

# anti feminism in the academy

EDITED BY

VÈVÈ CLARK, SHIRLEY NELSON GARNER,  
MARGARET HIGONNET, AND KETU H. KATRAK

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***VèVè Clark***

***Shirley Nelson Garner***

***Margaret Higonnet***

***and Ketu H. Katrak***

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*For all of the women who shared their stories with us*



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# Introduction

Feminists perceive inequalities between men and women in their treatment, prospects, education, opportunities for employment, roles in the family. . . . Feminists write and speak about these inequalities, seek to explain them, and work to remove them. Anyone, then, who opposes any of these activities—speaking or writing about women’s situation, exposing inequalities, seeking to change and improve the lives of women—is by definition anti-feminist.

—Cynthia D. Kinnard, *Antifeminism in American Thought*

In regards to pedagogical practices we must intervene to alter the existing pedagogical structure and to teach students *how to listen, how to hear one another*.

—bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

Feminist educators in the 1990s throughout the industrialized world face similar problems and issues. Despite national differences, they share a concern about the future of education for women in societies marked by the resurgence of right-wing ideology and the conservative control of the state.

—Kathleen Weiler, in Arnot and Weiler, eds.,  
*Feminism and Social Justice in Education*

Intellectual harassment is the most recent version of antifeminist behavior erupting methodically in the academy and in U.S. society generally. Unlike well-defined and widely reported misconduct aimed at a lone woman—misogyny and sexual harassment—this particular phenomenon of assault is broader and collective, representing new extensions of the backlash intended to ridicule feminist activisms and overturn achievements made since the 1970s. There are, of course, analogues that exist in international settings, as several recent studies demonstrate.<sup>1</sup> For every step forward to include women in the sites of opportunity and leadership in the United States, citizens beholden to the “*stasis*” *quo*—from Congress to college campuses—seek

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to halt the progress that feminist scholarship has imprinted on our intellectual legacy. This contemporary antifeminism takes particular forms and is rooted in previous waves of negativity towards feminism in U.S. history. Resistances to assaults on feminism—as in this volume—are part of the struggles of the Women’s Movement today.

Throughout U.S. history, resisting women and men have fought back against, talked back to, and overturned the privileges unduly accorded to Fathers founding themselves as the story of us all. In the introduction to her comprehensive, annotated bibliography, Cynthia Kinnard reminds us that antifeminism has been with us since 1798 (xi–xvii). As she points out, “Antifeminism implies, indeed requires, feminism. It does not exist in a vacuum, as does misogyny” (xi). Acknowledging the obvious anachronism of applying the terms feminism and antifeminism to social conflicts occurring before 1900, Kinnard recognizes, nonetheless, a pattern of behavior useful for contemporary readers to discern: when demands for women’s rights enter into published discourse, antifeminists take notice and respond with scorn.<sup>2</sup> As we demonstrate here, in *Antifeminism in the Academy*, antagonisms toward feminist intellectual advance exist across gender lines. In the “changing same” of U.S. conservatism from the eighteenth century until today, increasing numbers of women and born-again feminists have joined the ranks of legislators who intend to discontinue affirmative action, eliminate programs that promote women’s health, and repress free speech by attacking intellectual debate that smacks of “political correctness.” Since much of the staying power of previous feminist dissent resides now in universities, colleges, women’s centers, and caucuses throughout this nation and the world, it is not at all surprising to find the intellectual harassment that is emerging in the academy directed at tenured and untenured feminists across the generations. *Antifeminism in the Academy* is our call, in poet Audre Lorde’s words, to break “the tyrannies of silence” (3); it stands as our collective analysis, inviting ongoing response.

This volume of essays identifies various forms of antifeminist harassment: the use of vilification and distortion or even violence to repress certain areas of research and forms of inquiry. Our intention was to name the problem, gather documentation, and examine antifeminist intellectual harassment in three related areas: the history of feminist activism; campus politics; academic sites of power. These three venues frame the story contained in this collection. Most of the scholars represented here were associated between

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1988 and 1994 with the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP) of the Modern Language Association.

