MAKING TROUBLE IN WOMEN'S STUDIES: 
ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE AND THE CULTURE WARS 

Danielle Balderas 

A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. 

Chapel Hill 
2016

Approved By: 
Katherine Turk 
Benjamin Waterhouse 
Emily Burrill
This thesis analyzes the critical years of the culture wars in which women’s studies destabilized traditional understandings of sex and gender. The culture wars were fought over ideas about sex and gender, placing women’s studies right in the middle of national debates about the fundamental ordering of society. Turning to the life of controversial women’s studies scholar Elizabeth Fox-Genovese demonstrates the contentious development of women’s studies and the politicization of ideas about sex and gender within the academy. While she ended her career as an intellectual orphan of women’s studies as she embraced more conservative ideas about sex and gender, she entered the field in years of ambiguity and possibility. However, Fox-Genovese's evolving identification with the Right turned her career in women’s studies into a casualty of the culture wars.
To my grandmothers
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have had the good fortune of incredible mentorship and support in the process of researching and writing this thesis. When I first began this project, I had only a vague idea of what I might find. Inspired to understand the life of a woman who so consistently perplexed me, I became consumed by the archives. However, it was the people in my life, both professionally and personally, who sustained me in this endeavor.

To my advisor, Katherine Turk, your enthusiasm and dedication to my work has been a constant source of inspiration. You have guided me through this process from the beginning—constantly reminding me why I fell in love with women’s history. Benjamin Waterhouse and Emily Burrill have each been generous with their time and mentorship. In addition to the wonderful faculty at UNC, I am indebted to the archivists at the Southern Historical Collection, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript Library, and Hoover Institute. And to Stephanie McCurry and Stacey Horstmann-Gatti, thank you for sharing your time and memories with me—our conversations enriched my understanding of the contradictions in Fox-Genovese’s life.

These acknowledgements would be woefully incomplete without mentioning the unwavering friendship and support of Carol Prince. To the women in my program—thank you for an environment of unapologetic feminism, mutual respect, and solidarity. Lastly, my family has supported me every step of the way—making this journey called graduate school that much more enjoyable. This thesis is dedicated to my grandmothers, Rosemary and Dolores. Strong women in their own right, I can only hope to carry on the torch.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS: MAKING TROUBLE IN WOMEN’S STUDIES:
ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE AND THE CULTURE WARS……………………………………1

REFERENCES..............................................................................................................49
MAKING TROUBLE IN WOMEN’S STUDIES: ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE AND THE CULTURE WARS

In December of 1994 prominent women from the Left and Right came together on William F. Buckley’s PBS show Firing Line to debate a resolution: “That the Women’s Movement Has Been Disastrous.” Betty Friedan and her cohort sat on one side of the stage, ardently defending the past three decades of feminist activism. On the other side, next to infamous conservative William F. Buckley, sat Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, the founder of one of the first women’s studies doctoral programs, arguing that the women’s movement had strayed too far from its origins by embracing a “third wave” agenda. Fox-Genovese went toe to toe with Friedan and those defending the current state of feminism and the economic, social, and political achievements of the women’s movement of the 1960s and 70s. “The original women’s movement has succeeded brilliantly,” Fox-Genovese argued, “No social group in history has revolutionized their status in comparable fashion.” However, she took issue with what she saw as a “departure” from its original aims—to her, liberal feminists had become too preoccupied with gender identity and rhetoric rather than focusing on the material needs of women across racial and class divides.1

As these women debated one another, it became clear that each woman in attendance had her own distinct definition of feminism. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, a former atheist, Marxist-inclined historian, now a pro-life Roman Catholic who founded one of the first doctoral programs in women’s studies at Emory in 1991, publicly challenged self-defined liberal feminists to rethink their beliefs—much to the chagrin of her feminist colleagues in women’s studies. Just like the women on stage with Fox-Genovese, women’s studies scholars held diverse feminist views. Competing visions of feminism within women’s studies was nothing new, and by the early 1990s the relationship between women’s studies and feminism continued to prompt heated debate. However, Fox-Genovese’s departure from mainstream liberal feminism represented a distinct historical moment in the history of women’s studies. Her embrace of conservatism dug like a knife in the back to many feminist scholars. How could this eminent scholar of women’s studies publicly align herself with William F. Buckley over Betty Friedan? Women’s studies roots lay in feminist activism, and by questioning fundamental tenants of feminist beliefs, such as a woman’s right to choose an abortion, Fox-Genovese challenged the identity of the field and its scholars. Her conservative identity challenges the dominant narrative of women’s studies as a project wholly characterized by leftist feminist activism.

Activists involved with the New Left and women’s liberation in the 1960s and 1970s demanded a change in their education and lobbied hard for a curriculum that included women. Indeed, the first programs in women’s studies largely resulted from this campus and community activism. Given women’s studies’ roots in the women’s movement, scholars have struggled to

---

2 Nancy F. Cott’s *Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) is invaluable for any history of feminism.

3 Marilyn Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Women’s Studies Department Records, Special Collections and University Archives, Library and Information Access, San Diego State University; Marilyn J. Boxer, “Women’s Studies as Women’s History,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Vol.30 No. ¾, Women’s Studies Then and Now (Fall-Winter 2002), 42-51.
reconcile Fox-Genovese’s conservative evolution within the context of her foundational involvement in women’s studies. A lifelong “cultural conservative,” Fox-Genovese’s growing identification with the Right was characterized by discomfort with abortion, a rejection of new theories about gender, a commitment to the nuclear family as an ideal, and a religious conversion to Catholicism. While Fox-Genovese ended her career as an intellectual orphan of women’s studies, she entered the field in years of ambiguity and possibility.

In its early years, the field of women’s studies had ambiguous boundaries. University staff, community activists, professors, and students invented women’s studies as they went. They developed an underground network sharing syllabi and opened up their own presses to print feminist material. Early on, as scholars grew the field at lightening speed, it seemed as if women’s studies encompassed anything that had to do with women. The ad hoc development of the field reveals the contingency of the development of women’s studies—both in its form and content. Fox-Genovese’s ideas and career demonstrates the labyrinth of possibilities.

Fox-Genovese’s increasingly troubled career in women’s studies indicates that the path from the early women’s studies programs of the 1970s to the women’s studies of today was neither linear nor uncontested. Rather, in its first few decades, women’s studies scholars struggled to define the field’s boundaries and analytical framework. Some believed women’s studies had to adhere to specific feminist interpretations while others insisted their courses did not need any theoretical framework as long as they included women. Feminist theorists within

---

4 Sheila Tobias Interview, Interviewed by Danielle Balderas, December 17, 2016. (Phone-interview.)
women’s studies sparred over different methods for overcoming women’s oppression. This absence of consensus provided an intellectual space for a diverse array of scholars, including Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, whose evolving conservatism placed her at odds with women’s studies scholars in the 1990s.

The ideological space in which Fox-Genovese worked collapsed around her as the field confronted the “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s. By the 1980s, in the wake of postwar social and political movements which upended American society by challenging social norms related to race, sex, gender and war, a newly powerful Right emerged to challenge these liberal values in what scholars have characterized as the “culture wars.” Deep disagreements over public morality lay at the heart of the institutional conflicts of the culture wars. Conflict over sex education, school prayer, abortion, and the humanities revealed fundamental divisions between conservatives and liberals on issues related to sex and gender.

---


By challenging the stability of such a fundamental category as “woman,” women’s studies placed itself squarely in the middle of the culture wars as the site of a proxy war between the Left and Right. In the wake of fierce debates over feminism, multiculturalism, and the values being taught in the humanities, women’s studies became the “whipping boy” of conservative attacks. As historian Daniel Rodgers argues, for conservatives, “the destabilization of gender roles and gender certainties set off the sharpest tremors” as women’s studies scholars like Judith Butler produced scholarship that challenged traditional ideas about women and gender. The moral and political conflicts of the culture wars were largely contests over understandings of sex and gender.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese was left behind in the genealogy of women’s studies as she embraced more conservative ideas about sex and gender. The prevailing histories of women’s studies provide no room for an ideologically and politically complicated conservative scholar like Fox-Genovese. Revisiting the culture wars through the lens of gender, with women’s studies at the center, helps explain Fox-Genovese’s marginalization. Most conservatives eschewed the notion of studying gender as “feminist indoctrination and propaganda” and claimed that women’s studies “promoted lesbianism.” However, Fox-Genovese continued to study women and gender even after her conservative shift—leaving her without a clear intellectual or institutional home. The centrality of sex and gender in the culture wars encouraged women’s

10 Boxer, When Women Ask the Questions.

11 Rodgers, Age of Fracture, 145; Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (Routledge, 1990).

12 Rodgers, Age of Fracture, 170.

studies scholars to more clearly define their field against their opposition. As Fox-Genovese moved further to the right, women’s studies, under increasing attacks from conservatives, turned inward to defend itself against critiques of its legitimacy. Fox-Genovese’s evolving views placed her on shaky ground as she tried to straddle the world of women’s studies and the world of conservatism.

