

# "Women's History - Race: does it still divide us?"

## Who Needs It?"

by Dr. Alison Hirsch,  
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Staff Photo

Women were everywhere in the past, but they are by no means everywhere in the history books.

History is the man-made (and occasionally woman-made) story of the past. Like all storytellers, historians choose to include certain facts, events, and characters, and to leave out certain others. Every history book, every history lesson offers an opportunity to learn about women, but often the textbooks do not take the opportunity. Studying women's history usually means seeing what the textbooks leave out.

Of course, women were often left out of things in the past as well. Throughout most of early American history, women could not vote, either in civil elections or in church elections. Women could not serve on juries or in the army. Married women could not testify in court or sign legal documents on their own. Marriage, in effect, made women invisible or non-existent, subsumed by law within their husband's identity. But politics, warfare, and courts of law do not define all of human life, and women have always played a vital role in the social, economic, and religious realms.

Women are still most notable in history books by their absence. Their omission has been so complete that when women's historians argue for inclusion in textbooks, they are often seen as just another of many interest groups, which are all sometimes lumped together by politicians, bureaucrats, and even college students under the misnomer of "women and the other minorities."

But women are not a minority; throughout most of history, they have been at least half of humanity, and today they are a majority—51 percent of America's population. Women are not a minority, but they are members of minority ethnic and racial groups. They are also members of majority or dominant groups.

Modern women's history, as it emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is very much a by-product of modern feminism and the women's movement. But the fact that its origins were political does not mean that it is simply "political correctness" to insist on including women in the historical narrative. If history as it is taught today included women equally with men, then there would be no need for women's history. But traditional history is basically "men's history," and most textbooks have only gone so far as to include women in "side-bars" to the main narrative.

A catchword phrase of the late 1960s was "the personal is political." In women's history,

Dr. Alison D. Hirsch to paraphrase, the historical is personal. Students and teachers quickly discover the impossibility of studying women's history without making connections to personal experience—this is true of the half of the population that is female; it is also true for the male half, since every man has a mother, a grandmother, other female relatives and friends that frame the way he perceives women in the past and the present.

As we learn about women's past economic, political, and legal disabilities, we need to identify the stereotyping and sexism that were at the root of restrictions placed on women. There are two dangers inherent in this. First, by learning about past stereotypes we may risk perpetuating them in the present. For example, if we know that colonial women bore full responsibility for housework and and early childcare, do we risk believing that this is women's immutable proper place?

Ever-present in modern America is what one historian has called the "Nostalgia Trap," the longing for wholesome family values and happy families of the past. We need to know that families have always experienced break-ups, abuse, and other problems we identify as "modern."

The second danger is that we may create antagonism between men and women if we portray women's oppression as something done to all women by all men. But people today do not, either as a group or as individuals, need to feel guilty for what our ancestors did. What is important if to recognized the past, but act appropriately in the present. We cannot ignore historical sexism, but men today do not need to feel responsible for that past. What we all need to do is to rise above and to combat sexism in the present.

These dangers should not deter us from taking the opportunities offered by women's history to reconceive the American past, which can only better equip us as both public citizens and private individuals to deal with the challenges of the American present. Gender is not just another worrisome variable we can choose to take into consideration or choose to ignore.

Women's place in history is everywhere; by restoring that historical place, we help create a better future for both women and men. We all need women's history.

## Student speaks out on need for diversity

Dear Co-editors:

It is truly a joy and an inspiration whenever I see a month dedicated to a different ethnic and/or minority group. I enjoy going into the library, which always has a very good display, and looking through different books and videos on information of people or culture that are different than my own.

In this way I find that we, as Americans, are very lucky. We have the chance to learn, not only about our own culture, but other cultures, that normally we wouldn't be able to do if we lived in another country. Here, in America, we have the opportunity to introduce into our lives many views. No other place in the world could profess to such a comment. However, what is so disturbing is that not everyone takes advantage of such an opportunity.