### History of the Project

In October 1988, on a crisp fall day, the Modern Language Association's Commission (called Committee since 1991) on the Status of Women in the Profession met in New York City at MLA Headquarters on Astor Place. As part of our charge, we began discussing issues facing academic women, issues raised both by our own experiences and by those of our female colleagues working in different geographic and institutional locations all over the United States and Canada. In that rather daunting, airless room, dominated by a huge, wooden conference table, we started sharing ideas for future collaborative projects. This volume grew out of those discussions and emerged from a story shared with us by one of the commissioners at that meeting: a feminist scholar faced an intellectual battery for her presentation of ideas in public. What seemed to be an individual, isolated incident had striking resonances with other stories we heard; overlays of *ad feminam* racism and violence were evident. In the extremely supportive atmosphere created by cochairs Moira Ferguson and Diana Velez, the incident was taken seriously, and we started a wide-ranging exploration of what, after many years of work, we now call antifeminist harassment—a new form of mistreatment that is related to, though different from, sexual harassment. When we launched this project, we were also motivated by broad concern in the MLA membership about the proposed Helms and Fowler Amendments restricting freedom of speech in the National Endowments of the Humanities and Arts.

From the outset, the 1988–1989 commissioners—Mary Carpenter, Moira Ferguson, Ketu Katrak, Mary Lydon, Biddy Martin, Valerie Miner, Celeste Schenck, Valerie Smith, Diana Velez—maintained a spirit of feminist collaboration. Some of us continued to remain actively involved with the project even after completing the three-year terms for which we had been nominated to the CSWP. Each year, from 1988, new members also joined the project in various roles as writers (Sara Lennox, Elaine Ginsberg), editors (VèVè Clark, Shirley Nelson Garner, Margaret Higonnet), and advisors. We would like to thank all CSWP members for their intellectual support during the years over which this project has unfolded. For solidarity with our efforts, we are particularly indebted to Electa Arenal, Françoise Lionnet, Mary Lydon, Elizabeth Ordóñez, Celeste Schenck, and Valerie Smith.

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Since the birth of the project in October 1988, the process of consolidating this volume has been instructive. Initially, we published a short piece describing our new project in the Spring 1989 *MLA Newsletter*. We gathered further testimony about intellectual harassment by sending out a letter to members of the MLA's Women's Division and the Women's Caucus. We wish to thank all those who found courage and time to narrate their individual stories of harassment. In December 1989, at the MLA Convention in Washington, D.C., the CSWP sponsored an "Open Hearing," cochaired by Moira Ferguson and Ketu Katrak, to present the working parameters of what we then called "intellectual harassment" and to obtain responses from women in the academic language profession, one of the largest professional associations in the United States. We were overwhelmed to find a packed room at this 8:30 A.M. session, and to hear women eager to speak into the microphone. They told their stories, differently and yet with uncannily similar evocations of incidents in which, for example, people act anonymously against women and feminist scholars or deface their offices or belongings. Ferguson and Katrak presented the working parameters of intellectual harassment as

the demeaning or devaluing of feminist work and of feminists in terms of their academic progress and their professional lives. It also includes threatening or intimidating behavior in intellectual situations such as classrooms, public presentations, job interviews, conferences. Such behavior is expressed in ridicule, heckling, political baiting, homophobia, racist, ethnic slurs and physical threats.

As we heard women talking from their personal locations in terms of race, class, sexuality, nationality, however differently situated within their academic institutions, we were convinced of the multilayered dimensions of an antifeminism that takes both overt and covert forms. CSWP continued its work on this project in December 1990, when Mary Carpenter organized a session on "sexagism," her word for the intersection of "sexism" and "ageism"; a year later, in 1991, we prepared a public forum and related workshops on censorship and antifeminist harassment. As our work progressed, it required us to bring together the many contributors who had collaborated over these years, so we held a coordinating meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts in June 1992.