Under increasing pressure from administrators, hostile colleagues, and suspicious conservative organizations to prove their field’s academic and intellectual legitimacy, women’s studies scholars were forced into a defensive position. Faced with mounting opposition, women’s studies scholars made compromises in form and content at almost every stage of the field’s development. For instance, many had originally envisioned that women’s studies would become a part of all departments and disciplines rather than becoming its own separate field. However, because women’s studies operated in a political and cultural environment that harbored a large degree of hostility to the field’s vision and innovation, women’s studies responded through a narrowing and polarization in order to protect its feminist identity and institutional survival.\(^{14}\) This made Fox-Genovese’s evolving conservative worldview increasingly untenable. While women’s studies did not become explicitly political enough for some women’s studies scholars, for others, like Fox-Genovese, it became too involved in a certain kind of feminist advocacy.

Revisiting the history of women’s studies upends any perception of the field as predestined to embrace developments like postmodernism, queer theory, and sexuality studies. Because women’s studies’ theoretical approaches and methodologies did not arrive fully formed,

scholars forged a path in the crucible of the culture wars. By questioning ideas about sex and gender, women’s studies inserted itself into national debates about the fundamental ordering of society. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s evolving identification with the conservativism, which leveled scathing attacks against women’s studies, undermined both her ability to continue studying women and gender and her credibility within women’s studies.

Turning to the life and career of Fox-Genovese demonstrates the high stakes of women’s studies’ history. The furor over her political transformation exposes an intensely significant moment in the history of higher education. Fox-Genovese’s career in women’s studies enables us to uncover the full range of women’s studies’ history, and therefore allows scholars to more clearly understand the relationship between politics and education. Fox-Genovese’s career in women’s studies became but one casualty of the culture wars. However, her concurrent identity as a women’s studies scholar and conservative intellectual makes her uniquely suited to provide insight into the politics of women’s studies and higher education.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, known to friends as Betsey, traded one ideological identity for another throughout her life. At one point or another, she was an atheist, feminist, Marxist, conservative, Roman Catholic, historian, and public intellectual. Born in 1941 into relative privilege, she developed a love of intellectual inquiry early in life under the influence of her father Edward Whiting Fox, an eminent historian at Cornell University. She was a voracious reader and from a young age, politically conscious. In high school her ambition was to be “Ambassadress to France,” and she abhorred Republican foreign policy that aggressively

15 “Collection Abstract,” in the Fox and Simon Family Papers #5363, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
opposed communism.\textsuperscript{16} Never one dimensional, Fox-Genovese also knew how to have a bit of fun. While at the prestigious Concord Academy she enjoyed dancing, learning to smoke, and “cavorting” with the boys at nearby Groton.\textsuperscript{17} As a young woman, Fox-Genovese was not only an intellectually ambitious student, but also deeply interested in broader world affairs of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{18} This intense curiosity in politics, people, and society stayed with her throughout her life.

By the time Fox-Genovese studied abroad in Paris in 1961 she was already thinking seriously about class and wealth. Her time in France only intensified her interest in history and politics. After reading DeBeauvoir’s \textit{Le Mandarins} she reflected, “It is the first time I really felt how little those people had of food and clothes, let alone luxuries during the war.”\textsuperscript{19} Fox-Genovese’s own inherited class status as a self-described “half WASP-half Jewish girl” seems to have sparked a cognitive dissonance within her.\textsuperscript{20} Uncomfortable with her own relative wealth, but evidently dependent on it, Fox-Genovese tried to come to terms with her conflicting desire to be more class-conscious. Days after finishing DeBeauvoir, Fox-Genovese chastised herself (another theme throughout her life) in her diary, writing, “I must learn to resist temptation. There is no reason for me to spend so much. I am not rich and my purpose in life is not to be a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} “1958 Concord Academy Yearbook,” Box 44, Folder 467, in the Elizabeth Fox-Genovese Papers #4851, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\item \textsuperscript{17} “1958 Concord Academy Yearbook,” Box 44, Folder 467, EFG Papers, SHC. This yearbook is chalk-full of notes from her classmates. Paula Pace writes about Fox-Genovese dancing “cheek to cheek” with boys. Linda Livingston Wing writes about their good times with “seven-up, coke, and beer!!” And, her official yearbook profile pokes fun at her smoking by writing “Another art she never quite mastered is that art of smoking…”
\item \textsuperscript{18} Correspondence between Fox-Genovese and her father reveal that she thought deeply about world affairs, from elections in Algeria to political movements in France. Folders 90-94, in the Fox and Simon Family Papers #5363, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\item \textsuperscript{19} “Diary, 1966-1969, Entry January 16, 1962, Paris,” Box 45, Folder 470, EFG Papers, SHC.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Changing World of Women in the Twenty-First Century,” Box 15, Folder 186, EFG Papers, SHC.
\end{itemize}
clotheshorse. I must begin to live with people who have more than I do.” While in France as a college student Fox-Genovese honed the craft of connecting scholarship and literature with her own life—a practice encouraged by the political environment of the 1960s.

Returning home to the U.S., Fox-Genovese graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1963—the same year Betty Friedan published her path breaking *The Feminine Mystique* which reassured scores of women they were not alone in feeling unfulfilled as housewives and mothers. She pursued both a master’s and doctoral degree in history at Harvard in the midst of a burgeoning anti-war movement and feminist activism. When Fox-Genovese walked onto Harvard’s campus in 1964, the atmosphere was less than inviting to women scholars. Radcliffe Graduate School had just merged with the Graduate School at Harvard, and opposition to women’s inclusion at Harvard picked up steam in the 1970s while Fox-Genovese was still a graduate student as the National Organization for Women and student activists pressured the university to admit women and men on an equal basis. Fox-Genovese personally experienced that hostility when she was told by the history department, “We don’t give money [for scholarships] to girls.” Without funding, Fox-Genovese still managed to finish her doctorate as feminist activism and women’s liberation proliferated on college campuses—further inspiring her to make connections between

---


her politics and their education. The growing number of women on college campuses in combination with grassroots student activism cultivated a critical mass of students who clamored for histories and curriculum in which they could see themselves.

In the midst of the tumultuous environment of the 1960s on college campuses, Fox-Genovese encountered another force of nature: Marxist historian Eugene Genovese. Eugene Genovese, well known for blurring the lines between politics and academia, made national headlines when he told students in 1965 that he would welcome a Vietcong victory. Her marriage to renowned, and polemical, historian Eugene Genovese in 1969 marked a turning point in her academic and intellectual career. While their ideological leanings have long been understood in tandem, colleague Michael O’Brien insists “they had very different minds and temperaments.” Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s turn toward conservatism in the 1990s is usually written and spoken about in relation to Eugene Genovese’s conservatism. Although they enjoyed an incredibly close relationship and influenced one another over the course of both of their careers, her ideology was not just a reflection or reaction to that of her husband’s. She never fully embraced the extent of his radicalism.

25 Marilyn J. Boxer, “Women’s Studies as Women’s History.” Women’s Studies Quarterly, Vol.30, No. ¾, Women’s Studies Then and Now (Fall-Winter 2002), pp. 42-51. Boxer demonstrates that women’s studies emerged in the academy as a result of specific historical contexts—the women’s movement, increased in female tenured faculty members, the New Left, student power on college campuses, increased funding at universities accompanied by relative autonomy in curriculum development compared to Europe.

26 Eugene D. Genovese, Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2008).


Indeed, they often butted heads over their working relationship and harbored a deep sense of competition. Although she often didn’t voice her frustrations to Eugene out loud, she reflected on them in her writing and dream diaries. On a crisp March morning in 1972 Fox-Genovese woke up with an uncomfortable feeling. She had just dreamed that “something, Women’s Lib, was threatening Gene—was going to kill him, in fact, and I had to save him from it—[and] I think I did.” Never one to succumb to easy categorization, Fox-Genovese spent many hours contemplating female identity, feminism, and her place within the movement and ideology. Her own relationship to the burgeoning feminist movement was extremely complicated. She harbored a “hatred of men and authority” but also struggled with her identification as a woman and a feminist.

Fox-Genovese’s “hatred of men and authority” was compounded by a fierce lack of self-confidence and insecurity. This insecurity manifested itself in numerous ways, chiefly among them her self-critical temperament and competitiveness. From a young age Fox-Genovese struggled with feelings of inadequacy. After immersing herself in DeBeauvoir, Fox-Genovese lamented, “I am going on 21 and have done nothing. I seem consumed or dominated by a far reaching laziness.” Although seemingly critical of her own accomplishments, the contradictory nature of Fox-Genovese’s personality reveals that while she suffered from low self-esteem and anxiety, she also had a high estimation of what she deserved and was capable of.

After her marriage to Eugene Genovese, she often found herself butting up against his shadow. His success as a transformational scholar of the antebellum South and slavery caused

29 “Diary, 1972, Entry March 27, 1972,” Box 45, Folder 471, EFG Papers, SHC.
30 “Diary, 1972, Entry August 4, 1972,” Box 45, Folder 471, EFG Papers, SHC.
internal friction. She often felt “exploited, jealous, and fiercely competitive with him,” despising the expectation “to be sweet.” Fox-Genovese confided, “I don’t want to please him, seduce him, cajole him.”³² The pressure of being married to a fellow academic, in an era in which women scholars were not taken as seriously, deeply shaped Fox-Genovese’s attitudes about academic legitimacy—eventually inspiring her to seek legitimacy for women’s studies through more formal institutionalization, culminating in a doctoral program. Still a graduate student when she met and married Eugene Genovese, already a professor, the uneven power dynamic of their professional statuses increased Fox-Genovese’s tendency toward self-doubt.

