

# WOMEN OF COLOR AND THE MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM

Transforming the College Classroom

With a Segment on Puerto Rican Studies



Edited by LIZA FIOL-MATTA and MARIAM K. CHAMBERLAIN

# WOMEN OF COLOR AND THE MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM

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LIZA FIOL-MATTA and MARIAM K. CHAMBERLAIN

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# PREFACE

## WOMEN'S STUDIES AND THE EVOLUTION OF MAINSTREAMING

Women's studies as a formal area of teaching and research first appeared in higher education in 1969 and is now in its third decade. Fueled by the women's movement and the growth in the number of female students and faculty members in colleges and universities, the field has burgeoned and is now an established part of the curriculum. Well over a thousand institutions, including two thirds of all universities, half of all four-year colleges, and a quarter of two-year colleges, offer women's studies courses.<sup>1</sup> Of these, over six hundred have coordinated interdisciplinary programs offering a concentration in women's studies. From its origins in the United States women's studies has also spread across national boundaries, first to Europe and then, with the advent of the United Nations Decade for Women, in 1975, to developing countries as well.

The widespread introduction of women's studies courses and programs as part of the curriculum of higher education, important as it is, does not in itself fully represent the impact of the new scholarship on the academy. As a field that is cross-disciplinary in nature, women's studies and feminist perspectives have a bearing on the mainstream curriculum and its various disciplines. The world of feminist scholars not only enlarged but also challenged the assumptions of the traditional disciplines, and it did not take long before efforts were made to measure the impact of women's studies on the core curriculum.

The first such effort was undertaken by a group of faculty members at Princeton University in 1976. Their project, which was funded by the Ford Foundation, focused on an examination of introductory courses in four disciplines—history, sociology, psychology, and English. The staff of the project collected and analyzed 355 course syllabi from 172 departments in a variety of institutions. Supplementary information was gathered through questionnaires sent to department chairs, directors of women's studies programs, and publishers of textbooks. It was found that, with few exceptions,

little or no attention was being given to women in the mainstream curriculum. Department chairs reported that the presence of women in their departments and the existence of women's studies programs on campus were important factors in determining whether individual faculty members were taking heed of the new scholarship on women and incorporating it into their courses. Yet unless male as well as female faculty members did so, as the report noted, most undergraduate men and many undergraduate women would leave college without an understanding of women's roles in society or the influence of sex stereotyping on their daily lives. Based on these findings, the Princeton Project concluded that special efforts were called for to introduce faculty members to the new scholarship on women and its implications for the curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

Since that time there have been numerous curriculum integration projects designed to do just that. By the end of 1991, a period of fifteen years, there were no less than two hundred curriculum integration projects completed or under way.<sup>3</sup> These have encompassed a variety of techniques, including the preparation of monographs and guides to relevant topics and source material, workshops, summer institutes, conferences, faculty development grants, consultations, and curriculum development programs. For the most part these projects have been funded by foundations and government agencies, although in some instances colleges and universities have allocated internal resources for campuswide programs. To date, the principal sources of external funding have been the Ford, Rockefeller, and Andrew W. Mellon foundations, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) of the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Significant support has also been provided by a variety of national and regional foundations as well as other government agencies such as the federally funded Women's Educational Equity Act Program.<sup>4</sup> There have also been some state-supported programs, the most outstanding of which is the New Jersey Project, a statewide attempt to foster the integration of gender scholarship into the curriculum. Since 1986 the New Jersey Department of Higher Education has provided a total of over \$1.5 million in forty grants to nineteen institutions for support of campus-based curriculum integration projects.<sup>5</sup>

One of the earliest and most influential of the curriculum integration efforts was a four-year, cross-disciplinary project conducted by the women's studies program at the University of Arizona. This program, initiated in 1981, was the forerunner of the integration movement and served to demonstrate the magnitude and importance of the task as well as some of the challenges. Directed toward senior faculty, including department chairs, in the social sciences and humanities, the project developed integration strategies that included summer seminars, colloquia, and lectures by visiting scholars. Later programs benefited from the Arizona experience, particularly in confronting the resistance of male faculty members to feminist scholarship.<sup>6</sup>

These projects have resulted in a spate of publications about mainstreaming. Notable among them are: *The Prism of Sex* (1977), edited by Julia Sherman and Evelyn Torton Beck; *Changing Our Minds* (1988), edited by Susan Hardy Aiken et al.; and *Transforming Knowledge* (1990), by Elizabeth Kamarch Minnich.<sup>7</sup>

## MAINSTREAMING MINORITY WOMEN'S STUDIES

In 1985 the Ford Foundation hosted a meeting of scholars and leaders in the movement to integrate women's studies in the curriculum, assess the progress of curriculum reform, and identify areas requiring further support. An important conclusion that emerged from the meeting was that inadequate consideration was being given to the roles, contributions, and perspectives of women of color. As a result, the Ford Foundation turned its attention more specifically to the growing body of scholarship on that subject and the increasing number of scholars active in its production. In 1986 Ford awarded grants to Spelman College and Memphis State University, which house two of the principal centers for research on black women. These laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive program to mainstream minority women's studies.

