



# **Twenty-Five Years of Feminist Anthropology: A History of the Association for Feminist Anthropology**

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## Introduction

Well before the Association for Feminist Anthropology (AFA) became an official section under the American Anthropological Association (AAA), many anthropologists had fought for a gendered understanding of the discipline's history and an equal representation across its subfields. As Hanna Garth and Jennifer R. Wies state in an article in the AFA publication *Voices*, nearly two decades before the AFA came into existence "feminist leaders within the anthropology of gender rose up, etching tidemarks into the frameworks of the discipline (2012: 1)." Some of these same leaders took this demand further, to establish a formal section within the largest organization of professional anthropologists. The purpose of the group was to help bring women to the forefront of ethnographic inquiry and anthropological analysis, and to expose the systematic deficit of women and women's lives in anthropological theory and literature (Garth and Wies 2012: 1). These founding leaders recognized the need for those concerned with critical analysis of gender and gender equality, in particular issues affecting different categories of women around the world and throughout human history, to have an institutionalized space within anthropology. To meet this need, these leaders founded the Association for Feminist Anthropology in 1988.

Although a much more extensive history of feminist anthropology and feminist theory could be given, this report focuses specifically on the purpose and just a few of the achievements of the section dedicated to the anthropology of women and gender. This review of AFA history is based on original research conducted during July – August 2013 as part of a competitive Summer Internship awarded and co-sponsored by the AAA and AFA. Methods for the study included a comprehensive examination of the documents that make up the AFA Archives housed in the National Anthropology Archives of the Smithsonian Institution; individual telephone, in-person, and email interviews with various AFA members and leaders; a study of the documents of the Association of Black Anthropologists (ABA)

housed in the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center at Howard University; and a review of pertinent scholarship.

Within the larger discipline, AFA thrives as a relevant section because it has maintained dedication to an anthropology that explores issues of intersectionality—of gender, race and ethnic group, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and other categories of identity—through research, mentorship, advocacy, and pedagogy. This history seeks to explore briefly the background to that ongoing relevance as AFA enters its 25<sup>th</sup> year.

### **The Founding and Naming of the Association for Feminist Anthropology**

An invitation went out in 1988 to all interested anthropologists who wished to be part of establishing a new society for feminist anthropology to come together for a business meeting to be held on Saturday November 19<sup>th</sup> during the 1988 Annual Meetings of the AAA. The “purposes, structure and future activities of the new Society” were to be discussed, as well as the roster of founding members to be decided (“Become a Founding Member” 1988). On Sunday, November 20, 1988 at the Annual AAA Business Meeting, AAA President Roy Abraham “Skip” Rappaport signed the plan of merger to make the AFA an official AAA section; this status was final with the 1989 Annual Meeting.

The founding Executive Committee included Carole E. Hill, Chair,<sup>2</sup> Jane L. Collins, Chair-Elect, and Michael Burton Secretary-Treasurer.<sup>3</sup> The At-Large Board members were Naomi Quinn, Holly Mathews, Louise Lamphere, Joanne Pasarro, Elizabeth Brumfiel, and Meredith Small. At that time a role separate

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<sup>2</sup> Not until 1997 would the title change from AFA Chair to AFA President. No information appears in the National Anthropology Archives collection to explain this change although it was suggested in various interviews that the original title, Chair, was seen as less authoritative and more in keeping with the feminist spirit of democracy.

<sup>3</sup> In 1993, a vote was cast to divide the position of Secretary-Treasurer to two positions. No information was provided as to who initiated the change or the reason behind it. “Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Association of Feminist Anthropology.” Association for Feminist Anthropology. Box 1. 1993 AFA Business. National Anthropological Archives. Suitland, MD.

from that of the Board, the Nominations Committee consisted of Ilsa Schuster and Colleen Cohen (Association for Feminist Anthropology 1988). Through the hard work of the founding members, and the one hundred and fifty members who joined during the first year in 1988, AFA became a reality.

Together, the founding members created a set of By-Laws that continue with modifications to guide the AFA today. As stated in the original proposal, the mission of the section is as follows:

The purposes of the Society shall be (a) to foster development of feminist analytic perspectives in all dimensions of anthropology; (b) to facilitate communication among feminist anthropologists and between them and feminist scholars in other related fields; (c) to provide information on issues related to gender differences and to gender-based discrimination to the discipline and the public; (d) to encourage integration of feminist research from the different sub-fields of anthropology and to bring the focal concerns of feminist anthropology into the development of the sub-disciplines ("Become a Founding Member" 1988).

Shortly after the initial meetings, the AFA By-Laws were changed to include not only a focus on issues of gender, but also the "interrelatedness of gender with race, ethnicity, class and other bases of difference" (By-Laws of the Association for Feminist Anthropology 1988).

From its start, the purpose of the AFA has been to promote and further understanding of differences often not addressed within the larger discipline of Anthropology. Also from its beginnings, an understanding of promoting feminist ideals throughout the subfields of anthropology was held as key; all dimensions of anthropology needed to develop an analytical perspective that included gender and feminism as topics and as approaches. Among other issues, founding members wanted to address the disparity they observed within the field between those being studied and those doing the studying. In addition, and also of critical importance to the discipline in general, women of all identities were neither being researched nor being trained to do research in full parity with men.

