century, will be extensively used by historians of women. The French have progressed far more than anyone else in bringing ethnography to the service of the history of women and in some branches are now setting the pace. We note that the Irish woman has recently made her entry with “Images of the Irish Woman”, The Crane Bag, iv (1980). A pioneering group in Spain have produced Mujer en Espana, 1700-1975 (Ministerio de Cultura Estudios Sobre la Mujer, Madrid, 1982), of which the opening essay by Maria Angeles Duran, “Notas para el estudio de la estructura social de España en el siglo XVIII”, though not specifically devoted to women, will form some of the statistical basis for an in-depth study of women’s occupational roles. The Dutch periodical Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis and the Italian Memorie are other recent manifestations of a growing European commitment to the history of women and promise new horizons. There remains much to be done.

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II

THE MODERN PERIOD*

What one wants, I thought — and why does not some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton supply it? — is a mass of information; at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant? All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books; the life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it. It would be ambitious beyond my daring, I thought, looking about the shelves for books that were not there, to suggest to the students of those famous colleges that they should rewrite history, though I own that it often seems a little queer as it is, unreal lop-sided; but why should they not add a supplement to history? calling it, of course, by some inconspicuous name so that women might figure there without impropriety?1

DURING THE LAST DECADE, VIRGINIA WOOLF’S CALL FOR A HISTORY of women — written more than fifty years ago — has been answered. Inspired directly or indirectly by the political agenda of the women’s movement, historians have documented not only the lives of the average woman in various historical periods, but they have charted as well changes in the economic, educational and political positions of women of various classes in city and country and in nation states. Bookshelves are now being filled with biographies of forgotten prominent women, chronicles of feminist movements, and the collected

* I would like to thank for their assistance and suggestions Ellen Furlough, Sherri Broder and Donald M. Scott. Discussions with members of the research seminar at Brown University’s Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, and especially with Elizabeth Weed, have been invaluable for the conceptualization of this article.

1 Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own (London, 1929), p. 68.
letters of female authors; the book titles treat subjects as disparate as suffrage and birth control. Journals have appeared which are devoted exclusively to women's studies and to the even more specialized area of women's history. And, at least in the United States, there are major conferences each year devoted entirely to the presentation of scholarly papers on the history of women.

The production of materials is marked by extraordinary diversity in topic, method and interpretation. Indeed, it is foolish to attempt, as some historians have recently done, to reduce the field to a single interpretive or theoretical stance. Reductionism of that sort creates an illusion that the reviewer commands, indeed that he dominates, a profusion of disparate texts. At the same time, the illusion obscures the professed end of such reviews: an accurate account of the "state of the art", and of the meaning and importance of its diversity and complexity. It is precisely in the acknowledgement of its complexity and confusions that one finds both an understanding of women's history and also the basis for critical evaluation of it.

Some of the complexity comes from the sheer variety of topics studied. The confusion results from the proliferation of case studies and large interpretive attempts which neither address one another nor a similar set of questions and from the absence of a definable historiographic tradition within which interpretations are debated and revised. Instead, woman as subject has been grafted on to other traditions or studied in isolation from any of them. While some histories of women's work, for example, address contemporary feminist questions about the relationship between wage-earning and status, others frame their studies within the context of debates among Marxists and between Marxists and modernization theorists about the impact of industrial capitalism. Reproduction covers a vast terrain

2 The American journals are Signs, Feminist Studies, The Women's Studies Quarterly and Women and History. In France Pénélope publishes scholarly work in women's history. In Britain historical studies are published in the Feminist Review, and History Workshop is now a journal of socialist and feminist historians. RFD/DRF (Resources for Feminist Research / Documentation sur la Recherche Feministe) is the Canadian journal.

3 The largest of these is the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, the sixth meeting of which will be held in June 1984.