While Fox-Genovese’s insecurities fostered a self-critical temperament, they also shaped her complicated relationship to feminism and identification with other women. “I realize I’m very uneasy about myself as a woman,” she wrote, “The thing which gives me real satisfaction is my work.”³³ Here, Fox-Genovese set up a tension between her work and being a woman. She saw her work as a roadblock to her fulfillment as a woman. Indeed, she remembered that “when I was in college there was no woman around who was anything I wanted to be when I grew up.”³⁴ Gender prescriptions for women created an internal contradiction for Fox-Genovese—she wanted to be intellectually fierce but saw that desire as subversive of the female identity. Time and again in her early academic career Fox-Genovese resisted identification with other women—preferring to participate in broader scholarly activism at first.

Fox-Genovese participated in the feminist movement and leftist activity as she established herself as a women’s history scholar. She attended consciousness-raising circles in

³² “Diary, 1972, Entry February 20, 1972,” Box 45, Folder 471, EFG Papers, SHC.
³³ “Diary, 1966-1969, Entry February 20, 1972,” Box 45, Folder 470, EFG Papers, SHC.
Cambridge, served as a translator for Italian communists, and co-founded the path breaking journal *Marxist Perspectives.* She finished her Ph.D. in history as women’s history and women’s studies exploded onto the scene. Academic opportunities for women began to open up amidst increasing student activist and faculty pressure to bring the study of women into the fold of higher education. However, these gains came up against the criticisms of some academics, conservative intellectuals, and university administrators who argued women’s studies would be nothing more than “a fad.”

Although an uphill battle, women’s studies scholars and students proved the field was no “fad.” Student perseverance, faculty commitment, and external pressures on the universities to comply with affirmative action all contributed to the creation of permanent women’s studies programs. The advocacy of students and faculty inspired by the broader social-political movements of the 1960s and 70s created a sense of urgency and demand for a program of study that countered the male-centered curriculum of the university. At the University of Pennsylvania, for example, supporters of creating a women’s studies program argued that, “the search for self-knowledge has always been central to education in the liberal arts, yet the University offered almost no formal opportunities for 2000 of its undergraduates to engage in

---


37 Marilyn Boxer was one of the first scholars to attend to the history of the field. Marilyn J. Boxer, “Women’s Studies as Women’s History,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly,* Vol.30 No. ¾, Women’s Studies Then and Now (Fall-Winter 2002), pp. 42-51; Marilyn Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

Driven by a fierce desire to understand women’s lives, past and present, advocates of women’s studies were further supported by efforts to establish African American Studies, Chicano Studies, and Ethnic Studies. Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (University of California Press, 2012); Rodolfo F. Acuna, *The Making of Chicano/a Studies: In the Trenches of Academe* (Rutgers University Press, 2011).
serious learning about themselves.”

Yet, arriving at a consensus as to what the field of women’s studies would look like proved difficult in the wake of excitement and heightened expectations—providing room for a diverse array of scholars, including Fox-Genovese who later distanced herself from “mainstream,” liberal feminism altogether.

Many of the universities that adopted women’s studies programs adamantly disassociated themselves from the women’s movement and feminist activism. For Example, when Barnard developed a women’s studies program and women’s center, President Martha E. Peterson “denied…that the center was a direct response to the women’s liberation movement” although she did concede that the school “was better able to establish the center because a lot of women had made some noise.” University and community members saw women’s studies as a “cause” and prominent faculty, like Remington Patterson at Barnard, harbored skepticism about “making anything except an intellectual commitment to its students.” Women’s studies’ supposed identification with a “cause” made it incompatible with intellectual integrity in the eyes of skeptics. Hostility over women’s studies’ ties to advocacy drove much of the contestation over the field, forcing women’s studies scholars to make compromises to ensure its viability. More than one program forewent the name of “feminist studies” for the less explicitly political “women’s studies” as a compromise in establishing a program.

---


39 Fox-Genovese often used the descriptors “mainstream” and “liberal” to talk about the feminism she later placed herself in opposition to.


41 Professor Remington P. Patterson (acting dean of Faculty at Barnard) as quoted in “Pressure and Popularity Spur Variety In College Women’s Studies Courses,” The New York Times, May 7, 1975.

42 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.
studies grew out of feminist activism, opponents of women’s studies protested the field’s relationship to feminism.

From the outset critics questioned the academic legitimacy of women’s studies. Its ties to the feminist movement raised eyebrows among academics who saw no place for activism in intellectual scholarship. Many women’s studies scholars recognized that opponents saw women’s studies programs as products of “pressure from organized women’s groups” and “political instruments.” Joan Scott, who as a young scholar was active in establishing women’s studies at UNC Chapel Hill, responded to these critiques by insisting that “what began as a political movement has become an intellectually legitimate field of study.” Fox-Genovese agreed with this line of thought late into the 90’s, arguing that women’s studies could be “intellectually excellent.” However, as more universities adopted women’s studies programs, many administrators tried to deemphasize the political, and strip women’s studies of its feminist identity.

In the 1970s university administrators were the primary opponents of women’s studies’ existence on university campuses. At Mundelein College, Chicago Women’s Liberation Union member Jenny Knauss was fired for teaching a feminist curriculum and in turn the university


tried “to establish a more conservative women’s studies curriculum.”\textsuperscript{47} By depoliticizing women’s studies and stripping it of its feminist content, the university tried to assuage conservatives’ concerns about affirmative action and Title IX corrupting the university’s academic rigor.\textsuperscript{48} The university tried to co-opt the women’s studies program and in Knauss’ opinion, turn it into “a marketing tool for the college” by “eliminat[ing] all the stuff on sexuality.”\textsuperscript{49}

Despite administrative efforts to downplay women’s studies relationship to feminism, both women’s history and women’s studies played a prominent role in challenging the established western canon.\textsuperscript{50} By the time Fox-Genovese joined the radical project of a women’s history Ph.D. at SUNY Binghamton she fully supported a reimagining of the humanities.\textsuperscript{51} A glimpse at some of the titles she turned out in the 1980s point to her intellectual preoccupations at that time: “Women’s Studies in the 1980s: Now More than Ever,” “The Feminist Challenge to the Canon,” “The Academic Evaluation of Feminists, and Other Women,” and “The Many Faces of Feminism in the Eighties.” Fox-Genovese dedicated much of her intellectual inquiry into understanding the relationship between feminism and the academy. In these articles Fox-


\textsuperscript{48} Kul B. Rai and John W. Critzer, \textit{Affirmative Action and the University: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Higher Education} (University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Katherine Hanson, Vivian Guilfoy and Sarita Pillai, \textit{More Than Title IX: How Equity in Education has Shaped the Nation} (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011).

\textsuperscript{49} Interview with Knauss from Strobel, “The Academy and the Activist,” in \textit{The Politics of Women’s Studies}.

\textsuperscript{50} Women’s history has enjoyed a close relationship with women’s studies as scholars involved in both endeavors began to interrogate constructions of knowledge, asking whether there was a difference between gender and sex, whether gender was a social construct, and how feminism had exploited and benefited from racism. Mariam K. Chamberlain, ed. \textit{Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects}. New York: Russell Sage (1998).

\textsuperscript{51} Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Claims of a Common Culture: Gender, Race, Class and the Canon,” \textit{Salmagundi}, No.72, Fall 1986, Box 15, Folder 187, EFG Papers, SHC.
Genovese grappled with how to reconcile feminist politics and historical knowledge. Clearly she was working through her own ideological loyalties while responding to the conservative environment of the 1980s that challenged the legitimacy of anything “feminist” in the university.52

In the 1980s, Fox-Genovese adamantly disagreed with many conservative intellectuals’ insistence that women’s studies was nothing more than political indoctrination. Conservative philosophy professor Michael Levin called women’s studies “ersatz scholarship.”53 The libertarian-leaning Mises Institute sympathized with Levin’s conclusion and lamented that “women’s liberation has so permeated the universities that any attack of this philosophy is bound to create personal difficulties for a male author.”54 Fox-Genovese disagreed with those who questioned the legitimacy of studying women, given that she wrote extensively on the topic, taught women’s history at SUNY Binghamton, and later accepted a position at Emory as the head of a new women’s studies program. In the 1980s she fought back against conservatives who insisted women’s studies had no place in the university.

When Emory University issued a call for applications for the directorship of a women’s studies program, Fox-Genovese actively sought the position—intent on further developing the field of women’s studies by leaving her own mark on it. Although the field was almost twenty years old by the time Fox-Genovese arrived at Emory to run the women’s studies program—its

institutional permanence was uncertain, its ties to feminist advocacy were criticized, and its academic legitimacy was questioned by both conservative intellectuals and organizations.55

Fox-Genovese arrived at Emory in 1986 to run a newly approved women’s studies program in an environment hostile to its place in the academy “with nothing in [my office] but boxes of my own books and a telephone I didn’t know how to use.”56 Women’s studies was not a priority for the Emory administration. After the approval of the women’s studies program in 1985, an Emory professor published an opinion piece in The Emory Wheel caustically criticizing the faculty who approved the program as “a cozy little group of four females and two males, all of them feminists and most of them simply tiresome Marxists.”57 Clearly, the preceding decade and a half of women’s studies scholarship and programs had not calmed fears that women’s studies was “pseudo-academic avant-garde rubbish.”58

While many in the New Right turned their attention to sex education and history standards in secondary education, conservative intellectuals and academics increasingly focused their criticism on higher education.59 Women’s studies’ relatively new presence in the university placed the field and its scholars in an especially vulnerable position. Lacking institutional authority, the development of women’s studies at Emory was not immune to outside forces. For

55 Phyllis Schlafly’s organization Eagle Forum was a consistent critic of women’s studies and feminism in the university.


instance, faculty members like the Emory professor who wrote the aforementioned op-ed piece helped force proponents of the women’s studies program to moderate their vision of a more explicitly feminist women’s studies program that had originally included a Critical Theories Program.  