Having found these inequalities to be unacceptable, the AFA was set up as an association dedicated to an inclusive anthropology that identifies and challenges gender and intersectional relations within and across the anthropological subfields. Sandra Morgen, former AFA President, describes the AFA as a place that highlights and helps produce the “enormous and diverse body of feminist scholarship in anthropology.”<sup>4</sup>

The name of the section is indicative of this purpose. The original proposed name was the Society for Feminist Anthropology, and then thought turned to naming the unit the Association of Feminist Anthropologists, until finally the name Association for Feminist Anthropology was agreed upon. Although these options might seem similar, the final decision to be an association for a specific type of anthropology rather than a group made up of a specific type of anthropologist holds large implications. The AFA represents a distinct approach to anthropology as an organized section.<sup>5</sup> Because the association is not representing an identity or population group<sup>6</sup>, the only stipulation to be an AFA member is to be in good standing with the AAA, which is itself supportive of the AFA’s purpose.

In fact, in an attempt to extend membership to as many interested anthropologists as possible, organizers Sylvia Forman and Johnnetta Cole suggested in a 1988 memorandum to founding members Hill, Burton, and Quinn that invitations to join the AFA be sent to minority women and women who might not already be members of the AAA (Forman 1988). In 1990, AFA Chair Collins sent a letter to various colleagues, asking that AFA membership be extended further:

We [the AFA] have much to do as we work to increase the opportunities for feminist perspectives to be voiced within the discipline, and to create openings and support for women and feminist researchers. As a newly formed organization, we are eager to insure that all

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<sup>4</sup> Sandra Morgen, phone interview by Rachel Nuzman, August 09, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen Lewin, phone interview by Rachel Nuzman, August 23, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Lewin, phone interview by Rachel Nuzman, August 23, 2013.

potentially interested individuals learn about our work, and that they and us are given the opportunity to become members.

With the desire to include as many interested individuals as possible, and without specifying race, gender, sexuality, or academic status, Collins asked each colleague to invite four other colleagues or students to join (1990).

Ten years after AFA's launch, Meg Conkey addressed in her 1998 Chair Report the goals for the upcoming year, one of which was to push for continued improvement at that time in the association's inclusion of all anthropological fields including more representation and involvement than in prior years of feminism within archaeology, biological anthropology, and linguistics (10-11). In addition, the AFA needed to actively seek to include feminist anthropologists who were not employed full-time, and who were instead putting their "anthropology and feminist approaches to work in a multitude of other contexts and environments (10-11)." Conkey also stressed in her report the importance of including junior feminist anthropologists through formalized student representation on the Board, as well as the of increasing the participation of feminist anthropologists from typically underrepresented communities and groups (1998).

Various issues that were part of the AFA's original fight for feminist anthropology continued during the years that followed the section's founding. Indeed, despite intermittent progress, a number of these challenges still remain 25 years later.

### **Why Become A Unit?**

The relationship of the AFA to the AAA meets the needs of both parties. The AFA brings to the attention of the AAA and the larger anthropological community an awareness of gender and race and the way the

two interact with other aspects of identity. For its part, the AAA supports the AFA through allotted time at the Annual Meeting, financial and publication management, and various support services including in more recent years those for social media outreach.

Sections are guaranteed time on the annual meeting program and are able to choose the content to which this time is dedicated. This means that the AFA has an influence over which sessions are invited, who is given an opportunity to speak, and which topics are highlighted. Beyond the annual meeting opportunities, the AFA works with the AAA on policy issues and student awards, all to protect and encourage the future of feminist anthropology. When asked about the importance of becoming a section in 1988, Morgen stated, “for our continuing visibility and our autonomy and our ability to control our own destiny, politically and in terms of scholarship, we [the AFA] needed at that moment to become a section<sup>7</sup>.”

An important part of the decision to become a formal unit under the AAA was the need to institutionalize a context in which anthropologists might convene over a shared concern for adequate representation of all genders and highlight inequalities faced by women. Florence Babb, former AFA President, described in an interview the AFA as a section that registered a need and a place where people could come together to see that the very important work that feminist anthropology could get done.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of such a space, where discussions of gendered disparities in graduate research, academia and other occupations and in anthropology as a whole might occur, was clearly a need years before the AFA became a section. An earlier movement in the 1970s produced a call for an anthropology of women and

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<sup>7</sup> Sandra Morgen, phone interview by Rachel Nuzman, August 09, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Florence Babb, phone interview by Rachel Nuzman, July 25, 2013.

gender. One earlier version of the AFA was called the *Ruth Benedict Collective*<sup>9</sup> to pay homage to that famous anthropologist and the members were all women who shared scholarly and political interests. Later, as these concerns became institutionalized and realized by a wider and more diverse group of anthropologists, the need for a unit on both women and gender under the AAA was eventually realized.

### **One Hurdle Faced by the AFA – *The 1990 AAA Annual Meeting***

For its second AAA Annual Meeting as a formalized section, the AFA sought to forge ties with other sections and emphasize inclusiveness through accepting all sessions submitted for its review. However, the AAA meeting organizers stated that they were unable to accommodate all of these sessions that Sue-Ellen Jacobs, AFA 1990 Program Co-Chair, proposed. This lack of accommodation sparked a movement that forced both the AAA and other sections to look at allotted times, session planning, and questions of equality across AAA Annual Meeting programming.

In particular, a large outcry came in response to the overlapping and conflicting scheduling between the AFA and the ABA. A second, related issue arose in response to the refusal by AAA to schedule as requested a workshop that had been designed to follow a session on “Teaching as Praxis.” AAA President Jane Buikstra received several strong letters from various AFA members expressing their concerns over these scheduling issues.

