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Writing to Stay in History: Women, Politics and New Deal Archives

Writing to stay in history has long been a perilous pursuit for women in U.S. politics. When Hillary Clinton's account of her unsuccessful campaign to become the first woman President was published in September 2017, there was serious debate about whether the autobiographical project was a legitimate one. Salon.com published a list of the "6 harshest reactions to Hillary Clinton's new book- from Democrats," and included the views of a former supporter who is quoted as saying: "I wish she'd just shut the f**k up and go away."¹ Writing a book review for the New York Times, Jennifer Senior was compelled to remind readers that the first woman to secure a major party nomination for the Presidency (and as Clinton is keen to remind her readers- the popular vote) might be qualified to offer her perspective on *What Happened*.² If Clinton is unique in coming so close to winning the top job in American politics, the quest for authority by female autobiographers is as old as the creation of the genre itself.³ But it is not autobiographical traditions alone which have made women suspect narrators of their lives: archive creation and practice has also thrown into doubt women's authorial legitimacy, whether as historical subjects or historians. Since the women's movement, critics of autobiography have questioned 'traditional' models that privilege the public careers of white male subjects and posit an authoritative, unified "I," while scholars of the archive now view archives as knowledge producers in their own right, capable of making, as well as being shaped by racialized and gendered epistemologies.⁴

This essay explores the relationship between autobiography and archives through a study of archive making and memoir writing during and about the New Deal. In particular it focuses on the writing and collections of New Deal feminist and political campaigner Molly Dewson. Dewson was at the centre of a network of women who drove legislative social reform in and around government in the 1920s and 1930s. A supporter of Franklin D.

¹"6 harshest reactions to Hillary Clinton's new book- from Democrats," https://www.salon.com/2017/09/09/6-harshest-reactions-to-hillary-clintons-new-book-by-democrats_partner/ 9 Sept. 2017. Last accessed 11 Oct. 2017.

²Jennifer Senior, "Hillary Clinton Opens Up About 'What Happened,' With Candor, Defiance and Dark Humor," in "Books of the Times", 12 Sept. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/books/review-hillary-clinton-what-happened.html> last accessed 11 Oct. 2017

³Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), xi.

⁴On gendered models of autobiography see Nussbaum. Also Estelle Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*, (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1986) and Malin Lidstrom Brock, *Writing Feminist Lives: The Biographical Battles Over Betty Freidan, Germaine Greer, Gloria Steinem and Simone de Beauvoir*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). On archives, see for example Bonnie Smith, "Gender and the Practices of Scientific Research: The Seminar and Archival Research in the Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No.4.1995; Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2005). Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance' *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109.

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Roosevelt (FDR) she mobilised women to vote and campaign for the Democratic Party and lobbied successfully to get women appointed to positions in government during the New Deal. In the 1940s and early 1950s, she prepared, but never published a memoir of her public life. Instead she deposited copies of the manuscript, alongside her carefully curated papers, in two newly established archives: the inaugural Presidential Library, established by FDR on his estate in Hyde Park in 1941 and the new Women's Archives at Radcliffe College, one of the successors to the short-lived World Centre for Women's Archives. In both the unpublished memoir and throughout her archive, Dewson blurred the lines between archive making and autobiographical writing. Cognisant of how easily women's authorial voices were marginalized, especially in the political sphere, Dewson drew on masculine authorities to legitimize her truth claims even as she laid claim to alternative sources and modes of expression. In her manuscript and archive, Dewson legitimates her texts in a number of ways: she shows the rules which shape her writing, highlights the connections between her memoir and her 'crafted' archive, and repeatedly cites female-authored sources. If, as feminist critics have argued, it is in the act of reading, rather than the act of writing, that women lose their authority to represent their experiences, Dewson imagined ways of being read differently. Blurring the line between archive and formal memoir positioned the autobiographical "self" within a broader collective of women's self-writing, a space from which women might both "enter and stay in history."⁵

