

Women's Studies NEWS

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Virginia Commonwealth University

BELL HOOKS HELPS CELEBRATE ANNIVERSARIES

"Moving Closer to Freedom: An Anti-Racist Feminist Future," is the title of the lecture bell hooks delivered to an enthusiastic capacity crowd that packed the Engineering Building Auditorium on March 28th to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Women's Studies Program and the 30th anniversary of the African American Studies Program. Described as a "formidable feminist social and cultural critic," bell hooks is known for her pioneering work on racism and sexism in the United States. She is the author

of 21 books including "Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism," "Feminist Theory from Margin to Center," "Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black," and "Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics." Born as Gloria Watkins, she writes under the name of her maternal great grandmother Bell Hooks. She uses the lower case spelling to emphasize the substance of her work rather than the author.

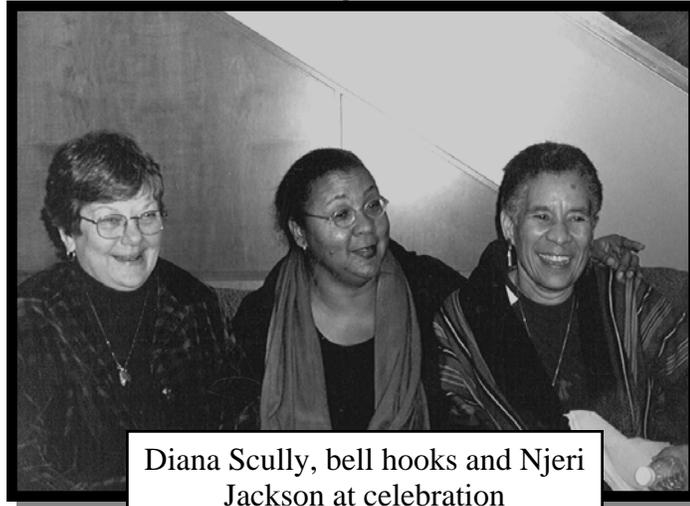
PROGRAM CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Diana Scully, Director

This year, the Women's Studies Program marked its 10th anniversary and what a wonderful year of growth and celebration it has been. In August, Dr. Janet Winston joined the Women's Studies faculty as our third joint appointment. We share Dr. Winston with the Department of English and she brings to Women's Studies a much needed balance in our humanities course offerings. Celebratory events during the year included a lecture by Eleanor Smeal, a joint anniversary program with African American Studies featuring bell hooks, a satellite conference on Women in Higher Education hosted by the University of Minnesota, and a student appreciation pizza social. The year also witnessed reorganization of the women's student group now called the Feminist Action Network (FAN).

As I review the activities of the year, it is worth noting how far the Women's Studies Program has come in its ten year existence at VCU. At the inception of the Program, exactly six courses related to women and/or gender were offered in the entire university. There was one half of a joint appointment for the Director (then called Coordinator), the Women's Studies office was in a small converted bathroom in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and the Program had no permanent budget. From that very humble beginning, the

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Diana Scully, bell hooks and Njeri Jackson at celebration

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The Women's Studies Program and the African American Studies Program held a joint anniversary celebration to showcase the interdisciplinary nature of the two areas of scholarship and the support the two programs have always provided for each other at VCU. "African-American Studies and Women's Studies emerged from similar traditions of political struggle and share a commitment to interdisciplinary teaching, scholarship, and the quest for social equity," said Dr. Njeri Jackson, Director of African American Studies. "More than any other writer, bell hooks' work is significant to both Women's Studies and African American Studies" added Dr. Diana Scully, Director of Women's Studies. "The program was a tremendous success; it was a wonderful celebration."

Ten Years Later...

Diane Berry Gahan

Here I sit at the computer and evaluate the last ten years of my life and the impact that Women's Studies has had on it. It is quite a challenge to assess a decade of one's life!

In an office slightly bigger than a janitorial closet, I was an administrative assistant to Dr. Diana Scully from 1988-1990. Women's Studies was a fledgling program then, and I remember Dr. Scully being very happy to have the little office space in the Sociology and Anthropology building. We had a great laugh upon opening the tiny closet within the "closet" and discovering a sign that read "Madame Sophie's Massage Parlor." It really hit the feminist funny bone!

