

peer is a person from a similar economic, social, religious, geographical, environmental, historical and racial background. To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the Black community from which the Black defendant came. We have been, and are being tried by all-white juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the Black community.

10. *We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the Black colony in which only Black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as to their national destiny.*

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. *That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.* Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. *But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.*

THREE

The Poetical Is the Political

Feminist Poetry and the Poetics of Women's Rights

For women, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, and then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought.

—Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," *Sister Outsider*

No social movement in the past fifty years has had a greater cultural impact than the women's movement, which reemerged in the 1960s and has grown in multifaceted ways into the present. The tremendous impact of feminism in everyday life includes, but extends far beyond, changes in laws, legislation, and political institutions. The texture of the life of every single person living in the United States was changed by the new feminism.

Here is a short list of ideas about women that were unimaginably radical for most American men and women to think, let alone endorse, up to the 1960s, which are now viewed largely as common-sense statements.

- Women as a group have a right to earn as much as men.
- Traditionally defined women's jobs (nurses, maids, elementary school teachers, childcare workers) should be paid at a rate comparable to similar work done by men.
- There are few, if any, jobs that women can't do.
- Women should have equal access to higher education, including fields traditionally reserved for men.

- Female writers, artists, and musicians should have respect, support, and opportunities equal to those given males in these cultural fields.
- Women are entitled to sexual pleasure as much as men are.
- Women should not be confined to housework but should be respected for it when they choose it.
- Women and men should share household and parenting work.
- Women don't need to be in a relationship with a man to be happy.
- Treating women as mere sex objects is wrong.
- Women should not be subject to sexual harassment in the workplace or in school.
- Girls and women should be encouraged to engage in sport.
- Women should have equal power in interpersonal relationships with men.
- Women have a role in the military.
- Women have a right to feel safe from the threat of rape.
- Battering women is a political issue, not a personal matter.
- Women have a right to be part of the decision if and when to have children.
- Women have as much of a place in the business world and the political world as men do.

Before the women's movement reemerged in the mid-1960s, not one of these ideas was widely held by men or by women; most would have considered them unacceptable. Today, while often still unrealized, these are ideas most Americans embrace. As with most social movements, however, the people who came to support these views often distance themselves from the means by which the ideas came into being—feminist activism—as something too radical to identify with.

In this chapter I will trace the social movement process by which the once radical idea that women were entitled to equality with men moved from the margins to the center, from the unimaginable to common sense. First, I'll describe the general contours of the women's movement, and then I'll use feminist poetry as a case study for how feminist ideas were formed in women's movement cultures and subsequently projected out into the wider culture. One key aspect of this process was something called "consciousness-raising." Feminist consciousness-raising in the late 1960s involved women meeting in small discussion/action groups to share their personal experiences in order to turn them into analyses of common political and structural sources of inequality for women. Consciousness-raising, while certainly not the only women's movement method, touched all realms of feminist action.

Compared to the drama of civil disobedience of sit-ins, or the shock of tragic shoot-outs with the police, the poetic "dramas of consciousness-raising" described in this chapter may at first sound quite tame. But part of my point is to suggest that they are anything but tame in their effects. Feminists did and do engage in many large, dynamic public demonstrations, and "zap actions" (small group acts of civil disobedience) were a key part of the movement, especially in the early years. These included the infamous attack on the Miss America pageant in 1968 that earned feminists the misnomer "bra burners" (no bras were burned, but many were thrown in a freedom trash can to symbolize the throwing off of the constraints of male-dominated notions of femininity and women's body image). But to argue that poems are every bit as dramatic as these demonstrations, or as confrontations with police, is to make a feminist point: what counts as dramatic has often been defined in limiting ways based on male-centered visions of heroic performance. If the goal is to change the world, there is reason to believe that publicly performed or privately read poems have been a force as powerful as any other. Before the 1960s poetry was still mainly a genteel, feminized but male-dominated form, and that aura still lingers around it. But there was nothing genteel about the raucous, often sexually frank, and always politically charged poetry that came out of the women's movement. Moving poetry from polite lecture halls and quiet living rooms out into the streets was part of many 1960s movements, but no one did it more intensely or effectively than the poets of the women's movement, and in doing so they reclaimed public space as women's space.

Consciousness-raising was especially important in that key feminist theoretical act of challenging the boundaries of what counted as "political" by rethinking the border between public and private life. One of the best known slogans to emerge out of the new women's movement was the phrase "the personal is political." The basic argument was that given the historical separation of the Western world into a male public sphere (of business, art, and government) and a female private sphere (of domestic and family issues), only shifting the definition of politics to include the "personal" private sphere could address the full range of ways in which women were oppressed. This decidedly did not mean that the movement was uninterested in public issues, but only that even those public issues needed to be rethought in terms that refused the easy separation between personal and political realms. On the one hand,

the movement sought to give women the right to access all the goods of the public sphere: equal access to education, good jobs, fair wages, positions of political power, and so forth. And on the other hand, it meant redefining the "personal" private sphere, where many dimensions of gender relations were formed, as a "political" sphere of discussion and contestation.

"Poetry Is Not a Luxury": Poems and/as Consciousness-Raising

Consciousness-raising was crucial in forming feminist thought on a whole range of issues, from economics to government to education, but it was particularly useful in giving a name to the "nameless" forms of oppression felt in realms previously relegated to the nonpolitical arena of "personal" relations. The premise of this chapter comes primarily from an essay by feminist poet/activist/theorist Audre Lorde, quoted in the chapter epigraph. As a child of Jamaican immigrants, a working-class black woman, a mother, a lesbian, and a socialist, Lorde richly embodied the complex multiplicities within and around feminism. In her landmark essay "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," Lorde provides one of the strongest and clearest cases for the value of consciousness-raising without ever using the word. What she describes instead is the process of writing a poem. This is no coincidence, I will argue, but rather a convergence. For both consciousness-raising and poetry writing make the subjective objective, make the inner world of "personal" experience available for public "political" discussion. While poetry is often thought of as a pure expression of personal feelings, only very bad poetry does that. Good poetry makes personal experience available to others by giving it an outward form.