Monumental Archives

When the historian and archives activist Mary Ritter Beard set up the World Centre for Women's Archives (WCWA) in the mid-1930s, New Deal women were prominent sponsors and donors. In 1938, Beard tried to persuade their most high profile sponsor, Eleanor Roosevelt, to donate a substantial portion of her records to the new venture. Roosevelt first declined the invitation on the grounds that she had "no papers of interest." Her assertion hardly rung true: the First Lady had long determined to document her political work for herself, writing a daily syndicated newspaper column, "My Day," for over twenty five years. Ignoring her protestations, Beard continued to urge the First Lady to donate materials documenting women's history "before the President ... "grab[s]" all your papers for Hyde Park." This time, Roosevelt demurred on the grounds that she need consult the wishes of her family.⁶

Beard's correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt reveals her concern that the Women's Archive might be derailed by the competition posed by the Presidential Library.

⁵ Brock, 27. Alexandra Juhasz, "A Process Archive: The Grand Circularity of Woman's Building Video," in *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building*, (Otis College of Arts and Design, 2011), 111.

⁶ Roosevelt handwritten note on Beard to Eleanor Roosevelt, 3 Jan. 1938; Also Malvina T. Scheider to Glenna S. Tinnin, 13 Jan. 1938 in Series 100, Box 678; Beard to Eleanor Roosevelt, 22 Nov. 1939, Series 100, Box 681; Eleanor Roosevelt to Beard, 28 Nov. 1938, Series 100, Box 327 in Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, (ERP, FDRL), Hyde Park, New York.

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She was right to be apprehensive: though the Women's Archive counted Eleanor Roosevelt as one of its sponsors, her husband's library had an advisory committee comprising the U.S. national archivist, R.D.W. Connor, university presidents as well as many eminent historians including Mary Beard's husband Charles A. Beard. Ultimately Eleanor Roosevelt decided to leave her papers to the FDR Library, but other prominent women New Dealers did not. Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in a Presidential cabinet – as Secretary of Labor – donated the bulk of her papers to Columbia University. Hyde Park was, in Perkins' view “too inaccessible” and she feared her papers would be buried if she donated them to the “greedy” Library of Congress.⁷ Perkins did however leave a portion of her papers to the Radcliffe Women's Archive after the collapse of the WCWA in 1941.

The seeds of the ambitious WCWA lay in a collection of international feminist and pacifist materials brought to the United States by the Hungarian activist and political refugee Rosika Schwimmer in the 1920s and 1930s. Headquartered in New York City and led by Beard, the WCWA was sponsored by a network of prominent, professional white women. It was established at a time when war threatened to engulf Europe and fear of displacement and wholesale archive destruction shaped archival practice on both sides of the Atlantic.⁸ Between 1935 and 1941, the WCWA had a strong focus on U.S. history, seeking pledges from donors across the United States and setting up state chapters. But it also aspired to be as “all embracing as possible,” and to collect the papers of “all races and classes” and so it solicited women's papers from around the world. With several hundred dues-paying members and trained librarians, the WCWA hoped to launch a “majestic cultural movement.”⁹ This sense of being part of a great movement was one that also shaped the architects of the New Deal. Women who had been the first to serve in federal government positions, and who had shaped the most significant welfare legislation to be enacted by any U.S. government to date, found they had split loyalties.

The overlapping projects to establish a Women's Archive and a New Deal archive presented both a quandary and unprecedented opportunity for the first generation of American women to hold public office. By 1941 however, the WCWA had floundered: the pressures of fundraising, lack of interest from major philanthropists required to support such an ambitious project and divisions within the broader women's movement about which feminist histories were worth preserving, brought the project to a premature end. Nevertheless, the women's archive movement constituted an important even defining aspect

⁷ Elizabeth Warden report on her meeting with Frances Perkins on 16 May 1955, Records of the Arthur & Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advance Study, Harvard University, Cambridge MA. (hereafter Schlesinger Library), Series 2:1, Box 30.

⁸ Ernst Posner, “Public Records under Military Occupation,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Jan., 1944), 213-227.

