It's an honor to be here this afternoon to give the Boyer Lecture and it's especially meaningful to me because Dr. Patsy Boyer was one of my amazing mentors when I was a student here at CSU in the 70s and 80s. In my second semester, I took Patsy’s Images of Women in Spanish Literature. I think you’ll see from my talk today, it was one of the classes that inspired me to pursue a women’s studies certificate and, eventually, a PhD with a dissertation on feminist publishing. Patsy embodied exactly the kind of feminist spirit I’ll be discussing here—strong, courageous, and willing to speak out about the injustices she saw around her. Patsy had an infectious enthusiasm for learning, one that encouraged even quiet students like me to share their ideas in a dynamic classroom.

In 1979, a group of young feminists at CSU heard about Take Back the Night marches around the world as actions reclaiming women’s rights to freedom from sexual violence. Let’s do that, we thought. Let’s hold a march in Ft Collins to protest the normalization of violence against women and the idea that any woman walking alone at night is asking for trouble.
Figure 1. Feminist Group members organize Ft Collins’ first Take Back the Night March on November 9, 1979

Some of you may remember north downtown Ft Collins before it was redeveloped as “Old Town.” In those days, bars lined LaPorte Ave and the streets weren’t nicely paved.

Figure 2: The Ft Collins *Coloradoan* covered the event

Despite police concerns about our safety in that area, that’s where we marched. Of course that’s where we marched—that was the point. Women should be able to walk anywhere at night without threats or fear or violence.
Figure 3: The Ft Collins Journal also covered the march

So with signs proclaiming Women Unite/Take Back the Night and mimeographed sheets of chants and lyrics from Holly Near’s Fight Back, we marched in solidarity that snowy November night, 200 strong. Braving hecklers and a few snowballs, we marched toward a future when we could walk those streets alone.

That was late 1970s activism, fueled by a decades-old women’s liberation movement that was raising awareness—what we called consciousness-raising—about women’s secondary status in a patriarchal, male-dominated world.

Figure 4: Billy Jean King and Bobby Riggs competed in what was billed as “The Battle of the Sexes” on September 20, 1973 at the Houston Astrodome
We believed we could create a society that valued women’s voices, lifted chains of violence and oppression, and guaranteed equal opportunity for all. Arm in arm, we heeded the slogan “the personal is the political” as we began to see old problems with new eyes.

Figure 6: 1973 paper dolls reflect changing gender roles
But where had we gotten these radical ideas? We didn’t have Facebook or Twitter or websites. We didn’t have the internet or cellphones. We had . . . word of mouth and some newsletters and a few bootleg films and some lovely women musicians, but mostly, we had books.

Figure 7: Popular novels in women’s book groups of the 1970s

We read them in our new women’s studies courses and we read them on our own. We debated them in book groups or in our office cubicle in the basement of Lory Student Center. We borrowed books from each other or bought them at the Old Corner Bookstore or the Stone Lion. Books were our lifeline to the movement in which we were coming of age as young women challenging the limited social opportunities prescribed for us and even the idea of gender roles themselves.

Now let’s take one more step back. Where did these books come from? A few were being published in paperback by mainstream publishers, many of them anthologies of feminist essays that had been circulating in movement newspapers,
books like *Sisterhood is Powerful*, the 1970 collection edited by Robin Morgan (who donated her speaking fees back to the movement).

![Image of books](image1)

Figure 8: *Sisterhood is Powerful* and other feminist books now archived in the Friedman Feminist Press Collection

Trade publishers also published books by better known feminists like Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*, Judy Chicago’s *Through the Flower*, and Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will*.

![Image of books](image2)

Figure 9: Feminist titles published by mainstream publishers

These were important books, but they represented only a tiny portion of books published by conventional presses and only a very small number of books
written by feminist authors. Feminism did challenge the very underpinnings of society, so it made sense from an ideological perspective that feminist books would be less than appealing to male publishers—and the majority of publishers at that time were men. Books that reflected the lives and perspectives of lesbians were especially suppressed.