Using explicitly feminist arguments, the AFA board reminded the officers of the AAA of the intersectionality of race and gender. Feeling strongly about the importance of this issue, AFA board members entered into an intellectual battle of sorts in order to improve the representation of both the AFA and ABA. A. Lynne Bolles, who would serve as ABA and AFA President and was Program Co-Chair

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<sup>9</sup> June Nash, phone interview by Rachel Nuzman, August 16, 2013.

with Jacobs at that time, expressed concern over the insensitivity to race and gender issues implied by the programming imposed by the AAA. When writing to Buikstra, Bolles made it known that she understood that not everyone can be pleased all the time by programming requests; nevertheless, the program outlined for the 1990 Annual Meeting was in her view outrageous in four significant ways. First, two ABA sessions were held at the same time, diminishing the significance of the ABA by “fracturing the audience size.” Second, the program did not allow for a woman to simultaneously be feminist and Black because the “AFA and the ABA unit meetings occur at the same time.” Third, the planned session on race and gender in the classroom had been split from the related workshop and, “By not having back-to-back sessions, the point of the follow-through on an important pedagog[ic] experience is lost.” Finally, the special event on race and gender was scheduled to occur at the same time as the social hour, again diminishing the audience size (Bolles 1990).

1990 Program Co-Chairs Bolles and Jacobs responded to Buisktra’s invitation to offer suggestions to the Committee on Scientific Communication and to the Executive Committee of the AAA Board on ways to improve AAA programming. Bolles and Jacobs argued that the AAA needed to be “sensitive to the diversity of the AAA membership – not all women are white, not all Blacks are men (1990).” Bolles and Jacobs further suggested encouraging the inclusion of poster sessions as an alternative to paper sessions. Finally, the Co-Chairs asked that all of the sections of the AAA be “treated with respect, since the annual AAA meeting is most often the Units’ annual meeting too (1990).”

Support at that time was gained from other sections facing similar scheduling conflicts and perceived under-representation. In October 1990, Jacobs received a letter from Victor Golla of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas (SSILA), questioning the AAA Program Chairs’ apparent preference for “‘real’ anthropology” over special interests. Declaring his section’s readiness to

join the AFA in its disapproval of the AAA Program Chairs' refusal of papers, Golla suggested that Jacobs gain the support of Judy Irvine, the current President of the Society for Linguistic Anthropology, in what he claimed might be "a nasty battle." The suggestion was made to ask the AAA Program Chairs to resign so as not to be in charge of the 1991 meeting (Golla 1990). In November, Jacobs received from Golla an informal copy of a letter that Jill Brody, Linguistics Program Editor for the Conference on American Indian Languages (CAIL), had sent previously to Buikstra expressing concerns and recommendations for AAA programming; although specifically focused on CAIL, Brody questioned the amount of time and number of sessions afforded to subsections, echoing AFA's concern (1990).

The outcome of all of these complaints from various units came almost immediately. Responding to the concerns of and suggestions made by the AFA, Buikstra wrote in October to inform Jacobs that the AAA Board Committee on Scientific Communication and the Executive Committee would address the stated issues of gender and race, as well as carefully scrutinize "the process of program construction for the annual meeting (1990). A report made by the 1990 AAA Program Committee Chairs, Antoinette B. Brown and William L. Partridge, then was released in November responding to the same issues along with recommendations for improvements. These recommendations included limiting the number of co-sponsored sessions that units could have, creating more availability for communication with the AAA planning committee, and an allotment of guaranteed sessions for sections determined by membership size (Brown and Partridge 1990). During the 1990 Annual Meeting, the procedures and role of the AAA Program Committee were reviewed and modified and the Committee was "instructed by the [AAA Executive] Board to maximize participation without compromising quality."

The reaction and success of the activism shared by the AFA and other sections was seen in the construction of the following AAA Annual Meeting program. In 1991, the AAA Executive Director Eugene

L. Sterud sent a memorandum to the 1991 Program Committee directly addressing the previous year's concerns: "The Program Committee is charged with the development of a scientific program of the highest quality, representative of the entire field of anthropology." In addition, the Committee was expected to take an active role in developing the program rather than remain limited to reviewing volunteered submissions. The AAA Board would appoint a Committee Chair who would "serve as general editor of the scientific program," assigning times and space to sessions, as well as having "final responsibility for decisions on program development." At the same time and in notable contrast to the preceding year, the program chairs of the individual sections were given "final responsibility for the session(s) authorized for their units" (Sterud 1991).

### **A Continued Dedication to Pedagogy and Feminist Anthropological Methods and Theories-**

#### *Sandra Morgen and the Curriculum Project*

The Working Commission on Gender and the Anthropology Curriculum (WCGAC) was engineered in the early 1990s by the AFA and co-chaired by Mary Moran and Deborah Rubin. The commission worked with Morgen's text, *Gender and Anthropology: A Critical Review for Teaching and Research*, to "[solicit] information from members on ways to include feminist scholarship and gender issues in the curriculum of anthropology courses, including syllabi, textbook preference, new strategies, etc." (Gruenbaum 1991). The purpose of the commission was to "provide an overview of the impact of feminist anthropology on the mainstream undergraduate curriculum." To reach this goal, a questionnaire on the use and distribution of Morgen's edited volume *Gender and Anthropology* was administered to all department heads listed in the *1991-1992 AAA Guide to Departments*, as well as all AFA members (Rubin 1993).

Previously, in 1989, *Gender and Anthropology* had been distributed free of charge to each anthropology department chair listed in the *AAA Guide to Departments* for 1990-1991. In response to “anecdotal evidence from AFA members suggest[ing] that the departmental copies were...being retained by departmental chairs rather than being circulated” (Rubin and McCulloch 1993: 5), the 1992 surveys were sent to approximately “400 departments and 600 AFA members” with the purpose of “learning reactions to the book, and whether or not it has been helpful in preparing courses or carrying out research” (McCulloch 1993).