Feminist faculty at Emory originally proposed a “Feminist Studies” program rather than what they saw as the more conservative path of women’s studies. Their vision for a feminist studies program relied on questioning assumptions about gender, critically examining “how gender impinges upon the subject material of any discipline.” By contrast, they thought a women’s studies program was “ostensibly the pursuit of anything wholly or marginally relating to women.” For the founders of the program at Emory, they saw “women’s studies” as not necessarily wedded to a feminist theoretical approach that interrogated gender.

In order to enact their vision for a program committed to deconstructing gender assumptions across academic disciplines, supporters of women’s studies at Emory felt they needed a more explicitly titled “Feminist Studies” program. The faculty committee at Emory insisted that a women’s studies program could be taught from the “male perspective,” whereas a feminist studies program required a feminist theoretical framework that could include courses on both men and women. Peggy Barlett, who helped form the women’s studies program at Emory,

---

60 The Critical Theory Program was supposed to consist of Marxist theory, psychoanalytic theory, and structuralist methodologies. Proposal found in Memo “Proposal to Establish Programs in Women’s Studies and Critical Theories,” May 10, 1985, Box 23, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

61 “Feminist Studies Program: Definition and Clarification,” Box 23, Folder: Feminist Studies Proposals 2/29/84, 1/31/84, Department of Women’s Gender, and Sexuality Studies Records, Emory University, Series 263.

62 “Feminist Studies Program: Definition and Clarification,” Box 23, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

63 “Feminist Studies Program: Definition and Clarification,” Box 23, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.
remembered, “we weren’t comfortable calling it women’s studies [because] we felt like if would open it to anyone.”

However, their vision of a feminist studies program was too political for both the administration and hostile faculty, leading instead to the adoption of a program entitled “women’s studies.”

That the adoption of the name “Women’s Studies” appeared less threatening to some reveals that women’s studies was not automatically associated with a feminist framework. Dean David Minter at Emory feared that a “Feminist” major would discourage any male students from taking courses. Instead, Minter preferred a program less explicitly tied to feminism. Even the name “women’s studies” worried some. Richard L. Simpson, who chaired the women’s studies exploratory committee at UNC Chapel Hill, speculated, “A curriculum with a Women’s Studies title might scare away some male students who might be afraid of going through their life with a B.A. in Women’s Studies. We don’t want to limit the program to women students.”

Some women faculty members who taught about women felt that they could teach within women’s studies without using a feminist framework. Karen O’Connor, who taught courses about women and politics at Emory used an “institutional approach that [was] not necessarily informed by

64 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.


66 “But when we proposed a feminist major, he never said no, but it was also clear that he had grave doubts. He really thought that language was going to turn people off, he thought “women” was better,” –Peggy Barlett in Dr. Peggy Barlett, Oral History Interview, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.; A history professor at Emory admitted that the feminist studies proposal was “no longer a live option.” Nathaniel Heidenheimer, “Women’s Studies Proposed,” The Emory Wheel, November 19, 1985, Volume 67, Number 23.

67 Bill Welch, “Women’s Studies Created,” The Chapel Hill Newspaper, Sunday September 21, 1975, 2A.
feminist theory.” Evidently, some professors believed that women’s studies could be anything remotely related to women, without a specific theoretical or political framework.

The committee that hired Fox-Genovese for the program at Emory based that decision more on her institutional vision for the program rather than on the basis of any specific theoretical or political commitments. Peggy Barlett, who sat on the hiring committee, remembered that although they received a flood of applications, Fox-Genovese “was by far head and shoulders above the other candidates.” Coming from the women’s history program at SUNY Binghamton, Fox-Genovese had done her homework—researching all the available resources on campus and in the community for a women’s studies program. They hired her not only for her “real administrative savvy,” but also because “she had a very dignified, almost August presence which lent a lot of gravitas to the message about the importance of studying women in all these different fields.” Given the hostility and skepticism towards the legitimacy of women’s studies, the committee hired Fox-Genovese partly to assuage these anxieties over credibility. Women’s studies’ ties to feminism meant that its success or failure as an academic endeavor contained political implications. Fox-Genovese and her colleagues were acutely aware of the high stakes. The deep political divisions between Left and Right in the 1980s amplified the criticism against scholars who advocated a new moral and ethical standards for society based in gender equality.

68 Professor Karen O’Connor as quote by Nathaniel Heidenheimer, “Women’s Studies Proposed,” The Emory Wheel, November 19, 1985, Volume 67, Number 23.

69 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

70 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.
Indeed, in the 1980s, “orthodox” and “progressives” battled it out over their vision for society in the “culture wars.” The culture wars were waged largely over ideas about truth and reality which turned all levels of education into a battleground. While higher education had been an especially prominent site of political division during the 1960s student movements, the ascendency of conservatism in the 1980s created new conditions for unrest and tension. If, as James Davison Hunter has argued, “the power of culture is the power to name things, to define reality, to create and shape worlds of meaning,” then women’s studies contested the very core of American culture by attempting to create and shape new worlds of meaning.

The women’s studies programs of the 1980s, such as the one at Emory, understood the power of language to shape culture—hence their insistence on a program entitled “Feminist Studies” rather than “Women’s Studies.” Because women’s studies scholars challenged a normative moral vision for society by articulating a feminist world view through academic language that destabilized the categories of sex and gender, they stepped into the crossfire of the cultural debates between the Left and Right in the 1980s.

In the 1980’s, both academics and the public continued to challenge the credibility of women’s studies. The criticisms of the early programs in the 1970s did not disappear. “The conservative national climate put women’s studies on the defensive,” founding women’s studies

---


73 Hunter, “The Enduring Culture War,” 33.
scholar Estelle Freedman remembers.\textsuperscript{74} Within this larger conservative political environment of the 1980s that questioned the very legitimacy of studying sex and gender, Fox-Genovese worked tirelessly to develop a program that would be taken seriously. Cognizant of internal skepticism at Emory, Fox-Genovese attempted to shape a program that was unquestionably committed to “intellectual excell[ence].”\textsuperscript{75} She envisioned a program grounded in History and English, and with feminist theory as one of many aspects of the curriculum. Her colleague Dolores Aldridge remembers that “when Dr. Fox-Genovese was here she felt that there should be a separation between scholarship and community.”\textsuperscript{76} Given the more conservative environment at Emory, a southern private university, Fox-Genovese’s attempt to stay out of explicit political advocacy was also a survival mechanism for the program.\textsuperscript{77} Peggy Barlett, a founding women’s studies scholar at Emory, remembered “one very conservative faculty member [who] denounce[ed] women’s studies as a religion.”\textsuperscript{78} The broader conservative political climate combined with Emory’s own history as a more conservative institution encouraged Fox-Genovese to focus on building a women’s studies program that mirrored more traditional academic disciplines.

\textsuperscript{74} Estelle Freedman graciously granted me permission to quote from her keynote address at the Fortieth Anniversary of the Women and Gender Studies Program at Eastern Michigan University, “My Profession and My Passion: Reflections on Forty Years of Women’s Studies,” October 23, 2015.


\textsuperscript{76} Interview with Dr. Delores P. Aldridge, by Matilde Davis and Professor Odem, 24 November 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

\textsuperscript{77} Peggy Barlett speculated that Emory didn’t form a Women’s Studies program until the late 1980s because “we’re in a conservative region and we have been a relatively conservative school.”

\textsuperscript{78} Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.
At times, Fox-Genovese’s vision for women’s studies created tension amongst women’s studies faculty and students. Before Fox-Genovese was hired, supporters of women’s studies at Emory had tried to appeal to broad coalitions across the university. Barlett recalled that they had proposed a program with a strong emphasis “on what we called in those days third world women,” which gave the program “a lot of support from the women of color on campus.” However, when Fox-Genovese arrived, she “was uncomfortable starting that way.” Fox-Genovese believed that “if you don’t start with a clear grounding in the history and literature of the English language in America and Europe, your students aren’t going to be well grounded in the main scholarly body of work in women’s studies.” As Fox-Genovese set to work establishing ties across the university with various professional programs like the nursing school and law school, “some people thought that was a real betrayal” of what they had been promised.

While Fox-Genovese did not embrace a more globally minded women’s studies program, she did try to establish strong ties with African American Studies and Spellman College, a historically black liberal arts college for women. Frances Smith Foster, a women’s studies scholar at Spellman, said “Betsey Fox-Genovese was really smart” in how she conceived the program. Foster credited Fox-Genovese for establishing a relationship between Emory and Spellman early on. “Almost no women’s studies programs…actually reach out and make some kind of formal relationship with African American historically black universities and colleges,” but Fox-Genovese did, and “that was a very smart move,” Foster said. Early on in her tenure at

79 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

80 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

81 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.
Emory, Fox-Genovese focused on building institutional ties and appealing to those who were skeptical of women’s studies.