As I look at poetry in this chapter as *one* key place where women's movement ideas, attitudes, positions, and actions were formed, expressed, and circulated to wider communities, I will also be using poetry as a metaphor for the larger process of inventing feminist analysis and diffusing feminist ideas and actions throughout the culture. The modern women's movement has never fit the mold of social movement theory very well, partly because that theory still largely holds to the division between the cultural and the political that the women's movement has done so much to challenge. The women's movement can be and has been forced into that older mold, but in doing so much of the nature, power, and influence of the movement is lost. No movement shows more clearly

what is left out of the social movement story when the full range of culture is not explored.¹

Some social scientists divide social movement activity into (serious) "instrumental" social and political action, and (merely) "expressive" cultural activity. We will never find the real women's movement if we use these categories. Culture was a prime "instrument" of change for the movement, not some decorative, "expressive" addition. So-called cultural activity, or what might more accurately be called "cultural politics," created changes in consciousness that provided the basis for calls for legislative and other forms of political change. And changes in consciousness were even more important in shaping behavioral change in those "personal" realms that feminist consciousness-raising redefined as "political," such as family life; male-female interactions in the kitchen, the bedroom, and the living room; female-female solidarity; female bodily self-image; and the right to reproductive decision-making. Feminist cultural activity also brought attention to the politics of cultural sites between government and the private realm: the workplace, the medical office, the classroom, the church.

Culture can be defined both as a kind of action in itself and as all those meaning-making processes that make any kind of acting in the world possible. It is surely possible to "act thoughtlessly," but we generally denigrate such actions and claim to prefer consciously "thought out" actions. Much of our behavior is driven by social norms we do not think about. However, movements, especially movements like feminism with a strong interest in reshaping culture, are thoughtful about those actions we take for granted most of the time. They are of great importance precisely because they are one of the key sites where *re-socialization*, or *re-education*, is particularly intensive and extensive.²

Only the dead parts of a culture are merely "expressive." Culture is fundamentally a creative process, a ceaseless process of unmaking old meanings and making new ones, unmaking old ways of being, thinking and acting, and making newer ones. Social movement theorists Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyerman have offered the useful term *cognitive praxis* to describe the ways in which movements bring new ideas into the world that have great, dare I say instrumental, impact. In an even broader sense, movements engage in many varieties of "cultural praxis" or "cultural poetics"—the generation of new ideas and also new "structures of feeling," new ways of being and seeing, new thought-feelings

and felt-thoughts. In this sense, the phrase "poetry of women's liberation" refers to actual poems and to a larger "cultural poetics" of social change. Culture, to paraphrase Lorde, is not a luxury for feminism; it is a material force at the heart of the movement.

Roots and Strands of the New Feminism(s)

The new energy around the rights and power of women that came into focus in the late 1960s is sometimes called the "Second Wave" of feminism, in recognition of earlier, "First Wave" efforts that began in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated with women's right to vote, established in the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920.³ While useful in linking the new movement to the past, the term *second wave* has also been criticized for linking the movement to the limitations of the earlier phase, especially with regard to racism and class inequality, limitations that have continued into the more recent period.⁴ The "waves" story has served to marginalize the key roles played by women of color in feminist organizing across the centuries. But it is less the wave metaphor than who defines the content of the metaphor that is at stake. Those critical of the whiteness of the waves have sometimes inadvertently erased the important role played by women of color of all classes, and working-class white women, in both "waves," *despite* racism and class privilege, and their increasingly central role in what is sometimes called the Third Wave of feminism, currently under way. As feminist theorist Ednie Garrison has argued, the wave metaphor may need to be reinterpreted more than abandoned—seen not as a solid wall of (white) water but rather more like radio waves emanating from and traveling out in many different directions.⁵

While the systematic denigration of women that came to be known as sexism was close to a universal female condition in the 1960s, different women experienced sexism in very different ways. Because feminist consciousness emerges out of the specific, material conditions of particular women, there are many different origins for the women's movement(s) that arose during that era. Differences in class, race, region, nationality, and sexuality led to very different ways of articulating the nature and needs of women. Conflicts within feminism around these and a host of other social differences have been extremely difficult and have not been resolved to this day. But struggling with differences among women has

also led to ever broadening constituencies committed to equality for all women.

The new women's activism that sprang up in the 1960s not only came from many different social locations but also took many different forms. Some movement historians divide these forms too neatly into categories like liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, cultural feminism, and the like. In reality there was much cross-over and overlap of people and ideas in the various kinds of organizations and approaches. Movement historians Myra Marx Ferree and Beth Hess argue convincingly that the tendencies should not be seen as "branches," since branches of a tree remain separate and distinct, but rather as "strands," since strands weave together but may also unravel at certain points.⁶ Common delimiters used for the general strands of the new feminist activism include "reformist" and "revolutionary," "bureaucratic" and "collectivist," "liberal" and "radical," and "equal rights" and "women's liberationist." As Katie King suggests, these categories are far more easily seen in retrospect than they were in the heat of early struggles to define a new feminism.⁷

Some new feminist groups focused primarily on reforming the government in ways more favorable to women. This tendency eventually coalesced around large organizations like NOW (National Organization for Women), WPAC (Women's Political Action Caucus), and WEAL (Women's Equity Action League). At other times and for other issues, the movement activists preferred to organize themselves in smaller, less hierarchical groups, which Steven Buechler has characterized as "movement communities," as opposed to more formal "movement organizations."⁸ Some of the time feminist activism has been embedded in struggles around racial and class oppression in which gender cannot be neatly isolated as a factor (a variable, in social science lingo). At times feminists have worked in separatist groups centered in ethnic identity, class, nationality, or sexual preference, while at other times they have organized in groups and coalitions that cut across these differences. Similarly, sometimes feminists have worked for specific, limited reforms, while at other times the call has been for more sweepingly radical change of whole systems of male domination and the larger race-class systems in which they are embedded. Chicana feminist theorist Chela Sandoval has argued that from the perspective of U.S. feminists of color, these various elements of feminism can be seen not as opposed schools but as a toolkit

of tactics to be used in various combinations depending upon the issues and conditions at hand.⁹

One key source of the new feminist energy that arose in the 1960s was community organizing among working-class women of color. Not necessarily articulated as feminist struggle, this important strand has often been ignored or downplayed in stories of the women's movement centered in the experiences of white, middle-class women. Women struggling for economic survival in black, Native American, Chicana/Latina, Asian/Pacific American, and working-class white communities never easily accepted gendered limits on their actions, and often realized that sexism inhibited their efforts to fight against the racial and class oppression faced by their communities. They formed activist groups like the ANC Mothers Anonymous and the National Welfare Rights Organization that forged a feminist path within other movements, including the labor movement. Race-based power movements often drew the first loyalty of women of color. Women played key roles in all these struggles but also often found themselves struggling against male dominance within the racial revolution. Some asserted themselves within ethnic nationalist struggles; others formed explicitly feminist groups of color like the National Black Feminist Organization, the Combahee River Collective, Hijas de Cuauhtemoc, Asian Sisters, and Women of All Red Nations (WARN). These groups were a key force of antisexist action and codified a long history of struggling simultaneously with the intersections of gender, race, and class long before white feminist theory began to recite this mantra.¹⁰ From the beginning, the women's movement—or more accurately, women's movements—emerged from within and were entangled with a host of other social movements. While for some white, middle-class women these other movements provided merely a model to appropriate, for working-class white women and women of color there could be no disentangling of the struggle against racial and class oppression from the struggle over gender oppression.