The WCGAC was also tasked with collecting and organizing syllabi from universities and colleges representative of a variety of anthropological courses around the country. Some of these syllabi were used in the previous year’s AAA Annual Meeting workshop, “Teaching About Race and Gender.”

Rubin, with the assistance of Stephanie McCulloch, then prepared a report containing the results of the questionnaire and syllabi collection, *Some Observations on Teaching Feminist Anthropology in the Undergraduate Anthropology Curriculum* (Rubin 1993). “Respondents have found the *Gender and Anthropology* volume to be most useful in: providing an overview of the existing literature on gender, identifying bibliographic materials, and preparing undergraduate course lecturers and outlines” (McCulloch 1993). Still others found the volume to be “useful in research activities, finding appropriate audio-visual materials, preparing graduate course lectures and outlines and identifying classroom exercises” (McCulloch 1993).

The purpose of distributing the volume had been to improve the presentation of women and gender issues in anthropology courses (Rubin and McCulloch 1993:5). Even though a majority of department chairs and AFA members responded positively to the volume, Rubin and McCulloch’s understanding of

the survey results were that there continued to be a “large gap between the content of the best and most recent work in feminist anthropology” circulated in contemporary professional journals, “and graduate students in research universities, and the content of the basic introductory anthropology course at many schools around the country” (1993: 2). While acknowledging that much work had been done as a result of work like Morgen’s, Rubin averred in an interview that much work was still needed.

AFA’s dedication to feminist anthropological methods, theories, and pedagogy continues to extend beyond the commission and Morgen’s volume. Over its history, the AFA has worked closely with organizations like the Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology (COSWA) and others, particularly to advance women in the field of anthropology.

An example of this was the occasion when Bolles made use of AFA support in 1993 for a feminist anthropologist facing what seemed to be unfair treatment by a university. When Alaka Wali was denied a tenured position, Bolles sent letters to colleagues and AFA members asking for support in not only securing Wali her tenured position, but also in addressing concerns against the university college in which Wali had been working. Bolles asked for immediate assistance in addressing issues at the college that were hurting not only Wali but also other women and applied anthropologists, particularly women of color. In response to that letter, 1993 AFA Chair Moran wrote on behalf of Wali and stated that both the AFA and its parent organization, the AAA, were “deeply concerned about the continuing lack of progress for women in our discipline” (1993). Moran pointed to the fact that while the majority of Ph.D.’s in Anthropology might be awarded to women, women continue to be underrepresented in the tenured ranks (1993). In a recent interview, Bolles states that she knew the importance of helping Wali

because she knew that Wali was not the first nor would be the last woman to face gender discrimination while working in academia. Eventually, Wali's case was resolved and she received tenure.<sup>10</sup>

## **A History of Collaboration**

Feminist anthropologists, and feminists in general, are often thought of in popular depictions as lobbyists working for only one cause – that of women. Analogously, another misconception is that feminist anthropologists seek to promote only that which is explicitly called feminist anthropology, when in fact AFA always has been dedicated to a gendered view across subfields and approaches.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout its history, the AFA has worked with the AAA to enact its goals and push this broad agenda. For each Annual Meeting, the AAA coordinates all of the sections and interest groups to create with their members' and guests' presentations a five-day event that draws thousands of anthropologists. For its 1990 program, AFA Co-Chairs submitted to the AAA sessions on a wide range of issues including curriculum, methods and theories in feminist research, women in groups, marriage and reproductive issues, violence against women, mythology, and postmodernism. Included were also three very important AFA sessions co-sponsored with the Urban Anthropology Association (UAA)<sup>12</sup> and the Latin American Anthropology Association (LAAA)<sup>13</sup> on "Comparative Anthropological Perspectives On Social Movements"; with the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists (SOLGA)<sup>14</sup> on "Lesbian Ethnography and Gender in America"; and with the Association of Black Anthropologists (ABA) on "Teaching as Praxis: 'Race' and Ideologies of Power."

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<sup>10</sup> A. Lynn Bolles, phone interview with Rachel Nuzman, August 12, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Florence Babb, phone interview with Rachel Nuzman, July 25, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Now called the Society for Urban, National, and Transnational Anthropology (SUNTA)

<sup>13</sup> Now called the Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology (SLACA)

<sup>14</sup> Now called the Association for Queer Anthropology (AQA)

These co-sponsorships mark the beginning of relationships that have remained strong throughout AFA history. The 'Teaching as Praxis' workshop was to precede a special event, "Teaching about Race and Gender: Courses, Curriculum and Classrooms." This same workshop would be co-sponsored again by the AFA and ABA and appear at four out of five Annual Meetings between 1990 and 1995. In 1991, Jacobs wrote a letter to Pem Buck thanking her for her hard work in bringing together "the new scholarship on issues of racism and sexism in anthropology" through "'Teaching as Praxis: Decolonizing Media Representations of 'Race,' Ethnicity and Gender in the New World Order'."

Through this continued co-sponsoring of events and correspondence between different groups, AFA's dedication to the intersectionality of gender with other identities and issues becomes apparent. In addition, "Teaching as Praxis" became an important workshop that brought to the forefront of anthropology the need to look at both race and gender when creating curricula.

The relationships developed through these co-sponsorships and workshops became increasingly important for not only the AFA but the ABA as well. At the 1992 ABA Business Meeting, the proposed AAA Minority Commission was discussed. Feeling that the ABA was becoming disenfranchised and marginalized by the restructuring of the AAA, members expressed their unhappiness over the decision to have only three representatives of twenty-nine sections elected to the AAA Executive Board. Fearing that the interests of the ABA would not be heard through this configuration, members decided that, "coalition building with other sections will be the only avenue for ABA representation" ("The Association of Black Anthropologists Minutes" 1992). Such alliances thus benefited both AFA and other section members as a way for issues important to both to be heard by the larger community of anthropologists.