4 Richard Evans, "Modernization Theory and Women's History", Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, xx (1980), pp. 492-514, applies the same reductionism that Tony Judt did in his review of American social history scholarship, forcing all practitioners into a single "deviation", the common denominator of which is ultimately not theory, method or subject, but national character. See also Richard Evans, "Women's History: The Limits of Reclamation", Social Hist., v (1980), pp. 273-81, which concludes with a sweeping generalization about "so many American historians of women" as compared to their British counterparts.

in which fertility and contraception are sometimes treated within the confines of historical demography as aspects of the "demographic transition". Alternately they are viewed within the context of discussions of the conflicting political analyses of Malthusian political economists and socialist labour leaders, or within the very different framework of evaluations of the impact of the nineteenth-century "ideology of domesticity" on the power of women in their families. Yet another approach stresses feminist debates about sexuality and the history of women's demands for the right to control their own bodies. Additionally, some Marxist-feminists have redefined reproduction as the functional equivalent of production in an effort to incorporate women into the corpus of Marxist theory. 6 Investigations

of politics have sought either to demonstrate simply that women were to be found "in public", or to illustrate the historical incompatibility between feminist claims and the structure and ideology of organized trade unions and political parties (the "failure" of socialism, for example, to accommodate feminism). Another quite different approach to politics examines the interior organization of women's political movements as a way of documenting the existence of a distinctively female culture.

Still, there is a common dimension to the enterprise of these scholars of different schools and that is to make women a focus of

enquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative — whether that narrative is the familiar chronicle of political events (the French Revolution, the Swing riots, World War I or II) and political movements (Chartism, utopian socialism, feminism, women’s suffrage), or the newer, more analytically cast account of the workings or unfoldings of large-scale processes of social change (industrialization, capitalism, modernization, urbanization, the building of nation states). The titles of some of the books that launched the “women’s history movement” in the early 1970s explicitly conveyed their authors’ intentions: those who had been “Hidden from History” were “Becoming Visible”.8 Although book titles are now more circumspect (in part in order to legitimate claims to serious academic consideration), the mission of their authors remains to construct women as historical subjects. That effort goes far beyond the naive search for the heroic ancestors of the contemporary women’s movement to a re-evaluation of established standards of historical significance. It culminates in a debate whose terms are contained in Woolf’s phrases: can a focus on women “add a supplement to history” without also “rewriting history”? Beyond that, what does the feminist rewriting of history entail?

There are several positions in the debate, which is less a debate than a different set of approaches to the “rewriting of history”. Most scholars working in women’s history assume their work will transform history as it has been written and understood; they differ on the questions of how that will be accomplished. Some see the recovery of information and the focus on female subjects as sufficient to the task. Others use their research to challenge received interpretations of progress and regress. In this regard, for example, an impressive mass of evidence has been compiled to show that the Renaissance was not a renaissance for women,9 that technology did not lead to women’s liberation either in the work place or at home,10 that the

8 Sheila Rowbotham, Hidden from History (London, 1973); Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, Becoming Visible: Women in European History (Boston, 1977); Hartman and Banner (eds.), Clio’s Consciousness Raised; Berenice Carroll (ed.), Liberating Women’s History (Urbana, Ill., 1976); Mitchell and Oakley (eds.), Rights and Wrongs of Women. The two superb collections edited by Martha Vicinus, Suffer and Be Still (Bloomington, Ind., 1972) and A Widening Sphere (Bloomington, Ind., 1977) have titles more descriptive of their subject than of their mission, but the introductory essays deal with the same theme.


"Age of Democratic Revolutions" excluded women from political participation,¹¹ that the "affective nuclear family" constrained women's emotional and personal development,¹² and that the rise of medical science deprived women of autonomy and a sense of feminine community.¹³ Still others — a much smaller number at this point — attempt to join their evidence more directly to "mainstream" social and political history. Evidence about women becomes a way into examining social, economic and political relationships and the conclusions are less about women themselves than about the organization of societies, the dynamics of power, the content and meaning of historically specific politics. For this approach, a focus on women


¹² Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women (New York, 1978); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-60", Amer. Quart., xviii (1966), pp. 151-74; Peter T. Cominos, "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict", in Victorin (ed.), Suffer and Be Still, pp. 155-72; Blanche Glassman Hersh, The Slavery of Sex: Feminist Abolitionists in America (Urbana, Ill., 1978); William Leach, True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Critique of Sex and Society (New York, 1980). A different sort of interpretation has emerged among a group of American scholars, who argue that there was an improvement in women's social and family status with the adoption of the ideology of domesticity. See nn. 17, 18, 19 below.

leads to the articulation of gender (or sexual difference) as a category of historical analysis, to the incorporation of gender into the historian’s analytical tool box, and to a conceptual perspective that makes possible a genuine “rewriting of history”.