Figure 10: Books by and about lesbians archived in the Friedman Feminist Press Collection

But the rejection of feminist books wasn’t just ideological, it was financial as well. Because male publishers weren’t interested in feminist writing, they didn’t believe such books had a viable sales market.
Figure 11: Books published by Daughter, Inc. and other feminist presses

The male publishing establishment was wrong, however, and in their absence, the feminist/lesbian presses began to create from the outside a growing market segment for women’s books—books that centered on the rights of women to determine their own destinies—books that began to sell decades before Oprah’s book club championed such plots.

As the feminist presses created a market for those books, the mainstream presses began to notice, so that by 1977, the year I started college, a book like Marilyn French’s *The Women’s Room* could become a bestseller for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, particularly in its mass market paperback form.

Figure 12: *The Women’s Room* by Marilyn French, a best-selling novel published in 1977

But the difference between the feminist and conventional publishers was that the women’s press movement not only pushed the edge of mainstream publishing, it also formed an essential arm of the growing women’s liberation movement, furthering activism committed to the larger political and social changes that have advanced women’s lives. The feminist presses understood that getting
women’s words into print and seeing women’s lives reflected in books was liberating. Their mission was to bring feminist and lesbian words in print form to the movement it created and supported.

The term “Women in print movement” sounds a little antiquated now but it provided the seeds for the media and social networking savvy of feminist activism today. The early movement is full of stories about feminists taking control of the medium of publishing to bring the messages that defined their experiences into print. For example, in 1972 when an Iowa print shop refused to print an issue of the newspaper Ain’t I A Woman? because it featured a picture of a vagina and speculum as part of a women’s self-help health article, the Iowa City Women’s Press Collective was born.

Figure 13: Anne Leonard running a small offset press
Photo Permission ©Paula Wallace
The Iowa City Women's Press completed its first project on a mimeograph machine in 1971. Later we put a few pieces of used equipment together in a garage and began printing. Since that time we have acquired three presses that can handle a full range of jobs from letterhead to books cheaply and efficiently. There are four of us working full time and we operate as a collective. In addition, each of us takes a turn at every aspect of the printing trade, from darkroom and layout to running the presses. We also work closely with other Iowa City women in the related trades of typesetting and bookbinding. Some nationally distributed publications we have printed include Sister Vision, and Common Lives/Lesbian Lives, a new quarterly. Recently we printed the second edition of Lesbian Path, the second edition of The Notebooks That Emma Gave Me, Outshiner, and Black Lesbian Bibliography. We also publish two of our own books, The Greater Than's Ante-Sedition Manual for Women and Against the Grain. A Carpentry Manual for Women. We are committed to women's writing and publishing and see ourselves both as a resource for women publishers and as a tool for making self-publishing available to women.

Some of Our Types

Aaron
Ararat
Avant Garde
Baskerville
Bembo
Modern
Caslon Antiqua
Century
Cooper
Humanistic Script
Fira Quadrata
Garment
Gothic Graphic
Hevelin
Janson
Kobus
Libra
McCullough
Molan
Microscope
Optima
Palatino
Tegnol
Thames
SentGothic
Syrax
Tinney
Titus
TypoHuman
Univers

Figure 14: An advertisement for The Iowa City Women's Press

With $1500 donated by Robin Morgan who was speaking at the University of Iowa, the press bought equipment from and printed an all-women's poetry anthology. According to co-founder Barb Wieser, “The press wanted to take control of all aspects of women’s words so that women could define their own lives rather than have them defined for them by men. Most of the women involved in starting Iowa City Women's Press had come out of the Civil Rights and anti-war movements and believed we could change the world. The Women’s Liberation
Front, as it was called then, wanted words like ‘equal pay for equal work’ out in the world because we knew how radical they were considered then.”

Less than a decade after the first women’s presses were established, feminist publishing had become an essential arm of the feminist movement. So much so that by 1978, Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman could conclude in their *Guide to Women’s Publishing*, “[F]eminist publishing is also feminist politics. It is a political act as creative and diverse as the Women’s Movement itself.”

Figure 15: The Women’s Press Collective and friends moving a new press into the storefront shared with A Woman’s Place Bookstore, 5251 Broadway, Oakland, California

Photo Permission ©Paula Wallace

To examine how feminist presses established an alternative network outside the domain of the mainstream publishing industry, I want to begin by
sharing what I call a “circulatory tale” from a series of interviews in *Feminist Bookstore News* between its editor Carol Seajay and writer Judy Grahn, co-founder of the Women’s Press Collective in California, one of the first feminist presses in the US.