In the midst of an environment hostile to the academic credibility of women’s studies, Fox-Genovese felt she needed to spend more time convincing those who were skeptical of women’s studies rather than focusing on the already “converted.” Barlett explained that “she was so focused on building that legitimacy with the non-converted—that she didn’t spend as much energy working with the converted.”82 Because women’s studies challenged traditional knowledge about sex and gender, it placed women’s studies scholars like Fox-Genovese on the defensive as they tried to establish women’s studies in more conservative regions of the country. Women’s studies experienced no shortage of criticism, from Phyllis Schlafly who was convinced women’s studies was “feminist propaganda” to NEH council member Peter Shaw who asserted he “fundamentally [did] not respect feminist scholarship.”83 Barlett reflected that in those early years they were “so busy on committees and growing the program [that] we didn’t have the same intellectual engagement after that [which] harmed the dynamism of what became the institute.”84 Fox-Genovese had to contend with competing influences and balancing the decision of whether to consolidate or expand. Her aggressive outreach across the university reflected women’s studies’ scholars fears that women’s studies would be marginalized in isolated departments.85

82 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

83 Quoted from Boxer, When Women Ask the Questions, 198.

84 Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

85 “Grass Roots Development of Women’s Studies Program” a paper presented by Juanita H. Williams of University of South Florida for the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, Canada, August, 1973.
Fox-Genovese sincerely believed that by creating ties across the university, women’s studies at Emory would gain institutional staying power and credibility in new circles.

Fox-Genovese took the position as head of the women’s studies program at Emory “to demonstrate, by creating a program, that women’s studies could be intellectually excellent and ideologically open.” She joined a litany of women’s studies scholars who, as Estelle Freedman reflected, faced difficulties in institutional success “in [the] more troubled economic times [of the 80s] and in a political climate that was increasingly hostile to feminism and the principle of affirmative action.” Throwing herself into this endeavor, making the leap from history to women’s studies, was a big step for a scholar in an environment that did not guarantee support or success. However, while she had a sincere intellectual commitment to women’s history and women’s studies, her decision to seek out the position at Emory was also influenced by the need to find a new institutional home.

Fox-Genovese had a long history of making enemies within her institutions. She was at SUNY Binghamton teaching women’s history in the 1980’s where she had antagonized many of her colleagues and students before coming to Emory. Stephanie McCurry, now a professor of history at Columbia University, was a graduate student of Fox-Genovese’s in the mid 1980s. McCurry painted a picture of Fox-Genovese and her graduate students as “enmeshed in a sycophantic web” in which Fox-Genovese would emotionally manipulate students. She would say, “You’re trying to run before you can walk,” or write on a student’s paper “You’re a sexy B+.” McCurry remembers multiple meetings in which Fox-Genovese would try to completely


88 Interview with Stephanie McCurry, by Danielle Balderas, 29 June 2016, New York City, p.13 of transcript in possession of Danielle Balderas.
humiliate her and then reach across the table and put her hand on McCurry’s arm and say, “Now, you know I’m doing this because I love you.” Then, “she would look you straight in the eye and she would make you hug her after you’d been forced to eat shit and be told that you were worthless intellectually and not the big shot you thought you were.”\footnote{Interview with Stephanie McCurry, by Danielle Balderas, 29 June 2016, New York City, p. 15 of transcript in possession of Danielle Balderas.} However, Fox-Genovese’s behavior at SUNY Binghamton did not prevent her from getting the women’s studies position at Emory.

Fox-Genovese’s inappropriate behavior at SUNY Binghamton was not an isolated event. Her often grating personality, intense insecurities, and corresponding big public ego defined much of her academic career. When Fox-Genovese was later sued for sexual harassment by a former student at Emory in 1991, McCurry was unsurprised because she had experienced many of the same inappropriate behaviors.\footnote{Interview with Stephanie McCurry, by Danielle Balderas, 29 June 2016, New York City, pp. 26-7 of transcript in possession of Danielle Balderas.} McCurry had talked to Jonathan Prude, who was on the search committee for a women’s studies director at Emory when they hired Fox-Genovese, and told him “don’t do it, she is litigation waiting to happen.” Indeed, one Emory faculty member later told McCurry that Fox-Genovese “was like rolling a ticking bomb down the central hall of the history department.” However, McCurry acknowledged that “nobody listens to graduate students” and that “people move around all the time with hidden reputations” because their home universities want to get rid of them.\footnote{Interview with Stephanie McCurry, by Danielle Balderas, 29 June 2016, New York City, pp. 26-7 of transcript in possession of Danielle Balderas.} Rather than one facet of Fox-Genovese’s life, her antagonistic personality and abusive behavior trickled into all aspects of her career. That she
could simultaneously commit her career to women’s studies while treating some of her students as she did reveals a brokenness within her, and the system.

While Binghamton may have wanted to “get rid” of Fox-Genovese, she also saw women’s studies as a compelling and legitimate academic enterprise. Reflecting on her time as Director of the women’s studies program at Emory in 1996, Fox-Genovese said, “My purpose in taking it over was to demonstrate, by creating a program, that women’s studies could be intellectually excellent and ideologically open, which I still believe as an abstract possibility.”92 When Fox-Genovese arrive at Emory in 1986, ten years prior, she had envisioned a women’s studies program devoid of any political platform—an “ideologically open” program. That position, of not tying women’s studies to any particularly political stance, actually had quite a lot of support from her colleagues at Emory in the late 80s and early 90s.

Fox-Genovese was not alone at Emory in wanting to keep the women’s studies program out of political activism. Because of pressure from administrators to not appear too political, especially given the Right’s public “backlash” against feminism in the 1980s, many women’s studies scholars were acutely aware of their field’s vulnerability.93 Martine Brownley, who took over as chair of women’s studies after Fox-Genovese resigned in 1991, wrote “continuing pressure on the Program comes from graduate students who want us to engage in political as well as intellectual activism. I, along with, I think, the majority of the faculty, firmly oppose this operational philosophy, but problems with it will most likely continue to flare up sporadically.”94


94 “General Assessment by the Chair,” Box 1, Folder: Annual Report 1993-94, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.
Brownley, and other faculty, firmly opposed committing the program explicitly to political activism—a position at odds with many of their students.

However, because women’s studies at Emory was so new, and its institutional longevity uncertain, the faculty at Emory were especially concerned with the perceived academic legitimacy of the program. Even after more than eight years, women’s studies student Jess Glasser felt she had to fight the stereotype that “you have to be a man-hating woman to take a Women’s Studies course,” or that “you have to be a lesbian to be a feminist.”95 She argued that “respect is denied” to women’s studies at Emory.96 Hence ties to political activism seemed too radical and risky.

Disagreement over the political role of the program continued to preoccupy the women’s studies leadership. Again, the next year Brownley wrote, “a small minority of graduate students and faculty continues to pressure the program toward more direct political involvement and engagement with ideological rather than intellectual concerns. Despite its limited numbers, this minority is noisy, unruly, and time-consuming.”97 Clearly, Fox-Genovese was not alone in her opposition to more explicitly tying women’s studies to a particular political platform. Brownley’s insistence on women’s studies remaining “intellectual” rather than “ideological” was

97 “General Assessment by the Chair,” Box 19, Folder: Annual Report 1994-1995, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.
more than a principled stance—it was also a recognition that women’s studies programs across the country attracted attention from conservative groups and politicians.  

Emory was not alone in attracting criticism over the political nature of women’s studies. The women’s studies program at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) attracted the attention of Republican lawmakers and the California branch of the Eagle Forum, Phyllis Schlafly’s conservative organization. In 1982 Jessica Shaver, a women’s studies student and member of the fundamentalist Grace Bretheren Church, filed a complaint with the program director and university president claiming the program “promoted lesbianism.” Joined by members of her church, Republican state politicians, and the chair of the California Eagle Forum—this group successfully lobbied for the termination of Betty Brooks, a women’s studies professor, and the removal of Sondra Hale from the directorship. In response, the women’s studies program sued the university, while a conservative group led by Thomas Burton also tried to sue the university for “illegally” using taxpayer dollars that “compelled [taxpayers] to support feminist indoctrination and propaganda.” While at first this lawsuit may seem a localized event, it also attracted the attention of the national Eagle Forum. Within the context of the culture wars which as James Davison Hunter argues were “episodic and very often, local in its

---

98 In a private addendum to the Dean at Emory, Brownley wrote, “Please remember that several times in the past four years, arguing strongly that WS must remain ideologically non-aligned, I have had to quash attempts on the part of other faculty members to expel Prof. Fox-Genovese from the Program.” “WS ADDENDA,” in “Women’s Studies Consultations, 1995-96: Synopsis,” Box 4, Folder: Grad. Budget Requests, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.


30
expression,” the challenge to the women’s studies program at CSULB was a localized example of a national preoccupation with sex and gender in education.\textsuperscript{101}

The political origins of women’s studies emboldened opponents, like the Eagle Forum, to charge women’s studies scholars with supposedly attempting to indoctrinate college youth. The case remained in court as Fox-Genovese arrived at Emory and began building the women’s studies program—no doubt she was aware of this nationally followed lawsuit. The walls of the ivory tower could not insulate women’s studies from these attacks.