How many of us during Black History month have gone beyond looking at the display? It is not that I am trying to lay a guilt trip on anyone. However, what I am trying to show is that maybe there is a need for all of us (me included) to observe these special months and take advantage of what they offer. And what do they offer, you may

ask?

Race has become such an issue that even discussing it in an academic environment the air becomes heavy with fear, which restricts us from having frank and open discussions about the issue.

Books offer us a chance to understand a culture that, otherwise, may have gone on being misunderstood or not recognized. By reading about people that are not like ourselves we may find that they have more in common with us than we realize. Therefore, it gives us the chance to give up those old fears and prejudices that we all carry. It is a way of helping us close the gap among each other and kill off racism.

Racism is based on ignorance. Ignorance is developed from not knowing or understanding. That, I believe, is a choice we make. We have the mean and if we go to the library, which I can't see how you can avoid, the truth is there to be learned. So it is your choice to educate yourself further. That may be a harsh reality to understand because we all want to believe that we have done our best at becoming knowledgeable, especially while in college. But college doesn't guarantee that we will

understand each other better and more importantly it doesn't guarantee that we will understand other cultures. It is up to the individual to make the move and teach themselves to become knowledgeable about their fellow man.

We should all make a commitment to ourselves to learn more about people of different backgrounds. And that goes for us all, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and so on. Only through learning can we lose these fears that have our country in such turmoil.

We must all face it, we are all prejudiced! We all feel a certain way about certain people that are different than ourselves. The difference between a smart and an ignorant person is that smart people seek ways to combat their prejudices and face them head on. Ignorant people will let themselves believe the worst about a people without seeking the truth.

My dream is that some day we will not need a glass display. That we, in an open and humane forum, will be able to discuss any topic and defuse prejudice. But as I said, right now this is only a dream.

Miriam Turpack  
Communications

## Lion Ambassador President publicly responds to former club member

Dear Co-Editors:

This reply is in response to a letter written by Dan Zackus and published in the Feb. 29 edition of *Capital Times*. This is addressed to all individuals concerned about Penn State Harrisburg.

In his letter, Dan discusses a meeting, that he and another Lion Ambassador had with a Penn State administrator on Feb. 20 concerning the invitation list for Dr. Spanier's luncheon. I was not at the meeting, but because of being the President of PSH's Lion Ambassadors, I was drawn into the center of the disagreement.

During the nine, LONG days between the meeting, the luncheon and the publication, a lot of other meetings and discussions were conducted. Some were successful, and some were not. However, I must comment that due to the quality of the students representing PSH, in student government and lion ambassadors, along with the administration - Dr. Spanier's visit on Feb. 29 was a tremendous success.

However, I have three regrets - the poor timing and title of Dan's article; the resignation of Dan as a lion ambassador; and the misconceptions that were left, due to his letter. Out of the three, there is only one I can help correct. That is the last one of which there are many parts.

I will begin by explaining, exactly what the Lion Ambassador organization's main objective is. Lion Ambassadors must make a commitment to promote Penn State, its interests and goals, and that is the sole reason for my response. Contrary to what Dan wrote, Lion Ambassadors do not need to agree with, "... anything that Penn State Harrisburg or any commonwealth branch of Penn State does."

What a lion ambassador should do, is try to assist with the development of the best university system possible. If that means pointing out con-

troversies or ideas for improvement, then that is what a Lion Ambassador should do. However, a responsible Lion Ambassador would RESPECTFULLY, go through the proper channels. When that process is followed, one may discover misconceptions, missing information, or one may invite a challenge that suggests a change is needed.

When Dan called me with his concern about the meeting, I talked to the other Lion Ambassador, then I called the administrator the next day. Knowing all three people involved, I knew there were misunderstandings that needed to be corrected, if possible. Through my discussion with the involved administrator and a few other administrators, I discovered Dan's concern, that PSH failed in its choice of leadership representation for Dr. Spanier's luncheon, was misdirected.

The list of requested representatives was made by University Park, not PSH. The invitation list was to include representative GOVERNING BODIES of PSH - the Board of Advisors, Alumni Society, Board of Directors, Faculty Senate, University Senators, and SGA.