Former AFA President Louise Lamphere describes the relationship between the AFA and other associations as an important way to increase the presence of like-minded individuals. She points out that many AFA members have had multiple section memberships and these overlapping relationships have helped bring into the AFA black feminists such as Bolles and Cheryl Rodriguez, both former AFA presidents<sup>15</sup>.

AFA members not only join multiple sections but also have served leadership roles across groups<sup>16</sup>. As a result of the alliances and partnerships forged, many successful enterprises came into being. For example, in 1992 the AFA supported the ABA's publication on racism and sexism through a donation of \$900. At the Annual Meeting that same year, the AFA approved a request from SOLGA to "support an AAA task force to look into discrimination against gays and lesbians in anthropology" (Rubin 1992b). SOLGA and the AFA Commission of Lesbian and Gay Issues in Anthropology later worked together to collect narrative and testimonials that were recorded at the Annual Meeting (Silverblatt 1995b). Ellen Lewin, who becomes AFA President at the 2013 AAA Annual Meetings, reported at the 1995 AFA Board Meeting that SOLGA was campaigning to become a section under the AAA and would need 200 members to be considered; she encouraged AFA members to join and proposed that upcoming issues of *Voices* would include SOLGA membership forms to ease this process (Silverblatt 1995a).

Today an established recognition of collaboration can be seen in the Annual Joint Section Reception held at the AAA Meetings, now co-hosted by eight sections: ABA, AFA, the Association of Latino and Latina Anthropologists (ALLA), AQA, the Society for the Anthropology of North America (SANA), the Society for the Anthropology of Work (SAW), SLACA and, as of 2013, SUNTA. AFA President Jane Henrici points to the 2010 joint reception held in New Orleans while that city struggled with racialized and gendered

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<sup>15</sup> Louise Lamphere, phone interview with Rachel Nuzman, August 15, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Sandra Morgen, phone interview with Rachel Nuzman, August 09, 2013.

recovery five years after the Hurricane Katrina disasters as an important site of activism and outreach, both for the community-based groups that catered and performed at the reception and for the AAA sections that worked together to organize and co-sponsor it, particularly SLACA and AFA that year. According to Henrici, the annual event is an opportunity to “deliberately [meet] with other outreach groups because of similar and overlapping concerns.” As the AFA continues to explore and advocate for a diverse and wide-reaching feminist anthropology, the joint section reception has become one more manifestation of AFA’s collaborative mission.<sup>17</sup>

### **Voices and AFA Publications**

A primary part of how the AFA has spread its message has been through scholarly and editorial anthologies, newsletter columns, published articles, and web posts. These texts provide a place for women in anthropology to tell their stories and a place for those of all genders to publish and advance feminist anthropology.

Before the section was ten years old, AFA boards and members had raised money enough to support publishing three books. As early as 1992, then AFA President June Nash sent a letter to AFA Board Members announcing the possibility of contributing to the book proposed by Constance Sutton who was in charge of the Eleanor B. Leacock Fund (Nash 1992). *From Labrador to Samoa: The Theory and Practice of Eleanor Burke Leacock*, a volume of essays in honor of Eleanor Leacock and edited by Sutton, was published in collaboration with the International Women’s Anthropology Caucus (IWAC) (Silverblatt 1995: 1, American Anthropological Association). An AFA sponsored session on militarism for the 1991 AAA Annual Meeting was eventually transformed into an anthology also edited by Sutton in collaboration with IWAC, entitled *Feminism, Militarism, and Nationalism* (American Anthropological

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<sup>17</sup> Jane Henrici, interview with Rachel Nuzman, August 10, 2013.

Association 1996 Proposed Budget, Mitchell 1993). By 1996, the book *Gender and Race Through Education and Political Activism: The Legacy of Sylvia Forman* was in press and set to be distributed to all AFA members free of charge (American Anthropological Association 1996 Proposed Budget). This publication included essays from past students of Forman and was edited by Dena Shenk (University of North Carolina at Charlotte) (American Anthropological Association 1996 Proposed Budget).

Specifically representative of activities and achievements within the AFA is the column written for the AFA in AAA's monthly edition of *Anthropology News (AN)*, and the annual publication of *Voices*. AFA Chair Carole E. Hill asked the AAA Board of Directors for a column in *Anthropology News* when first petitioning for the AFA to be a unit in 1988 (Hill 1988). This column, now primarily on-line, remains a place to announce AFA -related news, awards, achievements, research, activism, and activities. In 1992, AFA members showed interest in a separate newsletter from the AAA/AFA column and asked that a larger space be provided for "practical information as well as longer essays on relevant topics essays on relevant topics" (Rubin 1992C). Rubin, who had been the editor of the AFA column in *AN*, was the first editor of *Voices* and Winifred Mitchell became the new editor of the column. Goals for the new publication were discussed at the 1992 Annual Business Meeting; reporting on this meeting, Mitchell wrote to Rubin:

According to the report by our president, June Nash, the board had stated two goals for the new publication: (1) To reach out to the field of archeology, physical anthropology and linguistics to present a four field voice on gender research and publications; and (2) To reach out internationally with reviews of books and conferences (1993).

