express gender in clearly defined ways—no false eyelashes, no female masculinity.

Perhaps Enke’s greatest accomplishment is that she shows us how feminist subjectivity emerged within communities and among peoples who never would have embraced “feminism” in theory: women who wanted to socialize with one another and who thus challenged bars that insisted on women having male escorts—eventually making it easier for all women to go out at night by themselves; softball fans who delighted in watching women throw hard and run hard, paving the way for a broader cultural appreciation of women’s athleticism. Think of it this way: feminist subjectivity without feminist subjects. Now that’s a revolution.

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