Intense social and political battles over ideas about sex and gender in the 1980s and 1990s defined the fundamental character of the culture wars. Over such diverse issues as abortion, feminism, multiculturalism, sex education, pornography, family values and the Western canon the nation became embroiled in a battle over values, ideas, and identity.\textsuperscript{102} The culture wars called into question the very fabric of American national identity, and whether such a thing existed.\textsuperscript{103} Because categories of sex and gender provide such powerful mechanisms for policing citizenship, any entity that challenges that foundational ordering risks entering the belly of the beast.\textsuperscript{104} Women’s studies became the site of a proxy war between the Left and Right because women’s studies’ scholars interrogated assumptions about the stability and perceived naturalness of sex and gender—fundamental categories of social ordering in society.

\textsuperscript{101} Hunter, “The Culture War Endures,” 30.


At the heart of these cultural flashpoints lay ideas about sex and gender. As Daniel Rodgers insists, “Of all the certainties whose cracking seemed to culturally conservative Americans most threatening, the destabilization of gender roles,” provoked “the sharpest tremors.”\(^{105}\) As women’s studies scholars committed themselves to a feminist framework that critics chastised as “an ideologically circumscribed radical-lesbian-Marxist position,” the Left and Right drew lines in the sand and battled it out through politics, culture, and education.\(^ {106}\)

Fox-Genovese stepped into this cultural turmoil because ideas about sex and gender are at the center of women’s studies’ intellectual preoccupations. Women’s studies challenged a moral framework that subordinated women and privileged men. The culture wars were fought over the moral vision for the country, and as women’s studies veteran Marilyn Boxer argues, women’s studies “[put] values at its center”.\(^ {107}\) This centering of values opened women’s studies up to criticism in the culture wars.\(^ {108}\)

As conservatives and liberals fought over the divisive social issues like abortion and sex—they simultaneously confronted one another on college campuses, waging a battle over the content of humanities curriculum. Students began to publish conservative journals on campuses across the

\(^{105}\) Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 145.

\(^{106}\) External Review conducted on behalf of CSULB of their women’s studies program in the wake of the lawsuit. Excerpted from Sondra Hale, "Our Attempt to Practice Feminism in the Women's Studies Program," from "Three Personal Perspectives on Feminist Education at Cal State, Long Beach," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies, Vol. 8, No. 3 "The Women's Studies Movement: A Decade Inside the Academy (1986).*


\(^{108}\) Historian Marilyn Boxer argues that “the education promoted by women’s studies engages its public because it promises to enhance—or, rather, to restore—the role of the university in giving meaning to people’s lives and moral direction to society.” At a time when the very role of the university was under intense debate, women’s studies, intentionally or not, put itself in the middle of a nationwide debate that was concerned precisely with the “moral direction” of society.; Marilyn J. Boxer, “Remapping the University: The Promise of the Women’s Studies Ph.D.,” *Feminist Studies* 24.2 (1998).
country, with financial backing from conservative organizations like the Olin Foundation and Madison Center. While Fox-Genovese tried to establish the intellectual legitimacy of women’s studies she had to contend with students who saw no place for women’s studies in the university. One student editor of the conservative Florida Review admitted, “We don’t feel a degree in women’s studies and black studies is of any significance.” At Emory as well, Fox-Genovese was faced with conservative undergraduates who initially questioned the academic rigor of an undergraduate program in women’s studies. Given that so much of the culture wars took place over issues that involved sex and gender—abortion, sex education, and “family values”—women’s studies, an academic field specifically committed to producing and deconstructing knowledge about sex and gender, became the site of a proxy war between the Left and Right.

By the late 1980s conservative publications like Commentary Magazine and The National Review increasingly turned their attention to women’s studies. Commentary Magazine ran multiple articles criticizing women’s studies in the 1980s including one by Elizabeth Lilla entitled “Who’s Afraid of Women’s Studies?” in which she painted a picture of a liberal administration intent on “imposing” a feminist program onto an unwilling student and faculty population. Lilla, and an increasing number of conservative intellectuals, began to see women’s studies as part of the “liberal establishment,” and therefore in dire opposition to their worldview. Conservative intellectuals like Lilla, and conservative students, increasingly saw the

---

109 The “College Network” of conservative journals spanned more than 60 universities and received hundreds of thousands of dollars from conservative organizations. See Fox Butterfield, “Education; The Right Breeds a College Press Network,” The New York Times, October 24, 1990.


university as towing an ideological line. Women’s studies’ association with feminism made it a perfect target for their anxieties over the “ politicization” of higher education.  

The conservative intellectual circles that Fox-Genovese would call home later in the 1990s were blasting the academic credibility of women’s studies in the 1980s—putting Fox-Genovese in a precarious position as she increasingly came to identity with those intellectuals. Fox-Genovese’s commitment to establishing an academically rigorous women’s studies program put her at odds with those conservatives who eschewed any notion of studying women and gender as feminist indoctrination. She argued that “those shortsighted opponents of modest change now have a good deal to answer for.” In 1986 Fox-Genovese criticized those who “bemoan[ed] the crisis” of a changing academic curriculum that started to include women and minorities as nothing more than the whining of insecure elite white men. The nostalgia she located in their defense of a less inclusive and western-male centric canon “plagues certain kinds of liberal male academics who formed their own sense of self respect from their identification with a particular canon.”

Fox-Genovese’s own feminist world view was filled with nuance and complexity. In the 1980s she was tentatively pro-choice, questioning Marxist philosophy, and berating other feminists for enforcing what she perceived as a totalitarian intellectual regime. She spoke to a pro-life group while she still held pro-choice beliefs, and she refused to send a letter supporting Anita

---


114 Fox-Genovese increasingly corresponded with Reid Buckley and Midge Decter.


117 Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, ”The Claims of a Common Culture: Gender, Race, Class and the Canon,” Salmagundi, No.72, Fall 1986, p.6, Box 15, Folder 187, EFG Papers, SHC.
Hill to Congress on behalf of the women’s studies program. She supported keeping the Citadel an all-male military institution, but only because she claimed she supported the right of women’s schools to receive public funding. Fox-Genovese’s own feminist politics were more fluid than “Left” or “Right,” but the political environment of the 80s and 90s discouraged political nuance and slotted people into distinct categories.

Even as Fox-Genovese might critique the Left in the 1980s for excesses of deconstruction, she leveled as many strident and sharp critiques against the Right—recognizing that “our students feel colonized in relation to that elite western culture that has constituted the backbone of our humanistic education.”

Fox-Genovese’s vision for women’s studies in the 1980s may not have been radical in terms of her political affiliations, but she was hardly a conservative apologist. However, as Fox-Genovese’s own beliefs began to track more explicitly rightward in the 1990s, her ability to sustain a critique of feminist scholarship while remaining in the fold of women’s studies became increasingly difficult.

The Right came to see women’s studies as the ultimate symbol for everything that was wrong in the academy because of its association with feminism. Nonetheless, by virtue of her commitment to studying women and gender, Fox-Genovese put herself in a minority of conservatives, most of whom didn’t want to attend to gender at all.

During the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s a critique of women’s studies was a gelling agent for conservative identity. While in the 80s Fox-Genovese did not share

---

118 Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Claims of a Common Culture: Gender, Race, Class and the Canon,” Salmagundi, No.72, Fall 1986, p.9, Box 15, Folder 187, EFG Papers, SHC.

119 Fox-Genovese praised feminist scholarship for “spearheading the challenge” of overthrowing patriarchal forms of knowledge. “The Many Faces of Feminism in the Eighties,” p.3, Box 16, Folder 208, EFG Papers, SHC.

conservatives’ assertion that women’s studies was an illegitimate academic endeavor, given that she agreed to run a new program and worked toward establishing it as a permanent field of study, by the 90s she changed her tone. An increasing disillusionment with the direction of feminist theory and feminism within the academy brought her into an alliance with those intellectuals who lamented what they saw as a feminist take-over of the humanities.121

While undergoing a shift to the right by in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Fox-Genovese harbored some politically ambiguous views. For instance, she supported extensive public funding for childcare related policies while also endorsing the “mommy track.” As she became more critical of abortion rights she also leveled harsh critiques against conservatives who opposed extending generous welfare programs to mothers and families.122 While her positions revolved around supporting policies that reinforced women’s roles as mothers and caretakers, her critiques of small-government conservatives placed her in politically ambiguous territory. Although Fox-Genovese did not line up on every issue with conservatives, her turn to religion, opposition to abortion, and critiques of the “feminist elite” in the 90s created fertile soil for collaboration and eventual identification.

Fox-Genovese’s shift toward conservativism occurred as a long, messy process rather than a moment of conversion. In 1990, Fox-Genovese felt like an intellectual without a home. She was weary of “the dominant personalities in Women’s Studies [who were] advocating war to the death with established (male) values and spearheading an alarming erosion of confidence in our inherited culture.” At the same time, she lamented that “the self-proclaimed defenders of that


inherited culture have been retreating into a rigid adherence to the time-honored status quo.” She found herself caught between a rock and a hard place, insisting that “neither position will serve.” By looking at the period between her two books on feminism in the 1990s, the process by which Fox-Genovese comes to identify with “self-proclaimed defenders” of American culture becomes more clear.

The ideological chasm between her two books on feminism in the 90s reveals a critical period of shifting ideologies. Academic feminists were mostly generous in their reviews of Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism which came out with UNC Press in 1991. However, the release of her 1996 book “Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life”: How Today’s Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch With The Real Concerns of Women put her firmly on the side of conservatives.