The broader program was launched in 1988 with grants to four institutions. A second round of grants in 1989 extended the program to seven additional institutions, and two further grants in 1990 raised the total number of participating institutions to thirteen. Overall, the Ford Foundation committed nearly \$1.7 million to the program. Institutions were selected on the basis of projects submitted by campus-based centers for research on women which were also affiliated with women's studies programs. The program's mission was to enable these centers, many of which were already engaged in curriculum integration efforts, to collaborate with women's studies and racial-ethnic studies programs and scholars in planning and implementing projects to incorporate research and teaching about women of color into the undergraduate curriculum.

All participating institutions were members or affiliates of the National Council for Research on Women, which represents over seventy research centers nationwide. With that in mind, the Ford Foundation designated the Council to coordinate the overall program. Its functions were to facilitate communication and cooperative exchange among the program grantees, to assist projects in generating and distributing resource materials, and to disseminate information, material, and strategies for mainstreaming minority women's studies widely. As part of the dissemination activities of the Council, specific provisions were made to prepare a resource volume following the conclusion of the program, consisting of course syllabi and other curriculum material emanating from the program. *Women of Color and the Multicultural*

*Curriculum: Transforming the College Classroom*, prepared in collaboration with The Feminist Press, represents that volume.

## **MAINSTREAMING AND WOMEN'S STUDIES INTERNATIONAL**

Although women's studies is now widespread and continues to expand throughout the world, mainstreaming, or curriculum development, is not yet a visible part of the movement abroad, as it is in the United States.<sup>8</sup> There are several reasons for this. In most other countries, unlike the United States, women's studies programs tend to be peripherally related to higher education institutions. With some exceptions, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, such programs are more often located within research institutes or special training programs. This structure limits the access of women's studies programs to the mainstream curriculum. Another deterrent to curriculum integration efforts abroad is the lack of financial support. In the United States, as we have seen, such support has usually come not from the university itself but from external sources—private foundations and government agencies. Elsewhere local support from private foundations is largely absent, and support from public sources is limited to a few countries.

In some instances there is an additional reason for the absence of curriculum integration programs; it is the ideological view that women's studies must remain separate in order to flourish. Those that adhere to this view believe that mainstreaming leads to co-optation and a loss of identity of women's studies. The U.S. experience suggests otherwise. Indeed, every indication is that successful curriculum integration goes hand in hand with the existence of a strong women's studies program. In other words, it is not necessarily a question of either/or; curriculum integration is a process of, not a substitute for, women's studies.<sup>9</sup>

## **MAINSTREAMING AS A STRATEGY FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

Although the term *mainstreaming* is usually applied to women's studies, curriculum integration programs as such are not unique to women's studies. New development seminars and faculty institutes have long been held and continue to be held in numerous other fields. During the 1950s and 1960s, for example, they were conducted with great success by the Ford Foundation as part of its program to strengthen management education by integrating quantitative and social science methods. Summer institutes for faculty members are also regularly offered in the humanities disciplines with support from sources such as the National Endowment for the Humanities. What they are designed to do is to accelerate the application of new knowledge and ideas into the curriculum of higher education.

Curriculum change is part of the normal process of higher education, responding in part to the advancement of knowledge in the various disciplines and in part to the changing composition and needs of the student body. In the absence of strong external forces, the change takes place in incremental steps, as successive generations of scholars enter the faculty ranks. In these terms the past twenty-five years have been anything but "business as usual." Women's studies and ethnic studies have grown at an exponential rate. At the same time, the enrollment of women and minorities in higher education has reached record highs. Women now represent 54 percent and minorities 19 percent of the overall student body of colleges and universities in the United States. Also adding to the diversity of the student population is the growing enrollment of foreign students of all races.

To enable educational institutions to be more responsive to these changes than would otherwise be the case, foundations and public agencies have provided support for special programs of curriculum development. Women's studies, ethnic studies, and mainstreaming programs are all part of the overall effort. Given the scope and nature of the changes involved, it is not surprising that these programs have encountered resistance. In the case of mainstreaming programs, there is direct confrontation with entrenched faculty members who have their own agendas and do not welcome new ideas coming from unexpected sources. It is particularly difficult to make headway in the introductory courses of the disciplines in which available textbooks reflect accepted doctrine and require a long lead time to incorporate new concepts. The outcomes of the mainstreaming minority women's studies program are illustrative. The greatest gains have been made in upper-division and other specialized courses, women's studies courses, and new courses, rather than in the basic courses of the traditional disciplines.

Thus, while mainstreaming has made some progress, it has been slow, and much remains to be done. We hope that this resource volume will be helpful on the road ahead.

