



Dear friends,

With the conclusion of the Steinem Initiative, we are eager to thank you for your participation and support, report on what we accomplished, and let you know what's ahead.

What we set out to do. The Initiative was a two-year pilot to develop women's and gender history as an effective organizing tool. We began with the conviction that women's and gender history has potential to expand the vision, deepen the analysis, strengthen the strategy, and broaden the base of women's movements and, in the process, elevate gender justice within other social movements.

How we went about it. We have experimented with several programs to bridge the gap between the different cultures of academia and activism, all for the purpose of putting historical knowledge, archival evidence, and documentation methods in the hands of organizers in formats they can use in day-to-day work.

History-into-action partnerships produced materials activists want for current issue campaigns and long-term strategy development. Our efforts have focused primarily on two movements:

Economic justice: the domestic worker movement. A team of faculty, students, translators, and educational technologists worked with Matahari, a Boston-based organization for women of color, immigrant women, and families affected by sexual violence, migrant labor exploitation, and human trafficking, and with the National Domestic Workers Alliance. They produced a smartphone-accessible digital timeline (Spanish and English) of the histories of domestic worker organizing in the US, a media presentation on the history of Latina domestic workers, and other materials for organizer to incorporate into campaigns for dignity and rights for domestic workers, nannies, and other caregivers.

Reproductive Justice. Through intensive interviews, conducted in partnership with CoreAlign, movement leaders identified the tool that would be most useful for tapping into the extraordinary archival resources at the Sophia Smith Collection on the histories of women's struggles for reproductive health, rights, and justice. What they want is an interactive timeline that centers the experiences, perspectives, and agency of women of color, sexual minorities, and low-income women, and traces their centuries-long record of resistance to the racial, sexual, and economic inequities that undermine their reproductive lives. We began designing such a tool.

Gloria & Wilma School for Organizers: This summer gathering honored a dream Gloria Steinem shared with her late friend Wilma Mankiller, the first woman elected chief of the Cherokee Nation. Our three schools, each 3-4 days long, had different purposes.

The 2015 school focused on history. “Organizing to Build Power” gathered activists from economic justice, indigenous sovereignty, and reproductive justice movements to explore the potential of women’s and gender history to advance goals and sharpen strategy.

The 2016 school focused on gender. An “Organizers Conversation” convened 20 front-line organizers to exchange experiences as women in the field and share their efforts to elevate gender issues within social justice movements.

The 2017 school took a workshop approach as domestic worker organizers, faculty, students, media producers, and Initiative staff made progress on ongoing history-into-action projects.

Public history and digital scholarship projects utilized new media technologies to inject historical perspectives and archival evidence into contemporary debates on matters of pressing concern.

Mass incarceration. In collaboration with the Public History Program at the University of Massachusetts and the Humanities Action Lab at the New School, the Initiative contributed to “States of Incarceration,” a web site and national traveling exhibit. “What Are Women’s Prisons For?” features Sophia Smith Collection materials in a segment that applies a gender lens to the issue of mass incarceration. The exhibit is now touring the US.

Reproductive politics. Joyce wrote “Race, Reproduction, Resistance: African American Women and Birth Control in the Early 20th Century,” a digital essay refuting the misrepresentation of black women in current anti-abortion campaigns targeting communities of color. The survey of black women’s continuous organizing for reproductive autonomy and archival documents as evidence of the deep roots of political analysis and strategy that ground women of color leadership of the movement today. The journal *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* will published the essay.

SOS: Save Our Stories. The Initiative developed a prototype workshop that provides activists with basic techniques for archiving their movements — documenting and preserving evidence of their histories, recording women’s stories, and integrating these resources in their organizing work.

Activists-in-Residence. Each year, the Initiative hosted an organizer for a month-long stay on campus.

2016: Bekezela Mguni. A reproductive justice leader and librarian-activist, Mguni helped design and facilitate the SOS workshop, offered a printmaking workshop using images from the Sophia Smith Collection, and created a pop-up library and conversation space featuring black lesbian literature.

2017: Miriam Yeung. Newly departed from her tenure as executive director of the National Asian and Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF), Yeung held weekly conversations with faculty about women of color leading today’s social movements, led a public panel on “Visions for Reproductive Justice: Rebellion and Resistance, 2017 and Beyond,” advised Initiative staff on the reproductive justice project, and met with students in classes and other settings.

Check our newsletter for more information on these programs: <http://eepurl.com/cl4zyX>.

What we learned. The headline is “Yes, and” Yes, activists are eager to incorporate history into movement work, and it is difficult to do. The effort can create “a collision of worlds” – that’s how one journalist described our 2015 Gloria & Wilma School, which brought more than 50 organizers and scholars together. Activism organizing

We learned a tremendous amount about the benefits and obstacles to using women’s and gender history as an organizing tool. In general, organizers tend not to turn to history, either because the history is not presented in an accessible form, because it neglects or distorts their lived realities, or because it revives painful memories and hard truths. At the same time, organizers’ desire for knowledge and lessons from foremothers is strong, the movement impact is real, and the archives has proven to be a space where academics and activists can come together around collaborative projects.

Over the two-year pilot, Steinem Initiative programs established a solid conceptual and practical foundation for this exciting and significant work and incubated sustained partnerships of activists and academics who are “putting history into action.”

Going forward. As we transition from the Initiative, we are happy to say that the work goes on.

- Joyce is working with reproductive justice leaders to produce a digital toolkit which traces the long and varied histories of women of color, queer women, and low-income women organizing for sexual and reproductive self-determination, and which encourages present-day activists and allies to weave their own stories into the narrative of the ongoing struggle for human rights.
- Jennifer Guglielmo, Michelle Joffroy, and Miriam Neptune are partnering with the National Domestic Workers Alliance to develop histories of domestic worker organizing in the U.S. and Latin America in the form of a digital timeline, a guide to archival documents, and short videos, all of which the Alliance will incorporate into its political education curriculum and share with its 60+ affiliates.
- A proposed 2019 Gloria & Wilma School will bring domestic worker and reproductive justice activists together to share insights across movements, dig into the archives, develop media and other tools to advance their organizations’ goals, and gain skills in saving their own records.
- Monique Nguyen of Matahari Women Workers Center will be the 2018 activist in residence.

We are extremely grateful for this opportunity to work with you. We appreciate the time and energy you devoted to exploring the past, especially at a moment when current politics are so challenging and the future is so uncertain. Many thanks for taking this journey with us. We look forward to crossing paths as we all continue to build movements that tilt the arc of history toward justice.

In hope and solidarity,

Joyce Follet and Sara Gould

Co-directors of the Steinem Initiative