Black feminist Frances M. Beal referred to the condition of women of color as "double jeopardy," and a similar case of "double jeopardy" characterizes the position of white, middle-class lesbians, while working-class lesbians and lesbians of color face even greater difficulties (triple jeopardy?).¹¹ While stereotyped dismissal homophobically characterizes all feminists as lesbians, in fact lesbians had to fight their way into recognition in feminist organizations. In the most notorious example, the

leader of NOW, Betty Friedan, referred to lesbians as a "lavender menace" whose visible presence could damage efforts by feminists to achieve legitimacy. When announcing this menace, Friedan assumed she was speaking of women outside the organization, but not long after, in a classic "zap" action, lesbians within NOW turned off the lights at a meeting, took off their coats, and had a mass "coming out" party, wearing shirts bearing the slogan "Lavender Menace" and taking over the meeting.

Lesbians of color within nationalist and straight feminist groups met similar resistance and offered similar challenges through ideas and actions pioneered by the black feminist group known as the Combahee River Collective, among others. Feminist theory written or inspired by lesbians of color came to show brilliantly that racism, sexism, and heterosexism are intimately tied together, that fighting homophobia is a key element of fighting for women's equality, and thus that struggles for gay/lesbian rights before and during the rise of what came to be narrowly defined by some as "the" women's movement played a crucial role in the wider struggle for gender equality.

A key force shaping the consciousness of some of the women who became leading feminist activists was the experience of relative freedom and empowerment on the home front during World War II. During the war, women were recruited to fill a variety of previously male-identified jobs in factories, government, and business. When the war ended, most of these women were summarily drummed out of their new jobs. Middle-class white women were told to return to the home as "housewives." Many working-class women became feminists when they heard their once highly touted contributions to the economy reduced or ridiculed, and saw their paychecks shrink as they lost men's jobs and men's wages. Many women of color who had experienced higher paying factory work during the war were forced back into domestic service as maids, or had to return to lower paid jobs as waitresses, cooks, or janitors—a different form of "redomestication" to "women's work" as food makers and cleaners.

After the war, a vast government and corporate public relations campaign was put in place to turn "Rosie the Riveter" into Dolly the Homemaker, or Maria the Maid, but the transformation was not embraced by all middle-class women, and could not be embraced by most working-class white women and women of color who survived on work outside their own homes. There had been a 50 percent increase in the number

of married women in the workforce during the war, and of the women workers polled at the end of the war in 1945, more than 75 percent expressed a desire to keep their jobs. Despite the campaign to redomesticate women, a significant number remained in the labor force, and some middle-class women who did not remain regretted their decision when domesticity proved considerably less satisfying than promised. Thus many of the women who would reanimate feminism in the 1960s and beyond, including many middle-class women, were working women or had grown up with working mothers.

Redomestication also included a huge rise in the birth rate after the war, the famous "baby boom" that gave its name to the generation that came of age in the 1960s. Much of the baby boom occurred among middle-class families in the new social space of "suburbs." A deeply racist "white flight" from increasingly multiracial urban areas ensured quick growth of these new suburban spaces. Suburbs were built upon a new model of the isolated, "nuclear" family, in contrast to the centuries-old model of extended families with many aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and other relatives living together or nearby. Many women experienced these new arrangements as isolating and depressing, and were unconvinced by the new ideology of "feminine mystique" that celebrated the joys of housewifery.¹² For these women, the problem was not the role of homemaking, but the claim that this was the *only* "natural" or "proper" role for women, even as actual homemaking was trivialized in the new suburban system. Many middle-class women experiencing these conditions joined the fight for equal rights, and many passed on to their daughters an even stronger will to fight for radical improvements in the conditions of women's lives.

President John F. Kennedy's Presidential Committee on the Status of Women, formed in 1961, is often cited as a precursor of the more moderate, government reform or "equal-rights" strand of the movement. Long-time feminist and former first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the committee, and her personal prestige did much to draw attention to its work. Roosevelt also provided a link with the previous wave of feminist activism that had continued, despite hitting "doldrums," from the 1920s to the 1960s. Feminist scholars have shown that many cultural links helped maintain feminist energy despite relatively low levels of public engagement during the intervening decades.¹³ The equal-rights strand drew strength from, but was also profoundly limited by, this past, and it

was primarily the more radical waves of activism emerging out of poor communities and newly radicalized, middle-class, young white women that transformed the meaning of feminism into something far deeper and more profound than new rights. With grassroots support from these other strands, the reform branch achieved some key legislative victories: the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (broadened from an initial application only to race to include "sex discrimination" as well); the Title IX ruling on women in athletics; the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision on reproductive rights (1973); and a host of other legislative and legal rulings favorable to women. Much of this activity was then funneled into the campaign to pass a comprehensive Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. Though ultimately unsuccessful, the campaign did much to educate women around the country about the rights they did and did not have.

The other, more radical strands of the women's movement, which emerged in the late 1960s, include the tendency most commonly known as "women's liberation." This strand had its roots in other social movements of the era, especially the civil rights movement, ethnic nationalist movements, the student movement, and the anti-Vietnam war movement.¹⁴ Less formal "movement communities" and collectives were particularly popular among the (often) younger, more revolutionary elements of the movement, who dubbed their goal the "liberation" of women in the context of other liberation movements based in race and class. Detractors referred to them scornfully as "women's libbers." This strand included many female college students and recent college graduates, reflecting the increasing number of women in higher education during these years, a trend driven by the postwar economic boom. Deferral of marriage and a broadening of intellectual horizons during college years, along with the freedom from unwanted pregnancy provided by the new "birth control pill," contributed greatly to the ranks of independent young women attracted to the liberation movement.