In this essay I will examine these various approaches less in terms of their conclusions than in terms of their assumptions and methods. I will draw most heavily on North American scholarship not only because I am most familiar with it, but because in the United States there has been produced during the past ten or twelve years the largest volume of, the most varied examples of subject and interpretation in, and the fullest elaboration of theoretical debates about women’s history.  

The first approach writes women’s history as “her-story”, a narrative of women’s experience either alongside or entirely outside conventional historical frameworks. The aim in both instances is to give value as history to an experience that has been ignored and thus devalued and to insist on female agency in the “making of history”. Investigations that seek to uncover women’s participation in major political events and to write a women’s political history attempt to fit a new subject — women — into received historical categories, interpreting their actions in terms recognizable to political and social historians. A forthcoming book on the history of the French women’s suffrage movement by Steven Hause nicely exemplifies this approach. The author interprets the weakness and small size of the movement (in comparison with its English and American counterparts) as the result of the ideologies and institutions of French Catholicism, the legacy of Roman law, the conservatism of French society, and the peculiar political history of French republicanism, especially the Radical Party during the Third Republic. Hause also analyses divisions among feminists and he tells the entire story in terms of the ideas and organizations of the women leaders. Another example of this kind of approach examines a women’s political movement from the perspective of its rank-and-file members rather than its leaders.


In the best traditions of the social histories of labour (that were inspired by the work of E. P. Thompson) Jill Liddington and Jill Norris offer a sensitive and illuminating account of working-class women’s participation in the English suffrage movement. Their material, drawn largely from Manchester records and from oral histories they collected, documents the involvement of working-class women in the campaign to win the vote (previous histories described it as almost entirely a middle-class movement) and links demands by these women for suffrage to their work and family lives and to the activities of trade union and Labour Party organizers. The predominance and wisdom of the Pankhurst wing of the movement is called into question for its elitism and its insistence on female separatism (a position rejected by the majority of suffragettes).  

A different sort of investigation, still within the “her-story” position, departs from the framework of conventional history and offers a new narrative, different periodization and different causes. It seeks to illuminate the structures of ordinary women’s lives as well as those of notable women, and to discover the nature of the femininst or female consciousness which motivated their behaviour. Patriarchy and class are usually assumed to be the contexts within which nineteenth- and twentieth-century women defined their experience, but these are rarely specified or examined concretely. Since these are the given contexts, however, a number of histories tend to emphasize moments of cross-class collaboration among women and those actions which directly addressed women’s oppression, but such topics are not the defining characteristic of this approach. Rather the central aspect of this approach is the exclusive focus on female agency, on the causal role played by women in their history, and on the gender determinants of that role. Evidence consists of women’s expressions, ideas and actions. Explanation and interpretation are framed within the terms of the female sphere: by examinations of personal experience, familial and domestic structures, collective (female) reinterpretations of social definitions of women’s role, and networks of female friendship that provided emotional as well as physical sustenance. The exploration of the women’s world has led to the brilliant insights of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg about the “female world of love and ritual” in nineteenth-century America, to an insistence on the positive aspects of the domestic ideology of the same period, to a

dialectical reading of the relationship between middle-class women’s political action and the ideas of womanhood that confined them to domestic realms, and to an analysis of the “reproductive ideology” that constructed the world of the bourgeoises of northern France in the mid-nineteenth century. It has also led Carl Degler to argue that American women themselves created the ideology of their separate sphere in order to enhance their autonomy and status. In his rendering of the story, women create a world neither within nor in opposition to oppressive structures or ideas that others have imposed, but to further a set of group interests, defined and articulated from within the group itself. Although Degler has been accused of misreading the histories upon which he draws for his account, his conceptualization follows from the causality implied in “her-story’s” construction of the woman as historical subject and from its frequent failure to distinguish between the valuation of women’s experience (considering it worthy of study) and the positive assessment of everything women said or did.

This approach to women’s history substitutes women for men, but it does not rewrite conventional history. To be sure, it raises questions that call for answers by offering documentation about women’s activities — public and private — that happened, but were not included in conventional accounts. It insists as well that “personal, subjective experience” matters as much as “public and political activities”, indeed that the former influences the latter. It demonstrates that sex and gender need to be conceptualized in historical terms, at least if some of the motives for women’s actions are to be understood. Yet it does not then move on to challenge conventional history directly. Although women are substituted for men as the subject of historical accounts, their story remains separate — whether different questions are asked, different categories of analysis offered, or only different documents examined. For those interested there is now a growing and important history of women to supplement and enrich conventional political and social histories, but it remains embedded in the “separ-

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"ate sphere" that has long been associated exclusively with the female sex.