In the interim, before publication of this book, the kinds of painful disclosures that we documented were dismissed repeatedly as mere "whining" on the part of women. Activists from a variety of persuasions and back-

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grounds, working to foster change and combat discrimination, have been accused of imposing “political correctness.” In the fighting words of journalist Richard Bernstein, feminists engage in “a generalized killjoy ideology of faultfinding and professed victimization” (Bernstein, 214). The process and product of this volume, then, was conceived dually, through mutual feminist support, and “in defense of ourselves.”<sup>3</sup>

### Antifeminist Intellectual Harassment

We open the volume with Annette Kolodny’s provocative essay, “Paying the Price of Antifeminist Intellectual Harassment,” in which she outlines the parameters of what might appear to be random occurrences of antifeminist behavior by examining three career episodes. These testimonies, drawn from several public and private sources, “reveal a chilling commonality,” as the reader will no doubt detect. During a CSWP-sponsored panel chaired by Sarah Webster Goodwin and in which Dale Bauer also participated, Kolodny provided a working description of the phenomenon at the MLA 1991 Convention in San Francisco:

Antifeminist intellectual harassment, a serious threat to academic freedom, occurs when (1) any policy, action, statement, and/or behavior has the effect of discouraging or preventing women’s freedom of lawful action, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression; (2) *or* when any policy, action, statement, and/or behavior creates an environment in which the appropriate application of feminist theories or methodologies to research, scholarship, and teaching is devalued, discouraged, or altogether thwarted; (3) *or* when any policy, action, statement, and/or behavior creates an environment in which research, scholarship, and teaching pertaining to women, gender, or gender inequities are devalued, discouraged, or altogether thwarted. (9)

Anyone wishing to evaluate the presence or absence of antifeminist intellectual harassment within the academy might organize, as Kolodny suggests, a series of campus-wide conferences under the general rubric of academic freedom. Focusing solely on present threats is not enough, given the broad generational differences existing at any university, college, or school, and the varying degrees of knowledge about women’s studies and feminism across the disciplines. Participants must examine as well the historical terrain of activism and counterresponses out of which 1970s feminism emerged in the United States.

Following such a proposal for further investigation, Part One of *Antifeminism in the Academy* reads backwards into the 1950s activist movements

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and forwards well into the multicultural 1990s. In their essay, “Feminism and Antifeminism: From Civil Rights to Culture Wars,” Moira Ferguson, Ketu H. Katrak, and Valerie Miner (three former members of the CSWP) reconstruct the roads we have traversed from feminist activism in the 1960s to backlash and forgetfulness throughout the seventies and eighties, moving ever closer to outright hostility in 1994 and 1995. Ferguson, Katrak, and Miner have recovered histories of resistance in which many of us participated at the time. From the balkanized positions of identity or single-issue politics, we were thrust into struggle against the power of patriarchy to control citizens because of their ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Clearly, these contributors are writing for the present and the next generations who were not there in the streets when demonstrators were attacked by vicious dogs and their handlers, who know little firsthand of the mighty power fire hoses and tear gas have to incapacitate a body, to stifle legally sanctioned dissent. Ferguson, Katrak, and Miner take the reader through the persistent trials-by-fire into the seemingly less threatening areas of academic discourse. They show us that, despite the gains promoted by a host of activists in the 1960s and 1970s, a formidable backlash has assumed center stage in 1990s media representations—targeting the academy in particular—promoted by right-wing ideologues and their sympathizers, from Allan Bloom and Dinesh D’Souza to the histrionic antifeminist Camille Paglia. In response to such writers, the strong voice of dissent in Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991) appears prominently in this essay and resurfaces as well throughout the volume. As we hear the clamor of the culture wars, the next section takes us into another volatile discursive landscape—academic freedom, free speech, student resistance to feminism, anti-lesbian bias, and age discrimination—that might well be described as uncivil wars on college campuses.