Working-class, community-activist feminisms also linked up to the women's liberation strand through the involvement of young, mostly middle-class white women in the civil rights movement and the student-led new left emerging in and around college campuses. New left groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) sought alliance with civil rights groups to build an interracial movement of the poor. Efforts like SDS's Economic Research and Action Projects (ERAP) brought many

young white women into contact with women of color who were community activists. While the projects were sometimes marred by condescension, they were also powerful models of attempts to acknowledge and resist the privileges that came with whiteness and affluence.¹⁵ Women-to-women dialogues across divides of race and class in these projects helped shape the kind of feminisms that emerged later in the decade.¹⁶

The women who formed the core and the corps of this strand of the movement drew upon a great deal of social movement experience, and some of that experience moved them to create their own movement. Many women in the civil rights, ethnic power, student, and antiwar movements experienced marginalization, harassment, disrespect, and an unequal workload. Sensitized to issues of inequality and injustice by these other movements, they turned their analyses back upon their male colleagues, demonstrating that they were not living up to their own egalitarian ideals when it came to the treatment of women. Two of the most important early manifestos in this development were position papers drafted within SNCC in 1964 and 1965, one by a young black activist, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, the other by two young white women in the organization, Casey Hayden and Mary King. Both of these essays argued, as would many others in short order, that the position of women in SNCC had analogies to the position of blacks in white America. By the late 1960s the concept of "sexism" emerged as the central movement term, designed to parallel the concept of "racism." The analogy, while immensely productive of new ideas and attitudes, was also highly problematic, since race and gender were different in many respects, and paralleling them initially seemed to erase women of color. As a later book title colorfully expressed it: "all the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave."¹⁷

While some men within SNCC and other radical movement groups responded favorably to the claims made by women, many more did not, calling their claims trivial and a distraction from the "real" struggles around race, class, and war. Some feminists continued to work on issues of gender equity within these movements, forming "women's caucuses" within organizations. While some success was achieved in this way, and while women continued to work on all these issues, increasingly feminists felt the need to carve out an independent movement to address their concerns. Initially this proved easier for white women; many women of

color continued to feel that racial oppression had to be their central concern, or was a parallel rather than an intersecting concern. African American activist Florynce Kennedy, for example, listed her affiliations in 1970 as the black liberation movement and the women's liberation movement. But all the radical feminist groups formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s were deeply shaped by the mood set by groups like the Black Panthers; they saw women's liberation as part of a larger revolutionary movement to overthrow a racist, capitalist, and patriarchal order.¹⁸

When these young activists started their own women's liberation groups, they drew deeply upon the antihierarchical forms that were dominant in groups like SNCC and the radical SDS. But having seen the limits to real equality within those supposedly egalitarian groups, they were even more deeply suspicious of the tendency of inequalities of power to emerge even within organizations dedicated to equality. Thus, the movement communities these women formed were even more carefully designed to fend off hierarchy. Just as blacks had come to feel that the presence of whites in their liberation movement hampered the independent development of black empowerment, many of these early efforts insisted on being women-only groups.

Consciousness-Raising

The typical social science story of the women's movement has a difficult time dealing with the fact that large-scale, mass organizations with clear hierarchies were only a small part of the movement. Indeed, they were often seen as part of the problem. The most common form was the small group or collective. These "CR groups" or "rap groups," consisting most often of from five to twenty women, gave a mass movement an unusually intimate form and forum highly appropriate to the movement's goals and ideologies.¹⁹ While sometimes associated with white women's liberationist part of the movement, consciousness-raising, under various names, has been central to all feminist struggles. Toni Cade [Bambara], for example, wrote in 1970: "Throughout the country in recent years, black women have been forming work-study groups, discussion clubs, cooperative nurseries . . . women's workshops on the campuses, women's caucuses within existing organizations, Afro-American women's magazines."²⁰

As the other common name for CR groups, "rap" groups (from the black English term for intense conversation), suggests, the roots of the

form are partly in practices like the consensus-seeking meetings in SNCC (see chapter 1). The women's liberation strand of the late 1960s and early 1970s systematized what is often a more inchoate movement process. A handful of CR groups became famous because of their location in big cities or because of their widely circulated publications: for example, Bread and Roses, New York Radical Women, the Furies, Redstockings, Radicalesbians, the Combahee River Collective, WITCH. But by the late 1960s and early 1970s there were thousands of such groups in cities and small towns across America.²¹

As African American feminist Cellestine Ware characterized it in her brilliant book, *Woman Power* (1970), the role of CR groups was to express, compare, analyze, theorize, and then organize against all the ways in which women were oppressed. This meant thinking about and challenging the specific sexist structures in every "public" and "private" social space: the factory, sweatshop, kitchen, bedroom, classroom, boardroom, playing field, courtroom, or the halls of Congress. From the beginning, the new feminists realized that this largely unexplored set of analyses needed to be made from the ground up, through a process of comparing individual women's stories and turning them into a set of structural analyses. The point was to move from collected personal experiences to theorized general conditions, and then to further actions flowing from the analyses.²²

A new language had to be invented to characterize the experiences of oppression and liberation that had no name. Sometimes this meant literally inventing new words; for instance, the newly minted concept "sexism" was used to examine the ways in which discrimination against women was built into the very structure of the language. Women challenged every generic use of *man* or *he* claiming to speak for all "humanity," and they invented or adopted words to displace the presumptive "man" at the center of all public activity: *firefighter* for *fireman*, *worker* for *workman*, *business executive* for *businessman*, *chair* for *chairman*, *police officer* for *policeman*, *representative* or *senator* for *congressman*, and so on across all the various social spaces and places where women were absent or underrepresented. This task also moved in the opposite direction, replacing feminized and invariably lesser female versions of terms. Thus, *flight attendant* replaced *stewardess*, or more to the point of this chapter, *poet* came to be used in place of the condescending *poetess*. But

beyond neologisms, the deeper task was to find language to express oppressions and liberations that had no name.

Whether from formal CR groups, informal discussions, or shared writings, there emerged from consciousness-raising a host of new issues for the agenda of women's liberation. Shared stories moved women from the isolation of battering to a collective analysis of domestic violence, from a personal sense of sexual inadequacy to calls for equal sexual pleasure for women, from a sense of the social "double jeopardy" of being a woman and of color to women-of-color feminisms, from personal fears about pregnancy or forced sterilization to calls for reproductive rights, from poverty viewed as personal failure to analyses of welfare rights and the feminization of poverty, from personal experiences of intimidation by the boss to the concept of sexual harassment, and so on for dozens of issues that were moved from the personal to the political through collective dialogue, discussion, and debate.