Mariam K. Chamberlain

## NOTES

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2. Princeton Project on Women in the College Curriculum, Final Report, 1 March 1977 (MS).

3. Betty Schmitz, "Diversity and Collegiality in the Curriculum," *Liberal Education* 77, no. 4 (September–October 1991): 19.

4. For a directory of projects with brief descriptions, commentary, and sources of funding, see Betty Schmitz, *Integrating Women's Studies into the Curriculum: A Guide and Bibliography* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985).



5. *Transformations: The New Jersey Project Journal* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 1.
6. For an account of the Arizona experience, see "Trying Transformations: Curriculum Integration and the Problem of Resistance," by Susan Hardy Aiken, Karen Anderson, Myra Dinnerstein, Judy Lensink, and Patricia MacCorquodale, in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 255-75.
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8. For an international portrait of women's studies research, teaching, and strategies, see *Nairobi and Beyond*, ed. Aruna Rao (New York: The Feminist Press, 1991).
9. For a concurring view, see Schmitz, *Integrating Women's Studies*, 8.

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# WOMEN OF COLOR AND THE MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM

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# INTRODUCTION

*Liza Fiol-Matta*

This volume documents the results of a unique experiment in higher education curriculum transformation, the Ford Foundation's Mainstreaming Minority Women's Studies Program. The curriculum transformation projects that produced these seminar models and syllabi addressed the shortsightedness of an exclusive curriculum by concentrating specifically on the issues, learning, research, and achievements of women of color in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Curriculum reform is a continuous process; critiquing exclusions is not without historical antecedents. The reform of American language and literature studies is a primary example. It revolutionized the study of English and English literature by pointing out the devaluing of writing and criticism by authors from the United States. Yet it was, until recently, shaped by the same standards of the literature it sought to open up. In other words, the authors that were included were the American counterparts to those of the previous canon: white, male, and middle-to-upper class. Furthermore, similar to the discipline on which it modeled itself, the women included not only had to be white but also had to be some combination of doomed or damaged, or brilliant but somehow limited. The restricted sphere of influence and knowledge of Jane Austen's parlor has its parallel in Emily Dickinson's garden, Virginia Woolf's madness in Sylvia Plath's despair. By widening the areas of knowledge and research to include the many realities of gender, women's studies has made significant contributions to pedagogy in higher education, but one of its most significant achievements has been the influence it has exerted on other disciplines and fields of research. It was not so long ago that, primarily through the efforts of women's studies, Woolf, Austen, Dickinson, and Plath began to be accepted for English program reading lists, comprehensive examinations, and dissertations. Racial and ethnic studies for their part helped



to open department doors ever so slightly to a few black men, while women's studies again played a significant role in opening the canon to include black women. Harriet Jacobs joined Frederick Douglass; Zora Neale Hurston took her place alongside Richard Wright.

Once these gains were made, the lessons taught and learned were inevitably different; thus, the projects that teach how change takes place—and what change means—are becoming increasingly important. Perhaps most significant for faculty members engaged in the actual curriculum work, the transformation projects created spaces and times, forums and strategies, for professors to talk about teaching and to become acquainted with new materials and knowledge within their fields. The projects designed various types of disciplinary and interdisciplinary faculty development workshops, seminars, and conferences to facilitate just that kind of interaction, to talk not as experts but as learners. Curriculum transformation projects are stimulating and vital because they tackle concrete objectives; they provide the opportunity for university and college faculty to talk about methodology as well as content, pedagogy, and research. Successful workshops and seminars have addressed both *what* the new knowledge is and *how* to incorporate into current curricula the materials about women of color that are being discovered. This emphasis on teaching the new material provides the faculty with a means of renewal and an opportunity to engage the new knowledge themselves. With the emphasis on integration into the curriculum, syllabi and course revisions are major tangible products that programs such as these generate, but faculty development is itself a productive, innovative component of education, and several teacher-training models have evolved from transformation projects. In short, it is possible to change the ways we teach and learn, and the models provided here attempt to show how.

Peggy McIntosh's, and Marilyn Schuster and Susan Van Dyne's work on phase theory, in particular, was instrumental in laying the foundation for a methodology of feminist curriculum reform and transformation. From the beginning their findings were expanded on by African-American women, whose early work has since informed that of other women of color. Early on, for example, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Johnnella E. Butler pointed out the exclusionary patterns in women's studies and feminist pedagogy. Butler's "Transforming the Curriculum: Teaching about Women of Color," one of the key readings in the faculty seminars, shows how identity and knowledge create connected thinking and visibility.<sup>2</sup> Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith's *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, published in 1982, is still a useful model and resource.<sup>3</sup>

The work by these women is in turn being broadened by the Chinese, Puerto Rican, Native American, Chicana, Japanese, Indian, and Korean women and women of African descent whose work is largely responsible for the workshops that produced the materials in this book. The transformation