### Multiple Jeopardy on College Campuses

Whose free speech is it anyway? For how long must we tolerate distorted interpretations of an eighteenth-century principle of free speech that has little bearing on the perverted actions of our contemporaries? Hate groups proliferate, hate talk shows garner favorable ratings, hate speech has become acceptable on the airwaves and the Internet. Overall, the tendency to sanction violent confrontations “in your face” works to destroy our abilities to listen to and hear one another—a basic tenet of democratic dialogue which writer bell hooks recalls to mind in several of her publica-

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tions, especially in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994).<sup>4</sup> Failing to engage, refusing to learn beyond the proverbial picket fences, leads inevitably to collective paranoia as the millenium wanes. There is something extraordinary about the fears of change that we are now facing. Why do we need citizen militias across this country to defend us, when it is clear that the only people who will be protected by them look and act as they do? Largely white and male, leftovers from world and regional wars waged outside this country, these “wanna-bes” are basically “wanna-wins” who have been dismissed from the front or elite military lines. As a group of disaffected white-supremacists, they have persistently failed to analyze the shifts in economic privilege promoted by the Reagan and Bush administrations that left too many of their socioeconomic class unemployed, while their bosses made off like bandits. Depending upon their status and literacy, some do recognize the political causes of their economic predicament. However, the prevailing message that we hear from *angry white males*—an insidious and newly invented moniker—would “beam” women and ethnic groups back to the age of Eisenhower in the 1950s. In this Disneyland or “Father Knows Best” fantasy, white males were supposedly kings of their domains, wives and the occasional maid their servants. Large numbers of those same women had left the kitchen to support the Second World War effort; afterwards, once the men had returned, women were expected to stay home on the range. As the essays in Part One demonstrate, the 1950s were an age of inequity, hardly the age of innocence that a multicultural populace needs now to revisit.

In the 1990s, those supporting and promoting antifeminist harassment invoke in their favor several constitutional guarantees, including the rights to bear arms and to engage in free speech. As law professor Patricia Williams implies in “Talking about Race, Talking about Gender, Talking about How We Talk,” free speech is a misnomer for a right that was not accorded equally to Native Americans, African Americans, or women when the Constitution was originally signed. Reflecting on the provinces of free speech, Williams writes:

There is no place where this particular battle has been more visible than in universities; there is no fiercer entrenchment than the lines drawn around the perceived property of culture. It is a battle marred by the persistence of prejudice: as women are still trying to overcome presumptions that they really *like* getting fondled in the back office, blacks are trying to overcome presumptions that they really *deserve* to be on the bottom of the heap. It is a battle marred by ignorance and denial. (72)



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In an effort to reconstruct the arts/responsibility of engaging in civilized conversation, Williams moves our discussions from the wider society to classrooms and campuses, where one would expect informed dialogue to remain a prerequisite.

In the following three essays, by Dale Bauer with Katherine Rhoades, Greta Gaard, and Mary Wilson Carpenter, we find testimony about the multiple jeopardies suffered by feminists because of student resistance, anti-lesbian biases, and a combination of sexism and age discrimination which Carpenter calls *sexagism*. Drawing on a variety of documents, including student end-of-term evaluations, statistics, and personal narratives, Bauer, Gaard, and Carpenter demonstrate that all is not well in the feminist classroom, despite tremendous advances over the past twenty-five years.<sup>5</sup>

When calls to dialogue failed miserably in the 1990s, we witnessed hostile, public confrontations that erupted in Crown Heights, in the Los Angeles insurrections, in Anita Hill's testimony before the Senate, and most tragically in Oklahoma City. Where do we learn a different method, perhaps a more creative means of representing and hearing ideas and ideologies that seem foreign to us? Anna Deavere Smith has shown in print, on stage, in classrooms across the country that through careful collection of oral histories documenting the discordant views of events—in Crown Heights and L.A.—one can begin to hear the other sides. Her one-woman shows, *Fires in the Mirror* and *TWILIGHT Los Angeles, 1992*, although not concerned with harassment *per se*, are fine examples of how feminists continue to transform the academy and its environs.