The second approach to the "rewriting of history" is most closely associated with social history. Social history offered important support for a women's history in several ways. First, it provided methodologies in quantification, in the use of details from everyday life, and in interdisciplinary borrowings from sociology, demography and ethnography. Secondly, it conceptualized as historical phenomena family relationships, fertility and sexuality. Thirdly, social history challenged the narrative line of political history ("male leaders make history") by taking as its subject large-scale social processes as they were realized in many dimensions of human experience. This led to the fourth influence, the legitimation of a focus on groups customarily excluded from political history. Social history's story is ultimately about processes or systems (such as capitalism or modernization, depending on the theoretical stance of the historian), but it is told through the lives of various groups of people who are the ostensible, though not always the actual, subjects of the narrative. Since social experience or relations of power are embodied everywhere in a society, one can choose among a variety of topics, and it is relatively easy to extend the list from workers, peasants, slaves, élites and diverse occupational or social groups to include women. Thus, for example, studies of women's work were undertaken, much as studies of workers had been, to assess capitalism's impact or to understand its operation.

These studies have led to a proliferation of that "mass of information" Virginia Woolf asked for. We know what kinds of jobs women did, what their patterns of labour force participation were, what stage of the life cycle coincided with work away from home, under what conditions they formed labour unions or went on strike, what their wages were and how all of that has changed during the past hundred and fifty years. The mass of information has, furthermore, sugges-

ted the importance of including questions about family organization and sex-segregated labour markets in analyses of working-class history, but it has stopped short of meeting the challenge to "rewrite history". That is because most of the social history of women's work has been contained within the terms of social theories based on analytic categories that are primarily economic. There are many arguments advanced about women and work. Some insist that wage-earning enhanced women's sexual identity. Others that women were exploited as a cheap labour supply and that, as a result, men perceived women as a threat to the value of their own labour. Still others point out that sex-segregation undermined women's job control and hence their ability to organize and strike. Some historians have insisted that family divisions of labour attributed economic value to a wife's domestic role, others that family conflict centred around control of wages. One recent article suggests that when women commanded sufficient resources they engaged in collective action identical to men's. In all these studies the explanation ultimately has to do with economic variables not gender. Sexual divisions, their definition and elaboration are explained as the result of economic forces when, in fact, it is equally plausible and probably more accurate to suggest that cultural definitions of gender differences permitted the implementation of economic practices such as sex-segregated labour markets or the use of women to undercut the wages of skilled craftsmen.

Some historians of women's work have used a notion of patriarchy as a way of including gender in their analyses, but the term seems insufficiently theorized. Most often political, class and family systems are described as forms of male dominance which either transcend particular historical situations and social relations or follow directly from economic causes.


25 An interesting attempt to describe the interactions of cultural categories and the sex-typing of jobs is Julie Matthaei, An Economic History of American Women (New York, 1982).

If social history has freed historians to write about women and given them some methods by which to document the experience and agency of women in the past, it has also limited the potential of women's history to "rewrite history". Few studies of social processes or social movements have yet been fundamentally altered as a result of studies focused on women. Women are a department of social history; they are one of the groups mobilizing resources, being modernized or exploited, contending for power or being excluded from a polity; they are explained, in other words, within the terms of behaviourist or Marxist or modernizationist models. The history of women enriches and adds new perspectives, but it has not yet been central to social history's largely successful effort to reconceptualize political history. That is because the issue of gender — implicit in the materials studied — has not been sufficiently singled out as either providing qualitatively different insights or as raising different kinds of analytic questions. In a sense, if "her-story" tends to too separatist a position, much of the social history of women has been too integrationist, subsuming women within received categories of analysis. Both approaches offer supplements to history, but they have not found a way to convince or demonstrate to other historians that it is essential to take their findings into account. They have not, in other words, "rewritten history". That rewriting is the project of the third position in the "debate" I have constructed, and it builds on, indeed it is made possible by, the work of both "her-story" and the social history of women.