When the first issue was published in the Fall of 1995, Rubin expanded on these goals, stating that the main purpose of *Voices* is to inform members of AFA activities and all "decisions taken by the AAA" that had "implications for feminist anthropologists" (1995: 2). Further, Rubin wrote that "the initiation of VOICES is intended to give voice to what feminist anthropologists are doing, to record the

accomplishments, and to have a voice in defining what is yet to be done” (Rubin 1995: 2). In order to reach its second initially stated goal, *Voices* would be responsible for maintaining the newsletter for the International Women’s Anthropology Conference (IWAC), thereby continuing its involvement with an internally aimed organization. With this responsibility and the “IWAC’s mailing list, we [the AFA] will be able to raise awareness in the U.S. of the work of feminist anthropologists located elsewhere and to extend the reach of the AFA to an international audience” (Rubin 1995:2).

Although little information is offered or known about the decision to name the publication *Voices*, what can be ascertained from the larger history of feminist anthropology and feminism is that the term is one that was thought to reference a democratic ideal in which all women would be recognized, legitimized, and heard. Invoking the concept of a history shared among women, all participants could be seen as having participated in that history equally (Burton 2000: 21). AFA’s publication was seen as an “opportunity to create a new feminist voice in anthropology” (Rubin 1992B) that would share achievements across all four subfields of anthropology (Rubin 1995: 2).

Former AFA Website Manager and Editor of *Voices* Suzanne Baker used the publication as a tool for furthering the association’s larger goal of inclusion and commitment to the advancement of underserved communities. Explaining her role as Editor, Baker emphasized her freedom to concentrate her efforts on junior and senior feminist anthropologists. In light of AFA’s dedication to promoting feminist anthropology in all areas of education, Baker was able to publish “student articles and reviews, as well as those from scholars at less well-known colleges, including community colleges, and newly graduated anthropologists” on issues she felt most important to “the development of feminist

anthropology and AFA.” These issues included, “multicultural aspects, students, international linkages, lesser known colleges and universities.”<sup>18</sup>

Originally, members hoped that it would come out three times a year (“Dear Mr. Corman” 1994) but, as a publication distributed free of charge and without compensation available for its editors, *Voices* has struggled to remain even at an annual level. Nevertheless, with the hard work by a number of editors-- notably Sue Hyatt and Amy E. Harper— and as listserves and other digital media have taken up less formal communications, *Voices* has gone from a critical but relatively informal members’ newsletter to a publication of articles of scholarly substance.

### **Political Action and a Focus on Central Issues of Feminism**

Though hurdles abounded in starting the AFA, many accomplishments have come from the hard work of individuals within the association, and not all of them in the academic or scholarly arena. For example, Moran recalls the 1988 Annual Meeting where the founding of AFA was discussed and the difficulties faced by many women. She herself attended the meeting accompanied by her two-year-old child because there was no childcare provided at that time at the Annual Meeting.<sup>19</sup> Addressing this important issue, Forman presented a proposal to the AAA Board at the 1989 Annual Meeting on behalf of the AFA asking that the association provide childcare during meetings (Collins 1990).

Along this vein of early feminist agendas, the AFA became involved in important conversations, not only about the availability of childcare for working women, but issues of reproductive rights, abortion, affirmative action, and tenured positions for women, to name a few. By 1991, The Commission on

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<sup>18</sup> Suzanne Baker, questionnaire via email correspondence, July 30, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Moran, phone interview with Rachel Nuzman, August 13, 2013.

Control of Women's Bodies had been formed to "look at issues of new reproductive technologies, choices about health care, representations of women's bodies, violence against women, and reproductive rights" and was co-chaired by Colleen Cohen and Collins (Gruenbaum 1991). By 1992, this commission had transformed into the Commission on Women's Reproductive Rights, Freedom of Sexual Preference, and Control over Body Practices and Representations. The purpose of the commission had become to network with groups and individuals both within and outside the discipline of anthropology who were researching and promoting activism, "addressing freedom from all forms of violence and abuse directed towards women...and in particular the abuse of women's reproductive rights and freedom of sexual preference" and "focussing[sic] upon the body as a site of empowerment and agency" (Rubin 1992A). The goal of the commission was to create a directory of these groups and individuals that could be used a resource for responding to and formulating policies on issues of reproductive rights concerning the AFA. Furthermore, the commission was intended "to target and support innovative and important areas of research directed toward social, cultural and political change and broadly-based education initiatives, and especially to encourage graduate students working along these lines" (Rubin 1992A).

This same year, another commission was proposed: one that would focus exclusively on ending violence against women. In 1993, Nash wrote to Jacobs, expressing the need for help to ensure the creation of the AFA sponsored Women and Human Rights Commission. Rising reports of violence against women both at home and internationally inspired this step (Nash 1993). The committee was behind the push for a motion of support at the AAA Business Meeting for a statement of support for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Moran reported at the AFA Executive Board Meeting in 1994 that, because of the urgings of various AFA members and their support for the act, she took the motion to the AAA Business Meeting where it was passed and sent onto the AAA Executive Board for action. The motion was then

“passed by the Board with recommendation of the government relations staff at AAA” and, finally, AAA sent a letter of support to Delaware Senator Joseph Biden (Moran 1994). The Chair of the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, Texas Representative Jack Brooks, reported through his Counsel to Dr. Mary Margaret Overbey, AAA Director of Government Relations, that the U.S. House supported VAWA and would note the AAA’s endorsement of the civil rights provision (Overbey 1994).