The formal CR group, according to the early women's movement activist Pam Allen, proceeded through four stages: opening up (revealing personal feelings); sharing (through dialogue with other group members); analyzing (seeking general patterns by comparing to other experiences); and abstracting (creating a theory). Sometimes misunderstood as therapy, which it no doubt became on some occasions in some groups, CR was intended to strengthen the theoretical basis for revolutionary action. As feminist theorist and women's movement historian Katie King notes, the aim of "CR is not to exchange or relive experience, nor is it cathartic. Rather, its purpose is to teach women to think abstractly, and the purpose of thinking abstractly is to create theory in order to clarify and clear the ground for action."²³ Much important feminist thought and action emerged from this process, and was presented in written form in such early feminist anthologies as *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (1970), *The Black Woman* (1970), *Radical Feminism* (1973) (which collects materials from three earlier collections, *Notes from the First Year*, *Second Year* and *Third Year*), and, in poetic form, *No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women* (1973).

As several feminist critics have argued, some kind of positing of group commonality plays a necessary heuristic role in all feminist organizing (or any other movement that includes an element of collective identity).²⁴ The problem arises with the rush to give that heuristic concept a specific

content. Some feminists can be justly accused of this kind of "essentialism," arguments that homogenize all women as essentially alike (in oppression or in resistance).²⁵ But there has always been a way of drawing on experiences, a way of doing consciousness-raising, that suggests a path through this dilemma. Rather than simply being replaced, consciousness-raising can be, and often has been, *re-placed* into a more varied public space where conflicting and complementary "experiences" have provided the bases for painful but productive arguments within feminism that have broadened and deepened the movement(s). This is precisely what happened in many parts of the early feminist movement, and has continued to happen ever since. As I suggested, formal consciousness-raising groups in the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s were just the particular form of a larger, more general process of raising consciousness that goes on in many movements and many forms. In women's movements, one of the key forms, though hardly the only one, has been the writing, reading, and performing of poetry.

Women's Movement Poetry and the Range of Feminist Issues

Poems about women in economic poverty and spiritual poverty; poems about battering and resistance to battering; poems about sisterly solidarity and unsisterly betrayal; poems about factory work and maid work; poems about men as oppressors or men as lovers or men as loving oppressors; poems about women loving women; poems about the power in menstruation and the beauty of vaginas; poems about bad sex and good sex; poems in Spanglish and Niuyorican, black English and white Wellesley diction; poems about the pain of abortion and the pain of childbirth; poems about sterilization of poor women and the sterile lives of upper-class women; poems about women's history and women's future; poems about reform and revolution; poems about women in barrios and Chinatowns, Indian reservations and ghettos; poems revaluing traditional women's work and celebrating women breaking barriers into male-dominated jobs; poems about women lumberjacks and women quilters; poems about witches and bitches, *brujas* and voodoo queens; poems about women athletes and bookish women; poems about breastfeeding and breast cancer; poems about laundry and feminist theology; poems about war and peace; poems about women in Vietnam and Spanish Harlem; poems about Harriet Tubman and Marilyn Monroe; poems about Wall Street and Main Street; poems about changing diapers and

changing lives; even poems about writing poems. Poems poured forth by the hundreds from the new wave of feminist activity crystallizing in the late 1960s.

Andrea Chessman and Polly Joan assert in their *Guide to Women's Publishing* that "poetry was the medium of the movement," and that while "every revolutionary movement has had its poets and its poetry, no other movement has been so grounded in poetry as Feminism."²⁶ I do not think it is necessary to call poetry "the" medium of the movement, but it has certainly played a very important role for many feminists. One reason for this is that no movement has had a more sweeping need for epistemological transformation, for transformation in the nature and scope of knowledge. In effect, the feminist movement claims that half of the world's population has largely been excluded from production of what counts as knowledge about that world. As noted above, the women's movement has transformed every field of human knowledge, from business to science to politics to art and literature to "home economics."

Feminist poetry is certainly not alone in bringing about this profound transformation, but it touches all these social and cultural realms, among others. But feminism also has brought about a more general transformation of consciousness above and beyond these particular realms. To get at these two different dimensions, I will look first at "women's movement poetry" as a general tool of social change, and then at a more narrowly defined "feminist poetry movement" as an example of a formation aimed at one particular cultural sphere, the profession of poem-making.

The movement understood that knowledge was power, and that knowledge/power was vested in language. At the center of this was the notion that dimensions of women's voices had been silenced, distorted, or trivialized for centuries. Thus poetry, as one of the richest tools for exploring the dynamic meaning-making processes of language, was bound to become an important movement resource. Poetry is particularly well equipped to challenge two crucial dichotomies: the separation of private and public spheres, and the split between "emotion" and "intellect." Poems had practical advantages as well. They could be produced in the interstices of the busy multitasking lives most women lead. They took far less time to write than books, and they were far easier to reproduce and circulate. They could be nailed to trees and telephone

poles, taped to windows, and slid under doors. They lent themselves to performance in public, during a highly dramatic, performative era. They could also be set to music, turned into song.

The whole panoply of feminist issues that emerged from formal CR groups and from dozens of other sites of consciousness-raising activity can be found in poetry produced in and around the movement. In addition to anthologies of feminist poetry, most of the general anthologies of feminist thought from the new movement included poetry. The widely circulated collection, *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (1970), for example, was edited by a poet, Robin Morgan, and included a section entitled "The Hand That Cradles the Rock: Poetry as Protest." And one of the first major collections of feminist writings to center on women of color, *The Black Woman*, was edited by fiction writer/poet Toni Cade [Bambara], and privileged poems as the first set of readings. This is not because poetry "reflected" feminist issues, but because poetry was one of the main tools used to identify, name, formulate, and disseminate those issues. Poetry was consciousness-raising. Poetry was theory. Poetry was feminist practice.

When the radical women's liberation phase, with its emphasis on interconnections between race, class, and gender, was being displaced in the mid-1970s by a more mainstream brand of feminism, poetry became a key site for the articulation and contestation of feminisms. Poets like Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Janice Mirikitani, Sonia Sanchez, Susan Griffin, Nikki Giovanni, Alice Walker, Wendy Rose, Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, Irena Klepfisz, Robin Morgan, Nellie Wong, Chrystos, June Jordan, Marge Piercy, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Joy Harjo, and Cherríe Moraga used poetry as part of an ongoing dialogue about the nature(s) and purpose(s) of feminism(s). In this context poems become mediators between a collective "woman" and particular communities of "women." Poetry plays an important role in diffusing these subject positions out into the wider culture where their impact is often independent of knowledge of their movement origins.