The third position was articulated in prescriptions for women's history by some of its most important American representatives, but it has proved difficult to put into practice. Usually beginning with a focus on women, its subject is nonetheless gender. The late Joan Kelly set as the goal for this women's history making sex "as fundamental to our analysis of the social order as other classifications such as class and race". For Natalie Zemon Davis the aim is: "to understand the significance of the sexes, of gender groups in the historical past. Our goal is to discover the range in sex roles and in sexual symbolism in different societies and periods, to find out what meaning they had and how they functioned to maintain the social

order or to promote its change".28 The point is to examine social
definitions of gender as they are developed by men and women,
constructed in and affected by economic and political institutions,
expressive of a range of relationships which included not only sex,
but class and power. The results throw new light not only on women's
experience, but on social and political practice as well. In addition,
enquiries into gender permit historians to raise critical questions that
lead to the "rewriting of history".

Studying gender is less a question of a single theory than of a
method or procedure for investigation. It consists of examining
women and men in relation to one another, of asking what the
definitions or laws that apply to one imply about the other, what the
comparative location and activities of men and women reveal about
each, and what representations of sexual difference suggest about the
structure of social, economic and political authority. Thus Temma
Kaplan's *Anarchists of Andalusia* analysed the different appeals of
that political movement to men and women and the different but
complementary ways in which male and female peasants and workers
were organized to revolutionary struggle. Her parallel treatment of
men and women within anarchism illuminates gender relationships
in Andalusian society in relation to the nature and meaning of this
particular political movement's attack on capitalism and the state.29

Tim Mason developed important insight about the "reconciliatory
function of the family" in Nazi Germany as a result of an enquiry
into the position of women and policies towards women. The factual
material he gathered about women, who were largely "non-actors"
in the politics of the period, "provided an exceptionally fruitful new
vantage point from which the behaviour of the actors could be —
indeed, had to be — reinterpreted".30 Taking Foucault's suggestions
in the *History of Sexuality* as her starting-point, Judith Walkowitz
delved into Josephine Butler's campaign against the Contagious Dis-
eases Acts in late Victorian England. Avoiding what might have been
the temptation to write a simple heroic account of the success of a
woman's movement aimed at combating the double standard of sex-
ual morality, Walkowitz used her material for an investigation into
economic, social, religious and political divisions in English
society.31 Although she did not directly offer criticism of conven-
tional historical accounts of the period, her book implies such criti-
cism. The study establishes that a debate about sexual conduct took

place openly, within parliament as well as outside, that it was instigated by women (and supported by men) within the terms of their moral and religious preoccupations and carried on “in public”, that it resulted in institutional and legal change, in short that sex was an explicit political issue for at least several decades. These findings not only question the conventional characterization of the period as “repressed”, but suggest the need for rewriting a political history that has focused largely on the contests between Disraeli and Gladstone and on issues such as Irish Home Rule. How can the debate on prostitution and sexual standards be written into that political history? What critical perspective do we gain from the fact that it has, until now, been left out? At points of contact such as these the history of gender establishes a critique of political history and the means for rewriting it.

It seems no accident that many of the best efforts at joining women’s history with established history take place in studies of politics broadly defined. Political structures and political ideas — structures and ideas that create and enforce relationships of power — shape and set the boundaries of public discourse and of all aspects of life. Even those excluded from participation in the discourse and activities of politics are defined by them; “non-actors”, to use Mason’s term, are acting according to rules established in political realms; the private sphere is a public creation; those absent from official accounts partook nonetheless in the making of history; those who are silent speak eloquently about the meanings of power and the uses of political authority. Feminist desires to make woman a historical subject cannot be realized simply by making her the agent or principal character of a historical narrative. To discover where women have been throughout history it is necessary to examine what gender and sexual difference have had to do with the workings of power. By doing so historians will both find women and transform political history.

At this point the approach I am suggesting is best undertaken by specific studies of discrete periods, movements or events. One could, for example, recast studies of suffrage campaigns to uncover relationships between gender and power in late nineteenth-century America or England. Brian Harrison has described the opposition to suffrage and others have analysed the ideas and supporters of the movement. But there has as yet been no study which brings together in a context larger than the issues of the vote itself all the participants — militants, moderates, antis, government ministers and members of parliament. What did the debate over the vote for women signify about conceptions of authority and political rights? How are patriarchal ideas

32 Brian Harrison, Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women’s Suffrage in Britain (New York, 1978). For studies of suffrage movements, see nn. 7, 16 above.
articulated and in what terms? Where do conflicts about women (really about sexual difference) fit in the distribution of social, economic and political power in a nation? What is at stake and for which groups in a society when questions of gender difference become the focus of dispute, legislative consideration and ideological conflict?