While I agree with Dan, that there are many leaders on campus who were not invited, I disagree that the student government was not a representative body of student leaders.

In Dan's letter, he stated that other lion ambassadors agreed with him that, "... some SGA members do nothing, where as some members go beyond the call of duty." While Dan had no authority to speak for the other 24 Lion Ambassadors, I do have the right to question the validity of his statement. I do not believe that most of this semester's

Lion Ambassadors would have made that statement. Not only is such antagonism against the Lion Ambassador mission, but six of our members serve on

SGA.

Dan must learn that in every facet of life, there will be people that go beyond the call of duty, and there will be people that are self-serving. It is up to good leaders and members, to pull those people into service, and enable them to discover how it feels to actually earn recognition and really be a member of a group. If this happens enough, we may find less self-serving individuals in the future. If someone does not earn the recognition they place on their resume, it is their weight to carry around. It has no negative affect on others.

As for another of Dan's statements about, "... having lunch with a very important person at Penn State..." I believe that anyone you have lunch with at Penn State is a very important person.

I would like to conclude by stating that membership in the Lion Ambassador organization does not rob anyone of their first amendment freedom of speech as Dan concluded. If it did, I could never have served as president. Ask anyone that knows me; I cannot keep my mouth shut! Being a Lion Ambassador is a proud achievement that one can proudly add to their resume; especially, all the ones I have had the pleasure of serving with this year! They have worked very hard, and they have served Penn State well!

I am sorry, that I failed to convince Dan of his misconceptions. He will be missed, for he served us well! While I'm at it, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those that remained supportive throughout the nine day controversy. It was meaningful to me and the organization, for although we have worked very hard, we have much left to accomplish. Lion Ambassadors are Penn State Proud!

Karen R. Wilson  
President PSH  
Lion Ambassadors

## CHIEFLY CHATTER



by Head of Police Services:  
Leonard J. Supenski

Last month the *Capital Times* wrote an introductory piece on my appointment as head of Police Services on campus. This month, in what I hope will be a continuing series on police and safety related topics, I'd like to elaborate upon the philosophy of policing I intend to bring to the Harrisburg campus of Penn State.

First of all, I consider myself to be in the "policing" business. While commonly referred to as "law enforcement officers," only 20 to 30 percent of what we do actually involves enforcement. Historically as well as today, policing means not just "locking up the bad guys" and writing traffic citations, but providing service to the community. Our primary mission has been and will continue to be, order maintenance. That is why we are referred to as peace officers.

In any community, the role of police involves a variety of services such as: preserving the public peace; preventing and detecting crime; facilitating the orderly flow of traffic; reducing the amount of fear; educating the public about crime and ways to prevent being victims; and - dare I say it - improving the quality of life for its citizens.

Lest the last role sound like more bureau-babble, quality of life from a police perspective can be defined quite simply, "What is it about this community that makes me want to live or stay here?" Regardless of what other elements go into improving a community's quality of life, safety and security is always a major factor. Business cannot thrive, children cannot be educated, recreation cannot abound and the arts cannot flourish in an unsafe environment. It is no different with a university campus - a community in every sense of the word.

Today police cannot do the job alone. In reality, they never could. Creating and maintaining a safe community must be a collaborative effort between the police and the community they serve. I am committed to that philosophy.

However, to develop a partnership we must get to know one another. We'd like you to get to know us so the next edition of the *Capital Times* will feature a profile of the men and women of PSH Police Services. In the future, we'll be getting to know you better.

### ADA from page 2

Riegel is part of a group from the Center that goes to businesses and institutions to see if they comply with the ADA.

"We have trained a couple people in our group to give out potential (parking) violation tickets," she said.

The ticket, which consists of a bright yellow card with attention printed on it in red letters tells violators that they are parked in a reserved parking spot.

With plans for the new library building, Riegel urges PSH to consider the needs of disabled people in construction.

"If they build a new place that's not accessible, it will have to be done over," she said.

When President Bush signed the ADA in 1990, he encouraged Americans to "let the shameful walls of exclusion finally come tumbling down."