For some people who might be recruited to a movement and for some people already in it, poems (and other forms of art) are more effective in conveying movement ideology than are manifestos and other directly political forms. Katie King has argued that what she calls "art theoretical" discourses, including poetry, were central to the production of feminist cultures that were in turn "the primary location of feminist identity

politics in the 70s and 80s."²⁷ These "art theoretical" "writing technologies" (King includes "song" and "story" alongside "poetry") were especially important in the struggles of various women-of-color feminists to dislodge white, middle-class women from the center of feminist thought. In this sense, poetry as theory and consciousness-raising did much to challenge the limits of theory emerging from the often fairly segregated movement groups.

Two poets edited one of the most influential books in the history of feminist thought, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writing by Women of Color*, and much of its content takes the form of poetry. *This Bridge* not only featured poetry alongside more conventional forms of analysis, but also insisted that poetry was a form of feminist theory. Poems in that anthology (and others like it) drew upon personal experience mediated through race and ethnicity as well as gender, to show up the limiting "whiteness" of the identity proffered as normative in much women's movement culture. While poetry was by no means the only medium through which this critique was offered, it was a particularly powerful one.

Many other forms and forums of writing—manifestos, academic books and articles, novels and short stories, speeches, debates, and that close cousin to poetry, the song lyric—also contributed greatly to this process. King notes that mixed genres were particularly effective as their challenging of generic boundaries embodied their efforts to challenge the borders of what counted as feminism and feminist theory. This category would include, for example, Audre Lorde's mixing of autobiography, poetry, fiction, legend, and essay in her "biomythography" *Zami* (1982), or the mixing of *poemas*, *cuentos*, and *essais* in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* (1983).²⁸ The writing of poems, however, preceded even these longer works. Lorde suggests why this might be so: she notes that poetry is economical not only in terms of expression but also in terms of the material support needed to produce it: "poetry can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, on scraps of surplus paper. Over the last few years writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class [women], and [women of color]."²⁹ *This Bridge* uses poetry to articulate both a collective "women-of-color position" and various ethnic-specific positionings. Other collections of

writings, again invariably mixing poetry with prose fiction and nonfiction, focused on specific ethno-racialized communities of women. These texts identify points of solidarity and difference within such groups as Chicanas/Latinas (*Making Face, Making Soul: Hacienda Caras*), African American women (*The Black Woman*, and *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*), native women (*Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native American Women's Writings of North America*), and Asian/Pacific American women (*Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women*). Lesbians of color played significant roles in all of these volumes, and each deals seriously with issues of sexuality as interwoven with class and other differences within communities of color. Similar volumes like *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* did much the same for a variety of self-defined feminist movement subcultures.³⁰ In these volumes poetry does much of the work of "auto-ethnography," of showing the experience of the self to be part of and in tension with the experience of the collective, the social group. The poems also become what Young calls "auto-theoretical" works in which self-exploration, as in all good consciousness-raising, is the beginning, not the end, of a process leading to theory and action. Again, the point is that poetry does not simply "reflect" ideas already in the air, but rather in giving "form" brings the ideas into public existence, and helps to invent identities, not merely to express them. Movements in general are highly productive places, sites of a great deal of "cultural poetics"—the bringing into visibility and audibility of new thoughts and feelings. In this case, the cultural poetics occurs through actual poetry. But the lines across genres in this respect are constantly transgressed; Rich, Lorde, and Anzaldúa are as well known for their essays as for their poems, and each reinforces and adds nuance to the other.

The process of feminist consciousness-raising continues. As it does so, poetry plays a role in each new site or phase of activity, helping to form new issues and new feminist identities. The rise of antimilitarist, environmentalist feminisms in the 1980s and early 1990s, for example, was inspired in part by poet Susan Griffin's lyrical study *Women and Nature* (1978), and various "ecofeminist" anthologies used poetry to present new ways of thinking about relations between the devaluing of women and the denigration of nature.³¹ And the critically important challenges to the ethnocentric dimension of U.S. feminisms, emerging under the impact of feminist movements in the Southern Hemisphere

and of postcolonial theory in the universities, have also used poetry as one key mode of contestation. Figures like Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Lata Mani, Caren Kaplan, Inderpal Grewal, and Rey Chow gained prominence in the early 1990s by analyzing and countering homogenizing, racist conceptions of "women in the Third World" found in much U.S. feminism. This process gained support from poets whose defamiliarizing verses challenged dominant Anglo-American feminist paradigms. Trinh's poetic, auto-ethnographic *Woman/Native/Other* offers one example, while Spivak's literary critical essays on Bengali women poets and storytellers present another.³² Over time, virtually every constituency or position within the wide terrain of feminisms has been constructed in part through poetry, from the most essentialist statements of universal womanhood to the most deconstructive celebrations of postmodern fragmented subjectivities.

The Feminist Poetry Movement as a Cultural Formation

Let us turn now from "women's movement poetry" to the "feminist poetry movement." The distinction is partly artificial, since the two forms of activity overlap and intertwine, but it is useful to separate them in order to understand the full cultural impact of feminism(s). The distinction can be put this way: in "women's movement poetry" the movement comes first and is the central focus, with poetry as one of many means of serving the movement, while in the "feminist poetry movement" poetry comes first and the central concern is to establish a new kind of poetry.³³ The feminist poetry movement is a cultural formation by and aimed at professional poets and the cultural institutions (publishing houses, literature departments, bookstores) surrounding them. The feminist poetry movement is both inside and beyond the women's movement. It is what British cultural theorist Raymond Williams calls a "formation," an intellectual or cultural school of thought, like impressionism in painting or naturalism in fiction writing, that can have "significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which [has] a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions."³⁴

As historian of the feminist poetry movement Kim Whitehead puts it, "feminist poetry began in a hundred places at once, in writing workshops and at open readings, on the kitchen tables of self-publishing poet/activists, and in the work of already established poets who began slowly

to transform their ideas about formal strategies and thematic possibilities.³⁵ The grassroots troops of the new feminist poetry movement grew out of the hundreds of consciousness-raising groups and collectives. As these radical new feminist poets began to emerge, they caught the attention of some powerful, already-established women poets whose own poetry began to change under the influence of the movement. Poets like Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, and Gwendolyn Brooks were in varying degrees part of the poetry establishment when the women's movement emerged. The movement helped them understand ways in which they felt marginalized, stifled, or distorted by the male-dominated institutions and formations of the poetry world. At the same time, some of these poets had anticipated feminist themes in their work and with increasing self-consciousness brought that work to bear in the context of creating the women's movement. This led not only to a reworking by these poets of their own work, but also to a rethinking and researching of the role of women in the history of poetry.