When I graduated in December 1989, I was one of the first three women to receive a minor in Women's Studies at VCU. I felt very proud. That month I received my Bachelor's degree and divorce decree within days of each other. It was bittersweet. Ten years later, I am separated from yet another marriage within days of having a small ceremony to receive my diploma for becoming an esthetician (skincare therapist). It would not seem that I have moved very far in ten years—am I still at the same place? The answer is emphatically, no. To provide an analogy with skincare on the surface my life may look the same, but I am forever changed at the cellular level.

The interdisciplinary approach of the Program let me sample courses focusing on women's issues from English, Sociology/Anthropology, Psychology and the invaluable Introduction to Women's Studies. The information I received had a tremendous impact on me, particularly as I was an older student and single parent throughout my sojourn at VCU. The courses gave me strength and self-esteem, and helped me to instill in my young daughter the principles of social, political and economic equality for women. My daughter is now a strong and independent young woman, a freshman at James Madison University. I am very proud of her. Generationally, she does not stumble over the same things that I do in life, just as I do not stumble over things that are difficult for my own mother. However, these three generations of women all grapple with the issue of self-esteem. I think the essence of Women's Studies is about building a core of self-worth in all women who are open to the process. The Program has built a firm foundation under me so that no matter what difficulties arise, I know I have the inner and outer resources at my disposal to move forward through my life.

My first full-time position out of college was a claims representative for the Dalkon Shield Claimants Trust. In the five years I held this position, I spoke with thousands of women whose lives were changed by this intrauterine birth control device. Women's Studies proved to be valuable to me in helping women deal with their feelings surrounding their use and subsequent injuries from this IUD. Presently, I work in communications for a law firm that hires many women associates and promotes them to partner, but is still

male-dominated. There are no women members on the two policy making committees. Women have a long way to go economically as well, earning seventy-five cents to every dollar men earn. Ten years ago, it was sixty cents to the dollar.

Women's Studies continues to have a profound effect on my life. From brining up my daughter to researching and finding members of my birth family, from handspinning to initiating a career change and all the pieces of the quilt in between, the last ten years of my life have been rich, poignant and filled with wonderful people. The knowledge that I embraced in Women's Studies courses gave me a value system that will always be with me.

In order to give the Women's Studies Program the support it needs, alumna need to give back to the Program in terms of time, talent and funding. Our monetary gifts can help to fortify the Program in accomplishing its goals. As Dr. Scully stated in the Spring 1999 newsletter, VCU does not fund many activities that are critical to Women's Studies Program. Contributions will help fund student scholarships and awards, speaker honoraria, symposiums and conferences. Becoming a Friend of Women's Studies is a very important way to give back to a program that has given so much to us.

It is so wonderful to be a woman. If the next ten years of my life are as intricately beautiful as the last, I will be in great shape. Women's Studies will continue to light



Women's Studies Endowed

An endowment has been established for the Women's Studies Program through a generous gift from Jean D. and William F. Hellmuth. The Jean D. and William F. Hellmuth funds will provide a continuing source of income for the Program that will be used to enhance programming, and provide faculty development and student support. "I am thrilled for the Program," said Dr. Diana Scully, Director of Women's Studies, "and very grateful to Jean and Bill Hellmuth for their friendship and support over the years. Their gift will help the Women's Studies Program reach its full potential."

To become a "Friend of the Women's Studies," please see the back page. Your contribution will be used to support activities such as speakers and student travel that are critical to Women's Studies but not usually funded by the university.

Introducing Dr. Janet Winston

Tiffany France

Janet Winston, Ph.D., is the newest member of the Women's Studies Program's core faculty. Winston began teaching at VCU last fall. Her joint appointment is in English and she specializes in Modernist literature (including Virginia Woolf), women writers, feminist and postcolonial theory, and lesbian and gay studies.