⁹“ Beard File, Summary A-9” and “Directions for State Chairman of the Archives Committee,” in Mary Ritter Beard Papers, Schlesinger Library, Box 1, Folder 1.

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of international feminist activism in the 1920 and 1930s. In Europe and the United States women activists laboured to collect and preserve the archives of suffrage, peace and other reform movements in woman-centred and directed collections. The Women's Service Library in London, the International Archives for the Women's Movement in Amsterdam (IAV) and the WCWA in New York grew out of and reflected the movements they documented. But they also echoed the archival institutions and hierarchical practices of their time. The founders of both the WCWA and the IAV imagined they could create an international archive capable of collecting together in one place the history of all women, and both had aspirations to get there first.¹⁰ In this sense both women's archives shared the patriarchal aspiration that shaped Roosevelt's Presidential Library Project. The idea that the records of women's lives could or should be collected in one place relies upon a "monumental logic," in which size is a measure of value.¹¹ It also suggests that completeness is both desirable and possible. The history of the WCWA however, suggests that ambitions for completeness obscure historical and contemporary differentials of power among producers of knowledge. In her study of the National Council of Negro Women and its attempt to work with the WCWA to document black women's history, Bettye Collier Thomas points to the limitations of the WCWA's approach to collecting diverse histories. White elite women were able to imagine incorporating archive collections of women of color and working class women, but they could not envisage sharing control of the archive. Although a couple of black women were invited to become sponsors after 1938, there were never any African American women on the WCWA's Board of Directors. "Black women," she concludes, "were invited to participate when the project was beginning to fail."¹²

The history of the WCWA illustrates the problems facing women who have attempted to create monumental women's archives. Although relatively empowered, women's archive projects led by prominent white women have lacked access to the scale of funding available to comparable 'universal' or male-centric projects. While the WCWA tried to realize Beard's vision of an inclusive women's history which collected the records and artefacts of farm labourers, factory workers as well as Native and African American women, in practice they went after the papers of "great" women that attracted publicity, prestige and funds.¹³ In

¹⁰ Dagmar Wernitznig, "Memory is Power: Rosa Manus, Rosika Schwimmer and the Struggle about Establishing an International Women's Archive," in Myriam Everard and Francisca de Haan (eds.), *Rosa Manus (1881-1942): The International Life and Legacy of a Jewish Dutch Feminist* (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2017), 207-239, esp. 239.

¹¹ Wernimont uses the phrase monumental logic to explain the recent "celebration" of archives especially in regard to funding practices for digital projects and the imperative of "impact." Jacqueline Wernimont, "Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives," *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 7:1, 2013, para. 5

¹² Bettye Collier Thomas, "Towards Black Feminism: The Creation of the Bethune Museum Archives," *Special Collections: Women's Collections: Libraries, Archives, and Consciousness*, Spring/Summer 1986, Vol 3: 3/4, 44-45; 52.

¹³ Julie des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 236.

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“Hidden Archives,” Katrina Powell considers “how we use the archive without reinforcing the power it represents.”¹⁴ I am interested in histories of how women have found ways to make archives and write their lives within existing patriarchal structures while resisting the power they represent. The WCWA tried to find ways to do this, but ultimately it failed to create a new structure. A different example of how women worked within but also challenged traditional models of archive creation can be seen in Molly Dewson’s archival and writing practice.

Molly Dewson and the Crafting of the Archive

Described as America’s “first female political boss”, Dewson was Director of the Women’s Division of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) during the 1930s.¹⁵ In this role she was able to marshal eighty thousand women to bring out the Democratic vote at election time and to win unprecedented government appointments for women. Most high-profile was the appointment of Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in a President’s Cabinet. Dewson also served in government, as a member of the Social Security Board between 1937 and 1938. The papers documenting these experiences she donated to the Presidential Library between 1944 and her death in 1961. However she also left a portion of her papers to the new Women’s Archives at Radcliffe College. Launched in August 1943, the Women’s Archive took over some of the materials collected and pledged to Beard’s WCWA after it collapsed in 1941. Dewson’s donation consisted primarily of papers relating to the minimum wage struggle and her time at the National Consumers League, the suffrage movement and some Democratic Party materials.