Among living links to a longer legacy, no poet was more important to the movement than Muriel Rukeyser. A winner of the prestigious Yale Younger Poets prize in 1935, Rukeyser had given up a career of safe verse-making to immerse herself in the social and political struggles of the Depression years, a commitment she brought with her into the movements she associated with in the 1960s. Rukeyser, along with younger but established poets like Rich (who also had won the Yale prize for her first, pre-movement volume) became indefatigable teachers of poetry and poetics to the emerging generation of women's movement poets. Over time this process moved the category "woman poet" from a dismissive term to one charged with possibility.

As it emerged, the feminist poetry movement drew upon several other compatible developments in the field of poetry. Three strands from existing schools of poetry were particularly influential as rewritten into the terms of an emerging feminist poetic consciousness. First, the beat poets had begun in the 1950s a return of poetry to public performance. Poetry had become a rather genteel affair, more often read in libraries or living rooms. Beat poets like Allen Ginsburg were infamous for their raucous public poetry rituals. This process was then taken up by many protest poets in the 1960s, particularly antiwar poets (including Ginsburg himself) and poets in the black arts and other cultural nationalist movements. No group developed this return to poetry as performance,

rather than silent reading, more powerfully than feminist poets who fostered hundreds of public readings in feminist bookstores, music festivals, and demonstrations. Second, the confessional school of poets, founded by figures like Robert Lowell in the 1950s and including some proto-feminist poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, had opened up possibilities for personal psychological exploration that played well into the intimate psychological dynamics of emerging feminist experience. And third, the Black Mountain poets, among others, had begun moving poetry away from rigid formal lines to more open, free-verse forms. These forms were both better suited to the open explorations of self-in-society of feminist poets, and less daunting than rigid metrical poetry for women excluded from formal literary training.

Just as the early feminist movement scoured all history for examples of women struggling to liberate themselves from male-defined institutions and social roles, when the feminist poetry movement emerged, it naturally set out to find its poetic precursors. This task entailed both uncovering women poets buried under male-centered poetic histories, and rereading and reinterpreting female poets who had managed to find some hold in the mostly male-defined pantheon of important poets. In the United States it was nineteenth-century poet Emily Dickinson who served most often as a distant American foremother to the feminist poetry formation. The full range of Dickinson's poetry had only recently become available in the 1950s, and as her reputation grew as one of the two great poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century (alongside Walt Whitman), feminists struggled to rescue her from those who would ignore the powerful things she had to say about the minds and spirits of women.

Several poetry anthologies appearing in the early years of the new women's movement played a key role in solidifying the formation. The most successful of these was *No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women* (1973), edited by Florence Howe (co-founder of Feminist Press) and Ellen Bass.³⁶ The collection starts with poems by Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein, and other members of the modernist poetry movement of the early twentieth century, then presents an array of contemporary poets "shaped in the women's liberation movement." The collection includes 220 pieces from 86 poets, about 20 of them women of color. The title comes, not surprisingly, from a feminist poem by Rukeyser telling women to take off the false faces put upon them by patriarchy,

and the subtitle indicates that the search for "poems by women" did not necessarily restrict the collection to a political definition of "feminist poet."

Howe reports in the preface to a later edition of the anthology that the book began as something of a "lark, a game" of collecting women poets that she engaged in with her then student Bass. As she puts it, "in the early seventies it was still possible to use a card catalog under the word 'women' and find 'poets,' though we could not have known then that many poets had slipped away, out of that net into invisibility." This process of scouring library card catalogs netted about fifty established women poets for the collection, and then, Howe notes, the "younger poets found us: Word spread quickly in the early seventies through women's liberation newspapers and newsletters. We received three hundred submissions through the mail."³⁷ From this Howe and Bass culled the collection, with only their "inchoate" feminism and an insistence that the "poem please us aesthetically" to guide them. This second criterion, the aesthetic one, is the mark of the formation on their efforts. The larger task, which might define the formation, is expressed by Howe as a set of questions in the preface to the original edition: "A nagging doubt: are women victims of prejudiced editors or are women poets out of the mainstream of modern poetry? What is the mainstream? And what do women write about?"³⁸

No More Masks! was one of several anthologies that took on the task of answering these questions by making available for the first time a wide range of historical and contemporary poems by women. Other, similar volumes emerged in this same time period. It was clearly the moment when the formation was strong enough to begin shaping its own tradition. One such work was *Rising Tides: Twentieth-Century American Women Poets* (1973), whose goals were stated baldly in a prefatory paragraph: "Because representation in most poetry anthologies of the past has not gone beyond tokenism, most women writers have remained minor figures in the male-dominated literary world. This book is an attempt to make both men and women aware of the vital force women poets today represent." As the back cover put it, "Rising out of the same growing consciousness that spawned the women's liberation movement, this book is a feminist statement in the largest sense."³⁹ A year later came *The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America, 1552-1950* (1974), a collection whose title, again from

a Rukeyser poem ("What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? / The world would split open"), shows its connection to the movement, and whose subtitle indicates that it is aimed at helping to establish a still longer tradition.

By the end of the twentieth century, this literary formation had contributed mightily to a rewriting of the entire history of poetry. It is now possible to go to any literary bookstore in America and find dozens of anthologies dedicated to one or another of numerous strands and schools of feminist and/or women's poetry. Under the onslaught of this formation, and interrelated formations in ethnic and gay writing, literary history has been rewritten. It now not only includes but has been radically changed by the presence of a panoply of female (and often feminist) poets. And the future of poetry by women has been forever shaped by this remaking of the universe of poetry into an available *tradition* for women to build upon, just as surely as the wider culture was radically rewritten from top to bottom by feminist challenges to dominant paradigms of thought and action.

As impressive as the success of the "feminist poetry formation" was, it was only one among many similar feminist intellectual and cultural formations. Parallel efforts in academe, for example, gave birth to the closely connected formation of feminist literary studies, and also to feminist sociology, feminist political science, feminist anthropology, feminist science, and so on. Few, if any, realms of the arts or sciences remain unaffected by the kind of feminist formation represented by the feminist poetry movement. Each of these formations has had both a local impact on the particular area, and a mutually reinforcing impact across these realms of thought, such that they form a broader feminist intellectual/cultural formation of great power.