In 2012, feminists and activists came together to issue a public statement after anthropologist Adrienne Pine was criticized in a school newspaper and then through more widespread media for breastfeeding her child while teaching a class—ironically, on feminist anthropology. Henrici emailed the AFA Executive Board to ask if others wanted to issue a statement of support for breastfeeding in public and while working and a unanimous vote came back in support. Throughout the process of writing, editing, and issuing the statement the Board Members responded in an amazingly effective and prompt manner that many consider the hallmarks of feminism.<sup>20</sup> Through the quick and cooperative response of all board members, a notice was crafted that both responded directly to Pine’s case and more generally to the lack of necessary services for parents—students, faculty, and staff—on college campuses. When asked about this activity, Lewin described the AFA as an association that operates in a very feminist fashion, promoting consultation and consensus. Lewin describes this particular action of the Board as one of representative of that: “we basically leapt to her defense...I feel like AFA really lives its politics in a lot of ways and I’m proud to be part of it.”<sup>21</sup>

However supportive AFA Board members were, Henrici points to the complicated nature of making such a response. In a recent interview, she emphasizes that contemporary feminisms include an emphasis on the ethics of not presuming that the AFA had the right to speak for someone else, which led to her

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<sup>20</sup> Jane Henrici, interview with Rachel Nuzman, August 10, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen Lewin, phone interview with Rachel Nuzman, August 07, 2013

reaching out to Pine before the Board began its statement draft. In response, Pine expressed not only her acceptance but also her appreciation for the Board's gesture. After the statement was released, a number of AFA members and others from different sites and nations reached out to thank the Board for defending anyone's right to nurse in public, including while working, particularly if other arrangements are not supported or the situation was, as had been the case for Pine, extraordinary.

### **Mentorship and Awards**

The Association for Feminist Anthropology's commitment to scholarship and advocacy extends to finding as many forms to support new generations in the field of feminist anthropology as possible. In her 2012 *Voices* article on mentorship, Henrici writes that the act of mentorship, however understood or defined, has expanded "beyond that of feminisms and feminist anthropologies....Regardless, along with so many other issues critical to conditions affecting differences among and for women, mentoring seems part of not only the past quarter of a century of AFA history, but its present and immediate future" (2-3).

Along with encouraging students and young anthropologists to join the association and run for positions on the board, the AFA annually provides three awards to undergraduates, graduate students, and recent PhD graduates. These awards include the Sylvia Forman Prize, the AFA Dissertation Award, and the Zora Neale Hurston Travel Award. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary launch of AFA, 2013, also marks the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Competition for the Sylvia Forman Prize for Student Papers awarded to one undergraduate and one graduate student each whose research and papers present a feminist analysis of anthropology. Students of all four subfields within anthropology are encouraged to apply; research topics are limited only to their application to feminist anthropological theory and scholarship; and to compete a graduate student

must be an AFA member. Each winner receives a certificate, a cash award, and a summary of their essay published in *Anthropology Newsletter*<sup>22</sup>.

The Dissertation Award, developed in 2011, is annually awarded to a doctoral candidate in the writing phase of her/his dissertation. A \$2,000 scholarship is given to an anthropologist who is a member of AFA and whose submitted materials are evaluated by the AFA Dissertation Award Committee to be making a significant contribution to feminist anthropology (Nuzman 2013).

Finally, each year the AFA awards three \$500 travel grants in honor of Zora Neale Hurston. These awards go to graduate students of color, also members of AFA, in support of their delivering a paper or interviewing for jobs at the AAA Annual Meetings.<sup>23</sup> This support is explicitly to ensure the continued opportunity for those who represent typically underrepresented groups to attend and participate in the meetings.

In 2013, two other student awards were provided as well. One was a co-sponsored National Association of Student Anthropologists Emerging Leaders in Anthropology Award, providing a graduate student the opportunity to learn more about service and leadership within the profession with support to attend the AAA Annual Meetings including its governance events and mentorship by the co-sponsoring section through the following year. The other was to co-sponsor one of the annual AAA Summer Interns: when discussion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary had arisen, Treasurer Sandy Faiman-Silva proposed a history using archival materials and, since the internship would be in Washington, DC near the National Anthropology

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<sup>22</sup> "Sylvia Forman Prize". Association for Feminist Anthropology. Accessed November 2, 2013. [http://www.aaanet.org/sections/afa/?page\\_id=103](http://www.aaanet.org/sections/afa/?page_id=103).

<sup>23</sup> "Zora Neale Hurston 2013 Travel Award". Association for Feminist Anthropology. Accessed November 2, 2013. [http://www.aaanet.org/sections/afa/?page\\_id=101](http://www.aaanet.org/sections/afa/?page_id=101).

Archives, the board agreed to help raise funds to cover the internship and supervise and mentor him/her intern who would win after a competition the opportunity to prepare that report.

### **AFA Today**

Today, the AFA continues to make its presence known. In terms of outreach, AFA has had a listserv and a website since the late 1990s, although the latter remained relatively inactive until added support was provided through the AAA in 2011.

In November 2011, Henrici started an AFA Twitter account for which she created the tagline (Henrici 2013: 1-2) that reads, “The Association for Feminist Anthropology: provoking anthropological scholarship and practice to become more feminist for over 25 years.”<sup>24</sup> In February 2012, Rebecca Boucher, an AFA graduate student volunteer, took over the account. Boucher writes:

One of the greatest difficulties I have faced while tweeting for AFA is finding news articles that adequately represent the variety of feminist anthropologies that are important to AFA members. Since there is no single feminist anthropology, neither is there one set of criteria to choose which tweets are appropriate. Additionally, I am constrained by the way the media formulates issues. Part of my job is to address the following question: How is gender (or power, race, inequality, class, feminism, etc.) portrayed in the media? Considering that very often these things are *not* portrayed in a way consistent with feminist anthropological ideals, it is difficult to find articles that the AFA would endorse. Yet I also do not think the only purpose of tweeting articles on behalf of the AFA is to show the world what we believe in. It is to highlight various issues, how they have been reported to the media, and to represent the diversity of our membership (2013: 4).