In 1969, poet Judy Grahn and artist Wendy Cadden moved to the West Coast from Ohio. They brought with them Grahn’s play, “The Cell,” hoping to interest the San Francisco Mime Troupe in producing it.

![Figure 16: Cover Photo by JEB (Joan E. Biren)](image)

The group declined but offered instead the use of their mimeograph machine to reproduce the play, as well as other articles on what was then called “gay women’s liberation.” Grahn and Cadden borrowed $300 for the paper to print an
Entitled *Woman to Woman*, the book had lavender pages, a red cover, and graphics printed on white onionskin that could only be run one sheet at a time because they stuck to the mimeograph drum. They published 1000 copies priced at $1.00 each.
From San Francisco, Grahn and Anne Leonard rode to Boston with Carol Wilson, taking 200 copies of *Woman to Woman* to support themselves for two months while they apprenticed with the socialist New England Free Press. Carol Wilson was selling books, including *Woman to Woman*, cross-country from the back of her van to raise seed money for A Woman’s Place bookstore in Oakland, California. She stopped in Detroit, which is probably how Carol Seajay was able to buy a copy of *Woman to Woman* at the Michigan Woman’s Liberation Retreat.
and take it home with her to Kalamazoo.

In the meantime, at the urging of member Ruth Gottstein, the Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco donated $500 to Wendy Cadden for the purchase of an antiquated Gestetner printing press, and when Grahn and Leonard returned to San Francisco with their new printing skills, the Women’s Press Collective was born. The press shared a space with A Woman’s Place bookstore in Oakland—one of the first feminist bookstores in the US—, a layout in which publishing became a very public process. This location allowed customers to witness the production of the books they would later buy, starting with the Women’s Press Collective’s first book, Grahn’s *The Psychoanalysis of Edward the Dyke*, published in 1971. According to Grahn, “Bookstore customers could “watch these grungy-looking women trying not to run their hair through the rollers and so on. We cut our hair and we became very skilled. By day we were on display and talking to people, by night we printed, which took great concentration.”

![Figure 19: The 1971 Women’s Press Collection edition of *Edward the Dyke* by Judy Grahn](image)

Being “on display” both showcased women’s abilities and fostered a shared feminist vision. Seajay recalled the excitement in arriving at the bookstore in the morning to see what had been printed the night before. This common sense of
purpose enlarged the women’s community beyond the Women’s Press Collective, itself a multicultural group of about a dozen women, to the bookstore employees, volunteers, customers, and visitors.

![Figure 20: The Women’s Press Collective](image)

A belief in the almost superhuman ability of women to accomplish whatever they put their minds to, however, did not discount the intervention of material factors. Practical matters were still an undeniable consideration in the press movement, for even the most visionary of feminist books required paper, ink, and machinery before it could be circulated within a print network. According to Grahn, feminists had to “[go] through the entire industrial revolution.” In her words, “We first had to learn to get equipment or money (and spend it on equipment) and space and set up shops. Then we had to learn how to run the shops, fix the machines and so on. It was all step after step after step after step, so that teaching women printing became just as important a part of what we were doing
This do-it-yourself attitude resulted in part from the fact that “[t]here was no one to ask” about the nuts and bolts of publishing. The Women’s Press Collective bought the biggest, rather than the best, press they could for $500 because they didn’t know any better. When it constantly broke down and the male mechanic offered to repair it in exchange for sex . . . they learned how to fix the press themselves. In fact, they had to learn how to fix it before they could learn how to operate it.

Figure 21: Feminist press books exposed gendered labor inequality

While the Women’s Press Collective was publishing books in Oakland, Carol Seajay moved to the West Coast from Michigan in 1973 and two years later established San Francisco’s first women’s bookstore, Old Wives Tales, in 1976 with Paula Wallace, a former member of the Women’s Press Collective.
After attending the first Women in Print Conference in 1976 (at a Nebraska campground), Seajay volunteered to edit a new publication, the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter*, later *Feminist Bookstore News*, which became the major lifeline linking feminist bookstores and feminist publishers. Its first issues were printed on an old Gestetner press owned by Rising Woman Books in Santa Rosa, probably the same machine the Women's Press Collective had retired a few years earlier after purchasing more modern equipment.

