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Welcome

These remarks were presented as part of "A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s," a conference organized by the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University, March 27-29, 2014

Good morning, conferees! I am Deborah Belle, and I am thrilled to welcome you to *A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s*.

The women's liberation movement of those years changed my life. It is impossible to imagine my academic career: the topics I have studied, the methods I have used, the courses I have taught, or the salary I have received without the revolutionary women's movement of that era. Similarly, my experiences of marriage and motherhood, of sex and relationships, and my very sense of self would have been profoundly different if the world had not been changed for me by the women's liberation movement of my early adult years. I am forever grateful to those who created and sustained that movement and thus transformed the world. May I ask the world changers of that era: activists, intellectuals, novelists, artists, filmmakers, scholars, singers, and poets to rise?

Several years ago I emerged from the relative seclusion of my psychology department to become director of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Boston University. In the years that followed I was startled on several occasions to encounter a narrative about the women's liberation movement, now often called Second Wave Feminism, that seemed wildly discrepant with my own memories and understandings. In some re-tellings the Movement seemed to be anti-sex or homophobic or racist, certainly exclusionary and narrow. I was often angered as well as perplexed by these accounts.

Then a year or two ago I attended a screening of an early cut of *Left on Pearl*, a wonderful film that tells the story of the 1971 take-over of a Harvard building by women demanding a Women's Center in Cambridge. For those who don't yet know this amazing story (and we are screening *Left on Pearl* this evening, along with *A Moment in Her Story*, another great film about women's liberation in the Boston area), the take-over ended triumphantly, with the creation of the Cambridge Women's Center, which stands to this day, more than forty years later, on Pleasant Street in Cambridge. The film goes on to point out that the Cambridge Women's Center then gave rise to many of the important feminist organizations and institutions that exist in the Boston area today, including the Elizabeth Stone House, on whose board I served in the 1980s. What shocked me was that I was right here in Cambridge in 1971 but was entirely oblivious of the take-over or had long forgotten it. And although I served on the board of the Elizabeth Stone House I had been unaware that the idea for that program originated at the Cambridge Women's Center. If an ardent feminist who lived in Cambridge at the time of these events, a director of a

Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program, could be entirely ignorant of this history, how many others were also in the dark?

And thus the idea for this conference was born—an opportunity to revisit and remember this revolutionary period and to analyze and perhaps modify the narratives told about it.

So you could say that this conference was born out of ignorance and anger. That would be one narrative, and it would not be entirely inaccurate.

Or you could say that this conference was born out of gratitude and admiration and awe and love for those who changed the world for us decades ago. That would be another narrative, perhaps a superior one.

As originally envisioned, this conference would have brought together 6 or 7 experts in the field to give talks on their work. Then Linda Gordon suggested that a call for papers might bring to us wonderful scholars and activists whom we did not even know, and who could enrich our understanding immensely. The call was sent out and we hoped to receive a good number of submissions. We were stunned when proposals began flooding into our inboxes, ultimately over 150 proposals for panels, roundtables, individual papers, poetry readings, film screenings, and song. Clearly others were also more than ready to re-examine those revolutionary years. Our call for papers had struck a nerve.

Today we hope that our coming together will be many things. Certainly a celebration of great accomplishments and amazing women. Also an examination of the many incarnations of the Movement, across the country and across diversities of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. We even dare to hope that the talks and conversations over these few days will help us to think more effectively about the work that lies ahead, and that being with each other in conversation will give each of us more energy to do what can be done.

We are grateful to all of you who made the effort to be here today and to everyone who helped others get to this conference, including those who registered as Supporters, Mentors, and Benefactors. Thank you.

We are also grateful to our institutional funders, including Boston University's Center for the Humanities, our Alumni Affairs Office, and the Howard Gotlieb Center for Archival Research, as well as numerous Boston University schools, departments, and programs. We are grateful to our sisters across the river at Radcliffe's Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, who approached us some months ago asking how they could support this conference. We much appreciate their help.

Our graphic artist Andrea Sutton designed for us a conference poster and a conference logo we love. Thank you, Andi.

Our program coordinator, Jaho King, came on board mid-December and worked miracles to get our website up and running, while handling complex logistical issues and an immense conference correspondence and keeping the rest of our Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program running smoothly. Thank you, Jaho. You are an amazing woman.

Our conference planning committee, including faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates, worked tirelessly and often brilliantly to keep this conference on track and to enable it to fulfill its great potential. Words of thanks can never be sufficient. May I ask the planning committee members to stand?

We are also deeply grateful to our student volunteers, many of them from Boston University's student-run Center for Gender, Sexuality, & Activism. You can recognize them in their conference tee shirts. They stand by to provide directions to conference rooms you wish to find and to assist you if problems arise. They also would be excellent folks with whom to discuss organizing strategies if you wish to hold a terrific Take Back the Night march or encourage your university administration to create a rape crisis center. I have seen the face of youthful feminism, and it is beautiful.

Every conference needs a fairy godmother, to make our wishes come true. Ours has been Vita Paladino, Director of the Howard Gotlieb Center for Archival Research. We can never thank you enough, Vita.

And thanks to everyone whose cogent advice, moral support, and technical assistance have made planning for this conference a great joy.

And now, Liane Brandon's 1971 film, *Anything You Want To Be*.