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# Foreword

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The impressive body of work collected in *Feminist Legal History* demonstrates that a new field is emerging in history and in law that speaks, at one and the same time, to audiences in the academy and beyond.

This is a book that alters our vision of American life and law. It revisits familiar terrain, and recovers long lost interactions between men and women at the root of this nation's defining commitments and institutions. We come better to understand how gender relations have defined spheres we have long recognized as gendered, such as suffrage, marriage, the military, sexual harassment, and reproductive rights law. And we encounter gender relations shaping spheres we do not conventionally conceive of as gendered, such as accident or poverty law. We learn of micro-choices that cumulatively produced and made reasonable a world in which men have power women lack. And we learn of micro-resistances, of how women's phenomenal agency and creativity have given defining shape to family, community, politics, and law.

The work collected in *Feminist Legal History* matters, both as it intervenes in particular institutions and policy choices, and as it demonstrates, again and again, why it pays to ask how gender matters. Narratives about the past illuminate not only past choices but future ones. They help us see more clearly who we are and how we live together—and to consider what is fixed, what is contingent, and what is open to re-imagining.

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