When Dewson began depositing her papers in archives she was in her late sixties. She had been collecting and curating records and artefacts documenting her private and public life for many years. As her biographer Susan Ware has explored in a photo essay, Dewson and her partner Polly Porter compiled more than twenty photographic scrapbooks documenting their fifty-two-year lesbian partnership.¹⁶ The photographs testify to the significance both women placed on their shared lives: the dairy farm they ran in western Massachusetts, their holiday home in Castine, Maine, where they entertained their network of women friends and where Dewson happily returned between electioneering. While Dewson made no effort to hide her relationship with Porter, her archival practice suggests she understood their life together as a thing apart from her public career. The couple’s pictorial testimony to their loving partnership was a private archive and, of all of her collections, the most important to Dewson. She reputedly told her house keeper “If there is ever a fire at

¹⁴ Katrina M. Powell, “Hidden Archives: Revealing Untold Stories,” *Journal of American Studies* p1. Vol??

¹⁵ Susan Ware, *Partner & I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, Yale, 1987), xi.

¹⁶ Ware, *Partner and I*, 106-132.

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Moss Acre... the first things you are to save is the scrapbooks.”¹⁷ The scrapbooks were kept, long after both partners’ deaths, within the family.¹⁸ The archive of Dewson’s public career and other political women however was a different matter. In addition to ten “fat colourful scrapbooks” brimming with campaign leaflets, fliers and newspaper clippings, Dewson kept and carefully organized her voluminous correspondence with New Deal politicians and officials.¹⁹ Before, and especially following the election of Roosevelt in 1932, Dewson also kept notes and copies of her public speeches and as well as letters from and about the innumerable women whose appointments to public office she had done much to promote. Since Dewson devoted considerable time and effort writing letters to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt as well as a whole host of government officials to promote a particular woman to a government job, her outgoing correspondence reads like a collective biography of political women and welfare reformers during the New Deal. The collective biography so visible in her archive is also manifest in her memoir.

Crafting her memoir and archive alongside each other in the 1940s seems to have been crucial in allowing Dewson to envisage an alternative model to that of the linear, developmental narrative more typical of autobiography.²⁰ Not that she hadn’t tried linear. Dewson began thinking about writing her memoir as soon as she stepped down from her role on the Social Security Board in 1938. “Two publishers have asked me to,” she confided to Eleanor Roosevelt, “but I don’t believe I could be good at it. I am a born doer and whereas I can often making a telling statement, a book is very different.”²¹ Starting in 1939, her first attempt to craft a traditional life story with chapters on her childhood, education and suffrage activism, did not get very far. Such a structure did not suit Dewson and she abandoned the project, explaining to a friend in 1943 “I toyed with writing my life history but it turned out rather dull.”²² Instead, in the 1940s Dewson started organizing, cataloguing and retrospectively annotating her papers. Crafting an archive and memoir that could be animated not only by Dewson, but the records of many other women, appealed to this ‘born doer.’

The creation of two new archives interested in the papers of New Deal women clearly shaped Dewson’s plans for her collection. At the same time, Dewson’s archives document her influence on the collection policies of both the FDR Library and the Radcliffe archive. In March 1940, the President wrote to Dewson asking her views on whether the records of the DNC might be a valuable addition to the new library under construction at Hyde Park.²³

¹⁷ Ware, *Partner and I*, 106.

¹⁸ Ware accessed the scrapbooks for her 1987 biography. Dewson’s great-niece, Virginia Bourne subsequently donated them to the Castine Historical Society. Since 1988 microfilm copy of the scrapbooks dating up to Dewson’s death in 1962 are available on microfilm at the Schlesinger Library.

¹⁹ Dewson, “An Aid to the End,” 3.

²⁰ Susan Ware, “Writing Women’s Lives: One Historian’s Perspective,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40: 3 (2010): 416.

²¹ Ware, *Partner and I*, 250; Dewson to Eleanor Roosevelt, 25 Oct. 1938, ER, FDRL.