In Feminism Without Illusions Fox-Genovese reveals herself as a scholar caught in the middle—chastising both liberal feminists and conservatives. As a former adherent of Marxist philosophy, Fox-Genovese detested the atomization of American society. She claimed that by rooting feminism in individualism, feminists had abdicated their responsibility to reimagine a

---


125 Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life:” How Today’s Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch With The Real Concerns of Women (Anchor, 1996).

society that could be rooted in social and community rights.\textsuperscript{127} But, conservatives weren’t off the hook either. She criticized conservatives’ resistance to supporting social welfare policies.

However, by the time she published “Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life Fox-Genovese had abandoned her critique from the middle.\textsuperscript{128} This book, which fully launched Fox-Genovese against the so-called “mainstream” practitioners of women’s studies, chastised academic feminists for not understanding the lived realities of working-class women and mothers outside of the ivory tower. Conducting dozens of interviews with women across the country, Fox-Genovese painted a portrait of women in America fed up with feminism. The moderation between critiques of liberals and conservatives in Feminism Without Illusions was gone. Fox-Genovese reserved her most strident critiques for liberal academic feminists, who she claimed had become so preoccupied with studying gender identity that they ignored the material realities and concerns of working class women. Clearly, Fox-Genovese experienced a shift in consciousness between Feminism Without Illusions and “Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life. The intervening years between these two books, 1991 to 1996, were filled with momentous events for Fox-Genovese. Between a sexual harassment lawsuit, conversion to Catholicism, and a diagnosis with Multiple Sclerosis—the 90s were a time of intense instability for Fox-Genovese.

In 1991 a sexual harassment lawsuit brought forth by a former women’s studies student, Virginia Gould fast-tracked Fox-Genovese’s resignation as head of the Program at the end of

\textsuperscript{127} Rodgers, Age of Fracture.

\textsuperscript{128} Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life:” How Today’s Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch With The Real Concerns of Women (Anchor, 1996).
1991. While at Emory Fox-Genovese advised Ph.D. student Virginia Gould, who completed her dissertation as Fox-Genovese’s student in the spring of 1991. Upon graduation Gould accepted a position in the women’s studies program as associate director and began to work in the office in August of 1991 at the start of the fall term. Only a few months later, Gould was fired as associate director and proceeded to file suit against Emory and Fox-Genovese. Gould argued that she had been wrongfully terminated and that Fox-Genovese had violated her civil rights by engaging in a pattern of abusive behavior, asking “her to perform personal services she would not have asked of a male subordinate.” Claiming that she was pressured into taking the job, Gould said Fox-Genovese “told me I was arrogant. She told me I was being disloyal. She told me that she had done everything in the world for me and I didn’t appreciate it. She told me that I would not be anywhere without her support. She told me that I was no one and that I shouldn’t forget it.”

Fox-Genovese adamantly denied any wrong doing. She argued that it was her more conservative political ideology that led to her resignation—citing blowback for speaking to Feminists for Life and refusing to send a letter to Congress on behalf of the program in support of Anita Hill. She claimed that her adversaries’ “agenda was in large part political. These were

---

129 “Institute For Women’s Studies Self-Study Fall 1992,” p.3, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University. For information on the sexual harassment lawsuit, see the Elizabeth Fox-Genovese Papers in the Southern Historical Collection—there are multiple boxes filled with depositions, court records, and correspondence between Fox-Genovese and her lawyers.

130 “Gould Trial Depositions (L. Virginia Gould 1 of 3),” Box 37, Folder 419, EFG Papers, SHC

131 “Gould Trial Depositions (L. Virginia Gould 1 of 3),” Box 37, Folder 419, EFG Papers, SHC.


133 “Gould Trial Depositions (L. Virginia Gould 1 of 3),” p.61, Box 37, Folder 419, EFG Papers, SHC.
people who wanted a more radical program, one more clearly identified with a single line.”\footnote{Field Notes: Personal Politics,” \textit{Lingua Franca}, June/July 1992, 8-10,” found in “Correspondence Gould Case,” Box 36, Folder 410, EFG Papers, SHC.}
The fallout from the incident embittered her. Her personal writings and emails in the wake of the drawn out lawsuit reveal a person profoundly disillusioned with their professional identity.\footnote{The general tenor of Fox-Genovese’s emails after the lawsuit begins shifts to one of exasperation and disillusionment. She starts to dread Women’s Studies meetings, and it is the first time in her correspondence we see outright critiques of the women’s studies at Emory and \textit{writ large}.} While Fox-Genovese was not a “conservative” by any standard definition in 1991, when the lawsuit began, her feelings of betrayal from colleagues and students who were willing to testify against her helped propel her into more conservative intellectual circles.\footnote{Jon Wiener, “Feminism and Harassment: Elizabeth Fox-Genovese Goes to Court,” in \textit{Historians in Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud, and Politics in the Ivory Tower} (New York: The New Press, 2005).}

In addition to the effect of the sexual harassment lawsuit, Fox-Genovese’s evolving conservative views included a gradual abandonment of her pro-choice stance as she initiated her conversion to Catholicism. In 1990 Fox-Genovese said in an interview, “I’m pro-choice, but I have real reservations about the way it’s being argued.”\footnote{Eva Matacia, “Emory Professor outfoxes traditional wisdom on womanhood,” \textit{Atlanta Business Chronicle}, “Counterpart: Headlining Atlanta Women,” March 1990, 10-11.} Her wavering support of abortion led her to speak to the group Feminists For Life while she was director of the women’s studies program—which raised the ire of many of her colleagues and students. Reflecting back on that night of “vigorous and thoughtful debate” Fox-Genovese lamented that she “subsequently learned that the gossip network in the Women’s Studies program [at Emory] had taken my appearance as conclusive evidence that I was no feminist—and accordingly, prima facie grounds for opposing my continued leadership of the program.”\footnote{Philip Gailey, “Papers Struggle With Political Correctness, Too,” \textit{Petersburg Times}, April 17, 1994, 2D.} A profoundly insecure person, Fox-
Genovese felt that many of these critiques against her views and vision for women’s studies were a personal attack against her character. In this light, many of Fox-Genovese’s critiques of feminism can be understood as a reaction to the polarizing environment of the culture wars.

Fox-Genovese’s conversion to Catholicism became the most important part of her intellectual and personal identity, which further enhanced her opposition to abortion. Her evolving pro-life position came to dominate her critiques of feminism in the mid 90’s, placing her in sympathetic company with conservatives who opposed abortion. The rise of the Right in the 1980s facilitated the polarization of pro-life and abortion rights groups. By the time Fox-Genovese came to identity with the pro-life movement, the possibility of opposing activists reaching any consensus on abortion or any other issue related to gender was extremely unlikely.

Although she supported public funding for childcare, programs that allowed single mothers to finish high school, a Maternity IRA, and numerous other social welfare programs—her opposition to abortion became the gelling agent of her conservative identity. By the mid 90s one of her main critiques of feminism was that “feminists seem to be insisting that women’s equality with men requires that women be liberated from the consequences of their bodies, notably the ability to bear children.”

---

139 Stacey Horstmann-Gatti remembers the décor started to change in Fox-Genovese’s home to include religious iconography and that Fox-Genovese started to change her jewelry to mostly crosses. She reflects that at first she thought Fox-Genovese was just curious, “I didn’t realize how personal it was for her.” Interview with Stacey Horstmann-Gatti, by Danielle Balderas, 28 June 2016, New York City, p.19 of transcript in possession of Danielle Balderas.


143 Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Feminism and the Vocation of the Catholic Woman,” April 24, 1996, Box 15, EFG Papers, SHC. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese was unable to have children with Eugene Genovese as cited in *Miss Betsy*. 

41
a crucial issue during the culture wars, Fox-Genovese placed herself at odds with the majority of feminist women’s studies scholars.

As Fox-Genovese became more outspoken in her conservative beliefs and opposition to abortion, the women’s studies program at Emory took notice. Although she had resigned as director of the program, Fox-Genovese still remained a visible presence in the women’s studies program as a faculty member. The anticipation of Fox-Genovese’s 1996 book “Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life” caused anxieties at the highest levels of the women’s studies program at Emory. Anticipating the release of Fox-Genovese’s book, Martine Brownley, the new chair of women’s studies at Emory, wrote a confidential memo to the Dean.144 After writing in the general report that “over the past four years the Institute for Women’s Studies has been stabilized internally as much as it probably can at this point,” she added in a confidential addenda, “Some of my comments about WS in the synopsis may become inaccurate if Prof. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s forthcoming book makes a big splash. An overwhelming majority of the WS faculty is vehemently opposed to her public political stances. If her book covers these, individual or collected reactions could generate serious difficulties.”145 Clearly, Fox-Genovese’s scholarship was a source of discord within the women’s studies program at Emory. Specifically, the

---

Fox-Genovese wrote early on about considering whether Gene even wanted children, but then reproached herself, asking, “But what about if I want them?” She had dreams about bringing her “children up to be happy and at ease with themselves in the world.” “Diary, 1966-1969, Entries January 26, 1962 and May 6, 1972,” Box 45, Folder 470, EFG Papers, SHC.

144 The addenda is titled “WS ADDENDA: NOT TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO OTHER DEPARTMENT CHAIRS,” in the “Women’s Studies Consultations, 1995-96: Synopsis,” Box 4, Folder “Grad. Budget Requests,” Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

possibility that her forthcoming book would contain “political stances” such as pro-life sentiments or criticisms of feminism raised a red flag for Brownley.