### Changing Systems of Knowledge: Feminist Resistance in the Academy

Women in the academy who came to political consciousness during the past three decades of second-wave feminism are increasingly assuming administrative and leadership positions in universities and on editorial boards. Even in these high-status arenas just above the glass ceilings, they have found that antifeminism persists. In one of the concluding essays, Elaine Ginsberg and Sara Lennox uncover the disturbing details of "Antifeminism in Scholarship and Publishing," where one might not expect such practices to be maintained. Their careful research delves into those institutional areas of scholarship that sociologist G. William Domhoff has called *power structure research*.<sup>6</sup> The piece by Ginsberg and Lennox describes conservative organizations, such as the National Association of Scholars, and their funding agents, such as the Olin Foundation, which support the research of antifeminists.

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Shirley Nelson Garner, in “Transforming Antifeminist Culture in the Academy,” deftly shows us how to handle harassment issues and insensitivity among our colleagues by invoking the reasoned strategies of a seasoned administrator. Beyond the personal approach to resolving gender conflicts, Garner walks the reader through various campus resources established to “improve the climate for women” at the University of Minnesota and other institutions. Among the most important of these initiatives fought for and won by powerful women faculty members is the Minnesota Plan II (1988). Like so many other affirmative action and faculty development plans across the nation, these efforts will endure as long as concerned faculty resist their erosion.

This final Part examines the world of publishing and the university itself as sites of power. These are systems of knowledge production that we academics have invested all of our lives in—from K through 12, bachelor’s to doctoral degrees, and on the tenure trail. To criticize these institutions seems somehow sacrilegious, but examine critically and transform them we must, when the inequities of treatment described in this volume strike us in the face.

In that ongoing process, we would like to acknowledge the work of our colleagues in education who have looked closely at the state of feminist critical pedagogy both in the United States and internationally. These recent studies include *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy* (1992), *What Schools Can Do* (1992), *Feminism and Social Justice in Education: International Perspectives* (1993), and *The Feminist Classroom* (1994). *Antifeminism in the Academy* stands at the beginning of a series of discussions about antifeminist harassment. Further analyses and remedies need to be devoted to fields and disciplines where women’s studies have not yet taken a firm hold, including business schools, religious studies, military history, and congressional studies, to name the more obvious. The price we pay now for ignoring antifeminist harassment will surely inflate if we keep silent.

## Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge the support of the University of Minnesota Graduate School for a grant-in-aid award that allowed Shannon Olson, Shirley Garner’s research assistant, to devote part of her time to this project. The editors wish to thank both Ms. Olson and Laureen Larson, secretary in the English Department at the University of Minnesota, for their invaluable assistance in preparing the manuscript. Finally, we are grateful to William Germano and his staff for their advice and encouragement through every stage of this project.

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### Notes

1. See the U.S.-located works by Madeleine Arnot and Kathleen Weiler, Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *et al.*, and the European-located Mona Ozouf in the Works Cited and Consulted.
2. In the introduction to her annotated bibliography, Kinnard has located documentation of “feminist” activism and “antifeminism” well before the Women’s Rights Convention of 1848. She cites Judith Sargent Murray’s essay on the equality of the sexes (1790), Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and William Godwin’s *Memoir of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) as forerunners in the first-wave feminist debates.
3. The phrase “in defense of ourselves” refers to the massive support of Professor Anita Hill following the Senate hearings on the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. African American women in academia organized a grassroots protest against Ms. Hill’s treatment and dismissal in the public arena and the failure of legislators to take sexual harassment and misogyny seriously. Dissent was expressed by activists across gender, color, and class lines in a series of ads which appeared in prominent newspapers. For the broader contexts of this confrontation, see Jane Mayer and Jill Abramson.
4. The reference to hooks is taken from a dialogue with Ron Scapp, a white male comrade and friend of hers, in the chapter “Building a Teaching Community,” in *hooks*, 150.
5. For a comprehensive study of six institutions that have promoted feminist critical pedagogy, see Frances A. Maher and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault.
6. Domhoff’s publications in this area are widely known. See for example, *The Bohemian Grove and Other Retreats*, *Power Structure Research*, *Who Rules America Now?*, and *The Power Elite and the State*.