Another example stems from work on the French Revolution. Studies of women in that revolution have moved from documentation of female participation to considerations of iconography and of the question of when and why sexual difference became an issue for dispute. Darlene Levy and Harriet Applewhite have focused on the debates in 1793 which outlawed women’s clubs in the name of protecting femininity and domesticity. Why did gender become a means of drawing political lines? What issues beyond those having literally to do with women’s rights were being addressed in prohibitions of female political organization? What was the significance of the revolutionaries’ choice of a female figure to represent liberty and the republic? Was there any connection between iconographic representations and political rights for women? How did men and women differ in their discussions of women’s political role? What do the political debates about sexual difference add to our understanding of the legitimation of authority and the protection of power during the French Revolution? These questions cannot be answered without information about women, but they are not limited to woman as subject or agent. Instead they include gender as a way of gaining a new appreciation of the politics and of the social and political impact of the French Revolution.

Studies of politics in the sense in which I employ the term need not deal only with issues of power at the level of nation states for my use of the term extends to contests (expressed in language as well as institutional arrangements) about power and authority in all aspects of social life. Indeed the work of Deborah Valenze on women preachers in English popular “cottage” religion demonstrates the interconnectedness between religious ideas and gender in expressions of opposition to change in community and household economies. Leonore Davidoff explores the ways in which individuals played with culturally defined categories of gender and class in her article on Arthur J. Munby; she reminds us of the complicated ways in which personal relationships are variations on social themes of power, status and


authority. Some recent considerations of the labour and socialist movements have used questions about gender to advance discussion beyond documentation of misogyny or condemnation of male leaders and beyond reductionist economic interpretations of the ideas and actions of workers. Parallel considerations of the discourses and experiences of working men and women have led to new interpretations, in one instance emphasizing the relative openness of utopian socialism to feminism, as compared to Marxian socialism's marginalization of women. Enquiries about the significance of sexual difference have led, in addition, to readings of representations of work which include sexual, familial and religious dimensions. Work then has meaning beyond the literal description of productive activity, and studies about the place of women in the work-force and the labour movement offer insight both about women and the sexual politics of male and female workers and about the nature, meaning and purpose of their organizations and collective actions. The analysis must include women's actions and experiences, ideas and policies which define their rights, and metaphoric and symbolic representations of feminine and masculine. The problem for empirical historical investigation is to select moments when all of these are somehow at issue and to ask how they illuminate not only women's experience but politics as well.

To ignore politics in the recovery of the female subject is to accept the reality of public/private distinctions and the separate or distinctive qualities of women's character and experience. It misses the chance not only to challenge the accuracy of binary distinctions between men and women in the past and present, but to expose the very political nature of a history written in those terms. Simply to assert, however, that gender is a political issue is not enough. The realization of the radical potential of women's history comes in the writing of narratives that focus on women's experience and analyse the ways in which politics construct gender and gender constructs politics. Female agency then becomes not the recounting of great deeds performed by women, but the exposure of the often silent and hidden operations of gender which are nonetheless present and defining forces of politics and political life. With this approach women's

history enters the terrain of political history and inevitably begins the rewriting of history.38

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38 The same could be said of other topics of social history, which in uncovering information about hitherto “invisible” groups, introduce questions about the reasons for their invisibility, the economic and social conflicts that have been masked and so on. In the same way that much of the so-called apolitical social history provided the documentation, conceptualization and questions to challenge conventional political accounts, so the various approaches to women’s history — those I have called “her-story” and those subsumed within certain branches of social history — prepare the ground for the kind of political women’s history I have been advocating. The point, it seems to me, is not to reject and condemn various approaches as incorrect — in the manner of proponents of a narrowly defined political social history, among them Tony Judt, “A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians”, History Workshop, no. 7 (1979), pp. 66-94, and Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Political Crisis of Social History: A Marxian Perspective”, Jl. Social Hist., x (1976-7), pp. 205-20 — but to use them all to advance the enterprise. The rewritten narrative is then a collaborative effort, not the triumph of one school over another.