Building Feminist Cultural Institutions

Both women's movement poetry and the feminist poetry movement depended upon the creation and development of parallel, feminist institutions. I have argued that, given the centrality of experience, emotion, language reformation, and intimate spheres of action to the feminist process of consciousness-raising, poetry with its linguistic and affective precision was well suited to play a major role in diffusing feminist ideas out into the world. But a very concrete process of institution building underwrote this predisposition. Drawing on the tradition found in

the civil rights, new left, and ethnic nationalist movements of creating "parallel institutions" to challenge inadequate or corrupt ones in the dominant society, all strands of women's movements built formal alternative cultural structures. Many CR groups, the first level of institutionalization, for example, became writing groups. Feminist CR/writing groups in turn produced at first feminist broadsides, and then underground journals run by feminist publishing collectives. Feminist publishing collectives sponsored poetry readings and poetry festivals that widened the audience, encouraging small feminist presses to move into bigger projects. These processes produced and rediscovered enough writing to justify the creation of small feminist bookstores, and small feminist bookstores encouraged the creation of larger feminist presses. Larger feminist presses proved the existence of a market for women's writing that mainstream publishing houses could not ignore. They began then to broker deals with mainstream publishing houses that guaranteed a wider audience for feminist writers, and netted the feminist presses profits that allowed them to bring more radical writers into print.⁴⁰ By 1978 a phenomenal seventy-three feminist periodicals and sixty-six feminist presses had sprung up, along with dozens of women's bookstores.⁴¹

While institutionalization certainly involved some watering down upon entry into the "mainstream," many feminist writers resisted and continue to resist that process and the individualizing, divide-and-conquer strategy it often entails. When, for example, white feminist poet Adrienne Rich won the National Book Award in 1974, she indicated, as part of a joint statement written with two African American feminist poets, fellow nominees Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, that she accepted the award "not as an individual but in the name of all women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world." More generally, poets and editors negotiate between movement and nonmovement sites, making individual and collective decisions about when to support feminist presses and when to send their work out as incursions into the wider world.

The process of feminist institution building also includes an academic institution, women's studies departments, with a strong literary component that assisted the feminist poetry movement and used literature as one means of classroom consciousness-raising. This led to efforts to rewrite the canon of literature to include far more women's literature and a significant amount of feminist literature. This process moved from

movement anthologies to women's studies textbooks to such major revisionist works as the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, which in turn forced a reworking of such mainstream collections as the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. This process has taken several decades, but from these small group beginnings there has emerged a vast body of feminist writing that has touched every level, layer, and corner of American society. There is now a great body of feminist thought enmeshed in virtually every literary anthology available for use in the classroom or by the casual reader.

Ultimately, Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize for literature, and the vast women-of-color literary movement she embodies, grows out of movement contexts through these layers of mediation. As usual, by the time that point is reached, the originating movement contexts have been lost in the mists of time (and hegemony), but their diffusion is nevertheless movement work. One might note by way of materially tracing this process that Morrison edited and wrote introductions for both the first collection of Huey Newton's Black Panther writings, *To Die for the People*, and one of the most important early collections of black feminist thought, *The Black Woman*, compiled by Toni Cade [Bambara]. Again, this can stand as but one example of a massive *diffusing* of feminist and other radical movement ideas into the mainstream. That this process also involves some *defusing*, some lessening of the explosive impact found when texts are produced and received within a movement culture, is no doubt true. But that just suggests the need for ongoing movement struggle, struggle that should include taking far more credit for the powerful impact already achieved by the incorporation of feminist ideas into common-sense, mainstream thought and action.

Third Wave Poetics?

The debates within feminism in the 1980s and 1990s are interpreted differently. To some liberal white women committed to maintaining a status quo, the debates were seen as divisive, particularly in the context of a "backlash" against feminism in the years of Reaganism and Christian conservatism.⁴² To women in the Third World, U.S. women of color, and their white allies who believe feminism should not be dominated by one set of privileged voices, the turmoil, however painful, has been healthy and transformative. Similar ferment surrounds the language and concept of a "third wave" of feminism. Some suggest that the critique of

“hegemonic feminism” by lesbians and women of color in the United States and the Third World itself constituted a third-wave movement. Others see this as a process that has cleared the way, making it possible for a younger generation to take the movement in new directions. For others still, the wave metaphor is always falsely homogenizing, untrue to the variety of sites of feminist movement activity.⁴³ But however one characterizes it, feminist activity is alive and well in the twenty-first century, both in the form of ongoing women’s movements and in the impact of feminism within other progressive movements.

It is also clear that as these movements continue, poetry will continue to be a powerful feminist tool. The feminist music movement, which has always been closely linked to feminist poetry, was given renewed energy in the 1990s by new feminist music, most notably the independent folk/rock of Ani DiFranco, the post-punk energy of Riot Grrrls, and feminist rap by performers like Queen Latifah. The feminist poetry movement is also one of the forces behind the renewed energy in performed, or “spoken word,” poetry. Growing as well out of the powerful hip-hop culture pioneered by black and Latino/a youth (which in turn owes much to black power and Latino/a nationalist poetics), spoken word performance is an important site of feminist consciousness-raising for younger women (and men), and a sign that poetry will continue to be one key site of feminist action for years to come.

FOUR

Revolutionary Walls

Chicano/a Murals, Chicano/a Movements

The people we now call Mexican Americans, or Chicanos, came into existence through resistance to two wars of conquest. The first was that of Spanish conquistadors, who in the sixteenth century invaded and decimated the native peoples of the territories now known as Mexico and the southwestern United States. Rape, concubinage, and intermarriage between the Spaniards, various indigenous peoples, African slaves, and others eventually created *la raza cósmica*, the multihued mix of peoples that is Mexico. The second war of conquest was that of the United States against Mexico. The U.S. states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California, as well as parts of Wyoming and Colorado, were part of Mexico before they were forcibly brought under U.S. dominion through the Texas and Mexican-American wars of the mid-nineteenth century. Begun on a dubious pretense and resisted by many in the United States as a war of imperial conquest, the Mexican-American War ended in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Forced on a defeated Mexico, the treaty extended the U.S. empire into the Southwest and California. Overnight, thousands of Mexicans found themselves strangers in their own land, putatively “American” now but generally treated as second-class citizens.

Mexican Americans can rightfully claim deeper roots in these regions of the United States than most other citizens, yet they are often confused with and portrayed as “illegal aliens.” Maintaining their cultural heritage while becoming citizens of the United States was a complicated process involving sporadic open conflict (like the Mexican American