Winston grew up in the San Francisco Bay area and went to UCLA to pursue a degree in Psychology. After completing her undergraduate degree, Winston worked in non-profit social services, administering programs for people with disabilities. She worked closely with the Special Olympics for several years both professionally and as a volunteer. She received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Iowa in 1998. Before coming to VCU, Winston taught courses in British and American literature, Women's Studies, and Gay and Lesbian Studies at the University of Iowa.

Winston's educational training, teaching and research experience have involved literature and women's issues. Her favorite things about VCU are the types of courses she teaches and the friendliness of the people who work and take courses here. Winston is a member of the Women Studies Advisory Committee and Program Committee. When not in class Winston can be found at cultural events, theater or dance performances, or good local restaurants.

She currently teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in Feminist Literary Theory and a general education course in British Literature. In addition to lecture, Winston's classes involve discussion and collaboration of the students. In Fall 2000 she will be teaching Women in Literature, Lesbian Literature and an English Prose Module. Her ongoing research is on Queen Victoria. "I am interested in examining the ways, in which Victoria's 'whiteness' was emphasized in the iconography of her day and then questioned in later narratives about her," said Winston of her research. "I believe that these images and narratives offer clues to understanding how white womanhood has developed as a social institution implicated in consolidating Western imperial power." Winston is dedicated to ending gender and racial oppression and hierarchy, and working towards social justice for all people.

Winston sums up her goal as a professor of Women's Studies and English: "Just as feminism for me involves acknowledging and working to end all forms of oppression operating in women's lives—sexism, racism, class inequalities, imperialism, and homophobia—so too a feminist approach to teaching women's literature necessarily involves addressing the range of women's writing, not just the work of a few canonized white women writers."



Program Celebrates

(Continued from page 1)

Women's Studies Program has made tremendous progress. Although still a minor, Women's Studies is very involved in General Education and offers some 25 core and cross-listed courses on a regular basis. The core faculty has increased to include three joint appointments with an additional 21 affiliate faculty. The Women's Studies offices are no longer in a converted bathroom but are now located in a recently renovated space in Scherer Hall that we share with the African American Studies Program. The budget and secretarial staff have been increased and the Program has received an endowment. Along the way, we have been grateful for the support of the administration and too many individuals and departments to mention here. Very special thanks go to the Women's Studies Advisory Committee and the four wonderful women who were my program assistants over the past decade, often doing forty hours of work while being paid for ten—Diane Berry Gahan, Lana Bilyeu, Amy Thornton Zulkowski and Rose Pearson. Their energy and enthusiasm still resonates in the Program. Tiffany France now carries on in their excellent tradition.

With very modest resources, especially early on, Women's Studies has done some fairly impressive things. In 1995, we co-sponsored a delegation to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Six faculty members and 30 students made the two week trip and, upon return, the Women's Studies faculty offered a special "Beijing curriculum," with courses that addressed the major areas of concern discussed at the conference. In 1997, the Program hosted the annual conference of the Southeastern Women's Studies Association using the theme, "Beyond Beijing." To the extent that resources allow, the Program encourages and supports student participation in Women's Studies conferences. Over the past two-years, students have attended the Southeastern Women's Studies Association conference in North Carolina, the National Women's Studies Association Conference in New York, and Feminist Expo in Baltimore.

What does the future hold? There is every reason to be optimistic. Women's Studies is flourishing in most universities. For example, of the 25 universities that VCU defines as its peer institutions, 68 percent offer a major, 64 percent offer a graduate concentration or degree and one offers a Ph.D. Nationally, ten universities now offer a Ph.D. in Women's Studies and many programs have been elevated to departments with tenure lines. Interest in Women's Studies at VCU is robust and we are building the faculty and resources needed to move to the next level. Catching up with our peer institutions will be the work of the next ten years.

Pizza Social

Last September the Women's Studies Program hosted a student appreciation pizza social. During this event students and faculty mingled, exchanged ideas about the program and discussed the desire for a student's group on campus. Amanda Mauger and Julie Crowder ("The Best Kind") performed for the enthusiastic audience. Their music, a mixture between folk and rock about feminist issues, set the mood of the party perfectly.