The hope is that these multiple forms of communication and outreach will add to the encouragement for AFA’s membership and leadership diversity to expand and its scholarship, advocacy, and mentoring to continue. This partial history, shared digitally and based on multiple sources, reflects past intentions and successes and is intended also as a way to foster those to come.

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<sup>24</sup> Assoc4FeministAnthro, last updated October 22, 2013. <https://twitter.com/AFeministAnthro>

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## Appendix A: Informed Consent

Association for Feminist Anthropology 25<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary History Project, July – August 2013

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. The purpose of this interview is to find out more about the Association for Feminist Anthropology and your work with the section. The information provided during this interview will be used in the history of the AFA that I am writing in honor of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This phone interview should take about ten minutes and will be recorded. By participating, you are agreeing to the use of part or all of the information you are providing within the history. If you do not want to answer any of my questions, or would like to stop at any time, please let me know and we'll either move on or end the interview. If you have any questions this interview or the section history that I am drafting at the AFA Summer Intern, please contact AFA President Jane Henrici.

1. I'm contacting you because according to AFA records you were [one of the AFA founders, very active on the AFA board, very involved in AFA activities]; can you tell me more about that role and your experience?
2. Are you still active as an AFA member? And if so, please explain.
3. What are you most proud of having accomplished with the AFA?
4. In your opinion, was it important that the AFA became a section under the American Anthropological Association rather than an extension of an already existing section or interest group? And if so, please explain why.
5. If you feel the AFA makes a contribution to anthropology, whether as a discipline or a set of political or professional practices, would you describe that contribution? If you do not feel the AFA makes such a contribution, could you share your view about that?

## Appendix B: Interview Request Template

Dr. [name] ,

This summer I am interning with the American Anthropological Association and the Association for Feminist Anthropology to compile a complete history of the AFA for its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

I would be appreciative of any time you might spare to discuss with me your experiences with the AFA and feminist anthropology. Your insight and knowledge of the AFA are incredibly important to this project. Because of your involvement both as an important voice in the association as well as your role as [position], how you fit into the history is essential to its recording.

If you are interested and have time to do a short phone interview, please let me know when would work best for you and at what number I should reach you. If you would prefer, I can also send you the questions to answer as you have time via e-mail.

I would also like to ask if you know of anyone else that I might have missed, who in your opinion is essential to hear from in order to complete this report.

Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Rachel Nuzman

## Appendix C: AFA Leaders

Information collected from lists and contact information of AFA Executive Board for respective years:

Year	Position	Name	Affiliation
1988-1989	Chair	Carole E. Hill	Georgia State University
(1988-1989)	Secretary/Treasurer	Michael Burton	University of California, Irvine
1989-1991	Chair	Jane L. Collins	University of Wisconsin
(1989-1991)	Secretary/Treasurer	Ellen Gruenbaum	California State University, San Bernardino
1991-1993	Chair	June C. Nash	CUNY, City College
(1989-1991)	Secretary/Treasurer	Ellen Gruenbaum	California State University, San Bernardino
(1991-1993)	Secretary/Treasurer	Jean Lave	University of California, Berkeley
1993-1995	Chair	Mary H. Moran	Colgate University
(Dec. 1993-Nov. 1994)	Acting Treasurer	Colleen Ballerino Cohen	Vassar College
(Dec. 1993-Nov. 1994)	Acting Secretary	Julia J. Thompson?	University of Wisconsin
1995-1997	Chair	Louise Lamphere	University of New Mexico
(1995-1998)	Treasurer	Peggy F. Barlett	Emory University
(1995-1998)	Secretary	Irene Silverblatt	Duke University
1997-1999	President	Margaret "Meg" Conkey	University of California, Berkeley
(1998-2000)	Treasurer	Geraldine Moreno- Black	University of Oregon
(1998-2000)	Secretary	Christine G. T. Ho	University of South Florida
1999-2001	President	Sandra L. Morgen	University of Oregon
(1998-2000)	Treasurer	Geraldine Moreno Black	University of Oregon
(2000-2003)	Secretary	Nandini Gunewardena	Pomona College
2001-2003	President	A. Lynn Bolles	University of Maryland, College Park
(2000-2003)	Treasurer	Barbara A. West	University of the Pacific
	Secretary	Nandini Gunewardena	Pomona College
2003-2005	President	Mary K. Anglin	University of Kentucky
(2003-2006)	Treasurer	(Pamela) Pam Stone	Hampshire College
	Secretary	Cheryl Mwaria	Hofstra University
2005-2007	President	Florence Babb	University of Florida
(2003-2006)	Treasurer	Pam Stone	Hampshire College
(2003-2006)	Secretary	Cheryl Mwaria	Hofstra University

Association for Feminist Anthropology History

2007-2009	President	Cheryl Rodriquez	University of South Florida
(2006-2008)	Treasurer	Evelyn Blackwood	Purdue University
(2006-2008)	Secretary	Meena Khandelwal	University of Iowa
2009-2011	President	Dorothy Hodgson	Rutgers University
(2009-2012)	Treasurer	Sandra Faiman-Silva	Bridgewater State University
(2009-2011)	Secretary	Bonnie McElhinny	University of Toronto
2011-2013	President	Jane Henrici	Institute for Women's Policy Research
(2011-2014)	Treasurer	Sandra Faiman-Silva	Bridgewater State University
(2011-2014)	Secretary	Lynn Kwiatkowski	Colorado State University
2013-2015	President	Ellen Lewin	University of Iowa
(2011-2014)	Treasurer	Sandra Faiman-Silva	Bridgewater State University
(2011-2014)	Secretary	Lynn Kwiatkowski	Colorado State University