That the political stances of a scholar portended so much for their academic reputation is evidence of the polarization of discourse and politics within the culture wars. While women’s studies has always been intimately tied to the political, the fears and anxieties over Fox-Genovese’s political conservatism make sense in an environment where women’s studies scholars saw their discipline facing the brunt of conservative attacks on the humanities.146

Fox-Genovese joined a growing number of self-identified “feminist defectors” such as Christina Hoff Sommers, Camille Paglia, Daphne Patai, and Noretta Koertge who all portrayed themselves as whistleblowers from within the ivory tower revealing the supposed irrationality of women’s studies scholars.147 Sommers questioned the centrality of abortion to feminist identity—arguing that there should be a place in women’s studies for Orthodox Jewish women, conservative Christian women, and Islamic women scholars—regardless of their abortion politics.148 Paglia, “an open lesbian,” insisted that women’s studies scholars needed to “give men a break.” For her, “reconciliation between the sexes [was] the first order of business.”149 Patai and Koertge co-authored Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales From Inside the Strange World of Women’s

---


Studies drawing parallels between the feminism of women’s studies programs and religious cults.\textsuperscript{150} Clearly, Fox-Genovese had company in her condemnations of the way women’s studies programs operated and the ideas they generated.

With conservative critiques against women’s studies and the humanities coming from outside the academy, opposition from women’s studies scholars themselves posed a problem for the field. Critiques of “academic feminism” as “cults” from women’s studies scholars themselves seemed to reinforce and confirm conservatives’ belief that women’s studies was a faux academic endeavor that attempted to indoctrinate students. Indeed, when Fox-Genovese repeatedly and publicly questioned the legitimacy of direction of women’s studies, she did so as a professor of women’s studies. She argued that an intellectually excellent women’s studies program was now only an “abstract possibility.”\textsuperscript{151} In the mid 1990s the field of women’s studies was not established enough to dismiss these stirrings as healthy criticism. Lacking funding lines for joint appointments and consistently understaffed—even in the 90s women’s studies programs contended with their permanence within the academy.

Fox-Genovese insisted that her own views had not changed much, but rather the world around her changed. “What has changed dramatically is my sense of how best to work for, and maybe to realize, to implement, the things in which I deeply believe … respect for different members of society, especially women to whom I remain deeply committed.”\textsuperscript{152} This sentiment, that the world changed rather than her, is largely a product of the fracturing of consensus in the

\textsuperscript{150} Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, \textit{Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales From Inside the Strange World of Women’s Studies}, (Basic Books, 1994).


culture wars. Obviously, her own views had changed quite a bit—on abortion, Marxism, and feminism. As women’s studies began to focus more on constructions of gender, sexuality, and queer theory, Fox-Genovese no longer saw her ideas or professional identity reflected in the field. However, rather than abandoning studying women and gender in the university, Fox-Genovese remained a professor within the program until her death. While the visible presence of a conservative within women’s studies appears somewhat of an aberration, Fox-Genovese’s career highlights the uncertainty of the field and the heterogeneity of its origins.

The absence of consensus in the field combined with its ad-hoc development provided an intellectual space for a diverse array of scholars. While Fox-Genovese was no full-blown conservative when she came to Emory in 1986 to run the women’s studies program, she was also not entirely on board with the feminist advocacy other faculty members and students envisioned. In the 1980s she was truly an intellectual caught in the middle. However, as the ideological space she worked in collapsed in the culture wars, Fox-Genovese’s evolving views became increasingly untenable.

Because conservatives saw women’s studies as a political discipline, largely due to its decades long commitment to feminism, they dismissed the academic study of gender as a biased political endeavor. Instead of challenging women’s studies from within the academy, many conservatives formed independent groups like the Independent Women’s Forum and the Network of Enlightened Women, of which Fox-Genovese became an avid supporter. As Fox-Genovese came to embrace a more conservative identity, she too increasingly saw women’s studies as no place for a conservative intellectual. However, unlike many of her conservative counterparts, she remained committed to the idea of women’s studies as a worthy endeavor.

153 Rodgers, Age of Fracture.
Conflicts over sex, gender, and education amounted to more than just a sum total of individual parts. In the words of James Davison Hunter, “cumulatively, these debates…amounted to struggle over the meaning of America.”\(^\text{154}\) As Fox-Genovese actively participated in public debates over these issues—speaking to Feminists for Life, appearing on CNN and NPR, and serving as an expert witness for two controversial Supreme Court cases—her growing attachment to the Right undercut her legitimacy as a women’s studies scholar. However, Fox-Genovese’s continued presence in women’s studies demonstrates that this narrowing was messy and contested. Even if the nation at large was split into divided camps over the pressing social, political and moral issues of the day—Fox-Genovese avoids easy categorization. The labyrinthine of Fox-Genovese’s intellectual career as a women’s studies scholar provides us with an example of a political conservative seriously engaging with ideas about women and gender.

Because the culture wars were fought over ideas about sex and gender—women’s studies’ intellectual inquiry into those categories put it in the crossfire of political attacks. Scholars, journalists, and politicians often look to visibly divisive issues like abortion and pornography as sites of contest in the culture wars. While these are important places to look, focusing on the material issues obscures what was fundamentally at stake—ideas about sex and gender. Women’s studies, which led the effort in producing knowledge and interrogating assumptions about sex and gender placed itself squarely in the middle of the “war for the soul of America.”\(^\text{155}\)

Fox-Genovese experienced this war personally and professionally. The centrality of sex and gender to the culture wars intensified the stakes for Fox-Genovese. She had committed her

---

\(^{154}\) Hunter, "The Enduring Culture War," 14.

\(^{155}\) Pat Buchanan, “The Cultural War for the Soul of America,” speech, September 14, 1992 which inspired the title of Andrew Hartman’s *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. 
career to studying women—and women’s studies evolving interpretations of gender threatened her deepest beliefs and world view. She lamented that “academic feminism and political feminism [give] a view of the world that exists only in the language as they manipulate it.”156 What she failed to recognize is that she used her own language to manipulate an antagonistic feminist identity. Fox-Genovese’s life unearths a complicated legacy of a woman trying to come to terms with what feminism meant to her. Although she oscillated on issues of abortion, political affiliation, theoretical frameworks, and religion, she abided by one constant—criticism of feminism. Clearly, Fox-Genovese never felt fully at home with feminism, and those shaky foundations crumbled under her turn towards conservatism in the wake of the culture wars.

In October 1991 a woman named Anita Hill stood before the nation testifying to Congress about Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. For three days in October, Americans were transfixed before the television watching the law professor from Oklahoma speak about Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas’ behavior as her boss at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department of Education during the 1980s. Crude words like “long dong silver” and “pubic hair” shocked Americans when they were uttered in the Capitol.157 As Hill sat before an all-white male Judiciary Committee, she testified about Clarence Thomas’ inappropriate sexual behavior. According to Hill, Thomas discussed his sexual prowess, spoke to her about pornographic films with animals and rape scenes, and repeatedly pressed her for social engagements outside of work.158


That same month, Virginia Gould left the employ of Fox-Genovese and Emory over allegations of sexual harassment. While the nation was engrossed in the televised hearings of Anita Hill, a quieter, but no less important scene played out at Emory: The director, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, of one of the most eminent women’s studies programs in the country was accused of sexual harassment. Like Thomas, Fox-Genovese denied all allegations. However, the patterns of behavior Fox-Genovese exhibited throughout her life, in conjunction with the number of witnesses willing to testify against her, demonstrate the sound basis of Gould’s claims. Fox-Genovese’s inappropriate behavior is not an anomaly. It is a part of a broader history of sexual discrimination, and it is a part of the history of women’s studies. No discipline nor field, no matter how worthy their intellectual and political projects, remains untouched by this darker side of human behavior.

The implications of Fox-Genovese’s life and career transcend the history of women’s studies. She demonstrates why it is important to uncover the connections between politics and higher education more broadly. Revisiting the history of women’s studies through Fox-Genovese’s life complicates notions of what it means to be a feminist scholar. While scholars and pundits alike will no doubt continue to question the existence of “conservative feminists,” Fox-Genovese’s life indicates that this is a less helpful endeavor than unearthing the full complexity of a person’s political and intellectual ideas. Understanding the political environment in which ideas are shaped, debated, and disseminated remains an important project for historians and the public.
REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Collections:

Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

   Elizabeth Fox-Genovese Papers—Southern Historical Collection
   Fox and Simon Family Papers—Southern Historical Collection
   Margaret Anne O’Connor Papers—Southern Historical Collection

Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Emory University

   Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Records, 1984-2013

Women’s Studies Department Records, Special Collections and University Archives, San Diego State University

Oral History Interviews:

Interview with Dr. Delores P. Aldridge, by Matilde Davis and Professor Odem, 24 November 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

Interview with Dr. Peggy Barlett, by Zoe D. Fine and Ingianni Acosta, 2008, Department of WGSS Records, Emory University.

Interview with Stacey Horstmann-Gatti, by Danielle Balderas, 28 June 2016, New York City, transcript in possession of Danielle Balderas.

Interview with Stephanie McCurry, by Danielle Balderas, 29 June 2016, New York City, transcript in possession of Danielle Balderas.

Miscellaneous Newspaper & Journal Articles:


Gailey, Philip. “Papers Struggle With Political Correctness, Too.” *Petersburg Times*, April 17, 1994, 2D.


Welch, Bill. “Women’s Studies Created.” *The Chapel Hill Newspaper*, Sunday September 21, 1975, 2A.


**Televised Sources**


Published Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