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# I

## **Antifeminist Intellectual Harassment**

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# **Paying the Price of Antifeminist Intellectual Harassment**

***Annette Kolodny***

Ginger Rogers did everything that Fred Astaire did, but she had to do it backward in high heels.

——Ann Richards, Governor of Texas<sup>1</sup>

Many of us have modulated our voices out of fear. I have. I am ashamed of it.

——Beth Kalikoff, Ph.D. in English<sup>2</sup>

## **I**

On June 11, 1993, Jane Schaberg, a professor of religious studies at the University of Detroit–Mercy, was awakened after midnight by the sound of fire engines hurtling through the neighborhood. She hardly expected them to stop at her house. Seeing the flames through her bedroom window, however, she realized that her 1987 Toyota Tercel, parked out front, was on fire. A rag had been stuffed in the gas tank and then ignited. The police report listed the motive as “revenge.”<sup>3</sup> But to Schaberg it was simply what the *Chronicle of Higher Education* characterized as “the latest salvo in a nasty battle raging over her scholarship” (Wilson, A7).

In 1987, the scholar and former nun published *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, a historical and literary critique that examined internal evidence that the writers of the Gospels were handing on a tradition in which Jesus was not miraculously conceived but, rather, illegitimately conceived, perhaps as the result of the rape of Mary. By crediting divine love as intervening in the fate of Mary and her child, with God relieving Mary’s humiliation through His special relationship with her son, Schaberg offered a theology of God’s caring



for the socially outcast—and thus endangered—mother and child. Understandably, Schaberg's thesis was controversial, and not just in Catholic circles. Schaberg received hate mail and threatening phone calls, and she became a target of public attack by Detroit's Archbishop. Most troubling to Schaberg in all this was her home institution's lack of a forceful stand and its refusal to support unequivocally the value of serious scholarship, whatever its findings. In response to rumors of alumni threatening to cancel their contributions, the school's administration began distancing itself from her and her work, both through public statements and internal silence, according to Schaberg.<sup>4</sup> "I didn't know the university was going to cave in like this," she told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. And although she still had a job at the Jesuit school, she acknowledged that her "will is a bit broken" (Wilson, A7). In fact, Schaberg has now stepped down as head of religious studies because of what she experienced as Detroit Mercy's continuing lack of support.

While the torching of her automobile is surely an extreme response to a scholar's findings, unfortunately it represents only one event in the escalating campaign of intimidation directed at feminist teachers and researchers in a variety of fields all across the country. Stories are legion about right-wing organizations moving onto campuses in order to finance publications whose sole purpose is to attack (and, they hope, shut down) a women's studies program.<sup>5</sup> In such an atmosphere, faculty look the other way when colleagues openly discourage students from taking courses in women's studies on the grounds that these courses are inevitably anti-male. Many schools harbor senior faculty who refuse to sit on qualifying examinations or to serve on dissertation committees where the candidate employs feminist approaches. Deans and department chairs still quietly reassure recruitment committees that once they have hired one woman, they need seek no further, thus reducing affirmative action to the revolving door of tokenism. At some schools, faculty teaching gay or lesbian subject matter are forced to include a statement on all course descriptions and syllabi warning students about "sexually explicit material," while equivalently explicit (or even violent) content in courses treating only heterosexual authors requires no similar warning.<sup>6</sup> And in a typically incongruous situation, at Scripps College, "a women's college dedicated to the education of women," professor of English and well-published feminist critic, Gayle Greene, has seen her "course in feminist theory [repeatedly] . . . refused credit as 'the senior seminar,'" while a supposedly "real theory" course "taught by a white male" was given senior seminar status.<sup>7</sup>