According to Carol Seajay, "There was such a hunger for the books that we were inventing in the women's movement. Getting those books into women's hands was our work . . . "This concept of "inventing" books for the women's movement reflects the sense of urgent, radical mission that served as the impetus behind the early women in print movement. If books did not exist that honestly and multi-dimensionally reflected women's experiences, it was up to feminists to invent them. As Seajay asserts, "There was such a belief that we could do anything. We could teach ourselves and each other everything that we needed to know." Once a goal was imagined, accomplishing it would be easy. The challenge, then, was as much epistemological as material. How could women imagine their lives outside
of patriarchy? What kind of world did feminists want to create?

Figure 23: Photo cover by JEB (Joan E. Biren)

At CSU in the late 1970s, we were asking these same questions as members of The Feminist Group, the student activists who organized the Take Back the Night march. We published *The Feminist Perspective* newsletter.
We organized women’s film festivals.

And wrote guest editorials about campus safety for women, reproductive rights, and the newly flowering field of women’s studies.
We organized the Take Back the Night March and we shut down the campus Playboy Club in Ingersoll Hall, a so-called student tradition that clearly needed challenging in its sexist representation of women’s roles and rights.

One of my friends in the group was June Friedman. An agronomy major in the early days of women entering the sciences, she understood how gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, and glass ceilings prevented women from
achieving their highest goals. With other Feminist Group members and our faculty mentors and role models, we worked on what was then called a “chilly climate for women” on campus.

To put this chilly climate in perspective, in 1977, in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, 284 men and 401 women earned bachelor’s degrees; 45 men and 24 women earned Master’s degrees; and 10 men and NO women earned PhDs. These stats come from an independent study I wrote with another student in my sophomore year, wryly titled “Barriers: An Attempt to Study Sex Discrimination at CSU.” (Women undergrads at CSU began to outnumber males in 1972.)

As Feminist Group members met in our little office in the basement of Lory Student Center, we dreamed of a world where women were valued equally with men. I wish I had the book list from the feminist reading group June and I were in together. I know we read *The Women’s Room* and Robin Morgan's poetry collection, *Monster*. Over potluck dinners, books like those inspired the paths we hoped to travel.
June and I graduated in 1981 on the soggy field the day after a rainstorm at Hughes Stadium. We searched for each other amid the hundreds of graduates that day. I’m still surprised that we found one another on the field. Before long, June would leave for a Denver suburb to start a job in a soil lab and I would take time before graduate school to have a daughter.

And then, a year after our graduation, June’s life was ended by the very kind of violence against which we had marched. I won’t say her murder is
unsolved but rather that her killer has yet to be brought to justice. I haven’t given up hope that he will be someday, but in the thirty-one years since her death, all I could do to honor her memory was try to carry on our work.

Figure 31: CSU Collegian account of June Friedman’s 1982 murder

As the feminist print movement continued to evolve, debates about feminism—its goals, values, and strategies—began to be reflected in the presses and the books that they published. I want to mention a couple of those debates briefly here to give a sense of the complexities in which feminists were engaged.

An early debate of the women in print movement centered on separatism and whether feminists should participate in non-feminist social organizations or wholly create their own alternatives. In 1973, the feminist-lesbian press Daughters, Inc published Rita Mae Brown’s Rubyfruit Jungle, an instant hit with movement readers. Rubyfruit became such a runaway bestseller to feminist and lesbian
audiences that Daughters sold the paperback rights in 1977 to Bantam, a corporate publisher who by then had seen the dollar signs. This sale sparked uproar within the movement about “selling out” and the value of mainstreaming feminist books.