Women's Studies Brown Bag Lunches

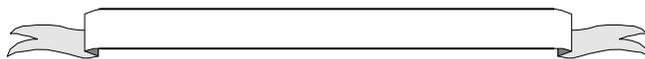
The Women's Studies noontime brown bag lunch seminars continued this year with two presentations by affiliate faculty members. In October, Dr. Kathryn Fuller, Department of History, amused the audience with her presentation, "Dish Night at the Movies: Female Audiences and the Consumption Crisis of the Great Depression," as she chronicled the free dish give-aways theatres used to attract women to the movies. In November, Dr. Angelina Overvold, Department of Foreign Languages, presented, "Identity Quest and Madness in the Works of Francophone Women Writers," in which she detailed a number of fascinating aspects of this literature. Women's Studies Brown Bag Seminars are open to all faculty and students.

FAN the Flame

The Feminist Action Network (FAN) is a new student organization on campus open to all male and female students and alumni. This group is dedicated to improving women's status on the VCU campus and in the surrounding community. The goal of the organization is to research, implement and support resources relevant to women's issues through social action. The tentative agenda is as follows:

- Work towards establishing a major in Women's Studies at VCU.
- Investigate the newly instituted charge for papsmears at VCU's student health, and brainstorm ways to combat it.
- Provide a family center on campus where parents can change diapers, breastfeed, meet with other parents and obtain general information on parenting.
- Work with local women's shelters and women's organizations around Richmond.

Many more ideas have been tossed around. We will be involving ourselves in grassroots work, focusing on joining forces with other groups interested in gender equality. For more information contact Tiffany France at 828-6710 or visit www.onelist.com/group/FeministActionNetwork.



CONGRATULATIONS!

**Carol Baker
Gloria Yocum**

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Eleanor Smeal at VCU

Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority, spoke to an enthusiastic group of students and faculty at VCU last fall. In her talk, "Breaking Barriers and Moving Forward: Feminists Worldwide Pushing for Equality," Smeal discussed the deploring conditions of women in many parts of the world emphasizing the plight of Afghan women.

Smeal has worked as a feminist activist and lobbyist throughout her life. In 1987 she helped organize the Feminist Majority, an activist organization, based in Arlington, VA. The Feminist Majority advocates nonviolence and works to eliminate social and economic injustice.

Smeal sees great opportunity for the next generation of feminists. Young women are no longer dependent on marriage as a final destination. Women now have choices to run for public office, to run their own law firm, to start their own businesses . . .

While she finds the advancement of women positive, she still acknowledges that we have a long way to go. "I'm recruiting a new generation of fighters," said Smeal. Her speech inspired the room of students and feminist enthusiasts. Smeal and the Feminist Majority recently hosted the Feminist Expo in Baltimore. To learn more about the Feminist Majority visit their web site at www.feminist.org.

SUGGESTED READING



Janet Winston

Non-fiction:

Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood: Cherrie Moraga (Ithaca: Firebrand, 1977)

The playwright and poet Cherrie Moraga has written a deeply personal narrative about her experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and new motherhood with her partner “Ella” and Rafael, their son born two months premature. Readers eager for Moraga’s characteristic blend of autobiography and trenchant political analysis will not be disappointed here. In part an unsparing account of a couple’s struggle to negotiate racism, sexism, and homophobia within the medical system and extended families, *Waiting in the Wings* provides a necessary counterpoint to mawkish portrayals of lesbian motherhood in mainstream media creations such as HBO’s recent *If These Walls Could Talk*.

Divided Sisters: Bridging the Gap Between Black Women and White Women: Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell (New York: Double Day, 1996)

A collaborative work by psychology professor Midge Wilson and poet and television producer Kathy Russell, this book-length study, geared towards a popular audience, explores several factors contributing to the social tensions that exist today between white and black women in the U.S. Impressive in its aim and scope, this thought-provoking book raises important issues about the history of relationships between white and black women during slavery, the cultural differences that exist today, and the multiple forms white women’s racism takes (though the book is inconsistent in offering a sustained analysis of these issues particularly in regards to socioeconomic class differences among women).

Fiction:

The Autobiography of My Mother: Jamaica Kincaid (New York: Penguin, 1996)

Novelist Jamaica Kincaid offers a searing portrait of European colonialism’s legacy of violence and devastation in the Caribbean. Set in Dominica, the novel tells the story of Xuela Claudette Richardson, a woman of mixed ancestry—Carib, African, and Scottish—who looks back on a life dominated by her struggle to reconnect with her mother, a Carib woman who died at the moment Xuela was born. The prose is at once lush and spare, richly metaphoric and unflinchingly direct.

Found Treasures: Stories by Yiddish Women Writers: Frieda Forman, Ethel Raicus, Sarah Silberstein Swartz and Margie Wolfe, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994)

An entertaining as well as scholarly significant book both as women’s history and as women’s fiction, *Found Treasures* offers the reader an array of short stories translated into English from the Yiddish—language of Ashkenazi Jewish literature and culture—by Jewish feminists. There are stories about Eastern European *shtetl* life, the American immigrant experience, and the Holocaust to name just a few of the subjects ex-

plored here. The collection includes an excellent critical introduction by the poet Irena Klepfisz, a glossary of Yiddish terms, and photographs and biographies of the authors.

Poetry:

Outside History: Selected Poems 1980-1990: Eavan Boland (New York: Norton, 1990)

In the haunting sequence of poems comprising “Outside History,” the title section in this collection, Eavan Boland combines myth, childhood memory, experiences of motherhood, and the history of the Irish people’s struggle for self-determination. The seemingly self-contained domestic focus of many of these poems gives way to a complex exchange between personal and historical recollection—of the poet’s Dublin childhood and of the wounds of Ireland’s troubled history.

Drama:

Unbroken Thread: An Anthology of Plays by Asian American Women: Roberta Uno, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993)

Edited by Roberta Uno, this collection of plays by contemporary Asian American women includes six works published in the 1970’s and 80’s—works that continue to be produced today in theaters around the country. Set in Junction City, Kansas in the 1960’s, Velina Hasu Houston’s *Tea* focuses on the experiences of five Japanese-born women married to U.S. servicemen and was a favorite among students in my *Women in Literature* class last semester. The collection includes a useful introduction tracing the development of Asian American theater, brief essays on each of the playwrights whose work is featured, and an extensive appendix listing additional playwrights and plays from the 1920’s to the present.



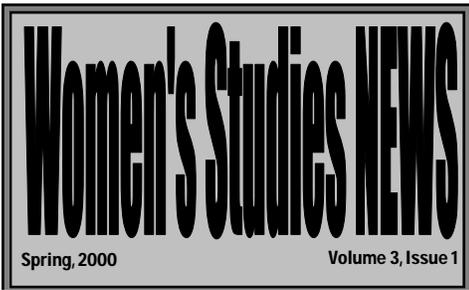
WEB SITES

Try these Women’s Issues Links

- ⇒ www.herspace.com – offers features from and links to a number of interesting web sites and zines.
- ⇒ www.un.org/womenwatch/ - information and data on the status of women worldwide as well as the global agenda for equality.
- ⇒ www.fordham.edu/halsall/women/womensbook.html – vast resource for materials on women’s history from prehistoric to current.
- ⇒ www.uic.edu/orgs/lgbt – offers bibliography of papers and reports on the campus climate for lgbt students and links to resource center sites.
- ⇒ www.4women.org/nwhic/references/index.htm – offers many links to women’s health information and professionals.

These and many other excellent links are listed on Joan Korenman’s web site at:

<http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/links.html>



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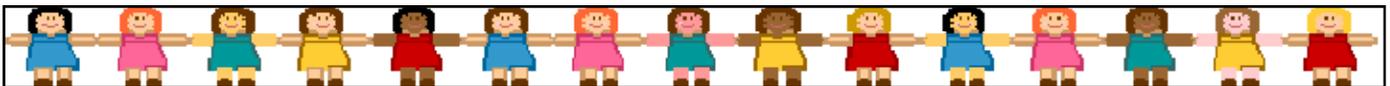
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