Figure 32: Original Daughters, Inc., edition of *Rubyfruit Jungle*

Of course, we see that mainstreaming today, with best-selling books like Cheryl Strayed’s *Wild*, which no mainstream publisher would have touched back in 1973. Strayed even had trouble finding a publisher a few years ago. Strayed’s wasn’t the first book about a woman hiking a long trail alone, (Cindy Ross published her account of hiking the Appalachian trail, *A Woman’s Journey*, in 1982) but it was the first to be published by a trade press in the now-popular sub-genre of “healing memoirs.” Yet in the early 70s, feminist presses were still creating the audience--and market--for women’s narratives and *Rubyfruit Jungle* was a breakthrough book of its time.
Another debate centered on the limited number of books by women of color published by feminist presses. In a chapter of my dissertation that was published in *Genders*, I wrote about the print history of the 1981 ground-breaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, the first collection of previously unpublished works by Black, Asian American, Latina, and Native American women. The book was originally conceptualized by its co-editors Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga as more than a collection of essays but also as, in their words, a “resource,” a “catalyst,” a “revolutionary tool,” a “consciousness-raiser,” and an “educator and agitator.” In their original call for essays, they wrote, “We want to express to all women--especially to white middle-class women--the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement. . . . We want to create a definition that expands what ‘feminist’ means to us.”

![Figure 33: Kitchen Table: Woman of Color Press’s edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*](image)

The circumstances of *This Bridge’s* own publication are as illuminating of power and privilege within the women’s movement of the time as the essays
inside. This struggle is captured in two paragraphs that lie in the preface pages of the book:

When Persephone Press, Inc., a white women’s press of Watertown, Massachusetts and the original publishers of *Bridge*, ceased operation in the Spring of 1983, this book had already gone out of print. After many months of negotiations, the co-editors were finally able to retrieve control of their book, whereupon Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press of New York agreed to re-publish it.

The following, then, is the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, conceived of and produced entirely by women of color.

Already in operation at the time they acquired *Bridge*, Kitchen Table was the first press dedicated to publishing the works of women of color whose writing “consciously examines, from a positive and original perspective, the specific situations and issues that women of color face.” Kitchen Table’s retrieval of *This Bridge* from Persephone, as well as of Kitchen Table publisher Barbara Smith’s own *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, brought two landmark books to a wider audience through the press’s practice of coalition politics. The far-reaching impact of *This Bridge* is discussed in *This Bridge We Call Home*, an anthology celebrating Bridge’s 20th anniversary to which Dr. Caridad Souza, director of Women and Gender Studies at CSU, was a contributor. I wish I had more time to talk about the early days of feminist publishing, but I hope I’ve excited you about those times and those books enough to want to learn more. And how might you learn more?
Figure 34: The Friedman Feminist Press Collection at CSU

When I retired from teaching women’s studies at CU, I decided to establish an archive in my friend June Friedman’s name of the feminist press-published books I’d collected during my dissertation research. Thanks to the support of special collections librarian Janet Bishop and others who have donated books and funding, that collection, along with books contributed by CSU’s GLBTQQA center, will be “out into the world” here at Colorado State University. Be sure you get a flyer about the Friedman Feminist Press Collection before you leave. I hope you all have a chance to visit and read and use and recommend these books in the years to come. Bring your students; assign papers and projects; get other scholars interested; donate to expand the collection; and just come and pick up a book to experience the delightful, controversial, inspirational, and still radical words that were written by feminist authors and published by feminist presses.

To encourage students to visit the Friedman Feminist Press Collection, we’ve created an annual award for essays that make substantial use of the collection’s original sources in feminist/lesbian literature and second-wave feminist
studies through multi-genre works by feminist publishers of the 1970s and 80s who brought women and women’s words out into the world.

I’m thrilled to see the work of The Feminist Group carried on today in powerful feminist activism, especially by young groups like We Are Ultraviolet who use smart and witty infographics in their campaigns against sexual violence and discrimination. This taking-the-medium-into-our-own-hands activism creates the kind of messages that would have made feminist presses proud. It’s an activism that names and defines and broadcasts the up-front, honest truth of women’s experiences. If you don’t know Ultraviolet, look them up at weareultraviolet.org.

Figure 35: June Friedman, Nov. 29, 1958 – June 11, 1982

For those of you who lived through the early days of second wave feminism, I hope the books in the Friedman Feminist Press Collection help you remember how far we’ve come. But we all know how much further we have to go. So for those of you who are younger, who are coming to feminism after many of its goals have been achieved, I hope you will take the time to look back at how the movement catapulted women forward into a new world. I hope you will draw inspiration from the work of the feminists before you (gesture to audience), for
continuing that work is the best way to honor the lives of feminist activists like Dr. Patsy Boyer and June Friedman.