²² There are only fragments of this early manuscript. See Ware, 250.

²³ FDR memo to Dewson, 28 Mar. 1940, President’s Personal File (PPF), FDRL, Box 5689.

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Dewson responded with enthusiasm, recognizing that the records of the Women's Division of the DNC would have a safe berth. Yet she also believed the FDR Library should document women's broader role in shaping political life in the 1930s. She argued, successfully, for the inclusion of private records documenting women's influence, such as those of the National Consumer League and other organizations in which women had played a prominent role and which had shaped FDR's political reforms as New York State Governor.²⁴ Dewson was also able to exert influence on the management of the library, pushing for the inclusion prominent women, such as Marguerite Wells of the National League of Women Voters on the Library's advisory committee.²⁵

When it came to her own archive however, Dewson weighed her options carefully. In correspondence with Roosevelt and with Dr. R.D.W Connor, the Archivist of the U.S. National Archive who was helping the President with his library, Dewson breezily described the plans for her own archive. There were, she wrote, volumes of "literature" samples, clippings and pictures not all personal, and letters received" that she meant to donate to the WCWA if "no-one in my family was interested."²⁶ As she had perhaps intended, Connor responded promptly, urging Dewson to consider donating her papers to the FDR Library. The Presidential Library was, he suggested, an "ideal repository" for material that would "complement and supplement" the President's own. Dewson's collection would, he argued, be "far more valuable to students" if it belonged to a large collection documenting a particular historical period "than if it was preserved in a separate institution."²⁷ Dewson was not willing to surrender her entire collection to the President's library however. In her reply to Connor she explained her attachment, and that of her family, to her archive: "I don't know if I can manage it," she confessed, for "When I told my nieces I was going to give my scrapbooks to the FDR Library they wailed."²⁸

Four years later, and with the WCWA no longer an option, Dewson made a decision. Beginning in 1944, and spanning a period of nearly eighteen years, Dewson organized and donated the bulk of her New Deal archive to the FDR Library. Her collection at Hyde Park includes her ten bound volumes of letters and twelve scrapbooks spanning the years between 1932 and 1955. It also contains clippings and notices of her career, alongside correspondence and documents chronicling her life in politics. Crucially, the archive also records how Dewson came to reflect upon and organize her archive in the 1940s and 1950s.²⁹ Retrospective comments overlaid on documents written in the 1930s, and cross-references to other parts of the archive as well as to her unpublished memoir, suggest an author determined

²⁴ Dewson, "An Aide to the End," 18.

²⁵ FDR memo to Harry Hopkins, 5 Dec. 1941, PPF, FDRL, Box 5869.

²⁶ Dewson to FDR, 2 Apr. 1940, PPF, FDRL, Box 5869,

²⁷ Connor to Dewson, 9 Apr. 1940, PPF, FDRL, Box 5869

²⁸ Dewson to Connor, 10 Apr. 1940, PPF, FDRL, Box 5869

²⁹ Dewson to Herman Kahn, 4 Dec. 1948, FDR Library, Box 59. 487.

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to show the craftedness of the archive.³⁰ Dewson made no effort to present her collection as a body of ‘raw’ primary sources, awaiting rescue and interpretation by the conquering male historian, archivist, or even Presidential Library. Rather she compiled a compendium of sources and references for future historians to write a women-centered history of the New Deal.

Dewson the archivist haunts the collection of Dewson the political campaigner. Her retrospective, handwritten notes frequently appear on correspondence, explaining who a particular individual was, or the broader context of a particular issue. For example, Dewson attached a note to her series of correspondence with Wilbur Cohen explaining his role as an important aid to Arthur Altmeyer—and Dewson herself—at the Social Security Board.³¹ For male correspondents, Dewson sometimes added a note to explain their position vis a vis women. For example, her folder on Louis Howe, FDR’s political advisor over twenty years, includes mimeographed excerpts from Howe’s published articles on Dewson and the role of the Women’s Division. Staped to the files is Dewson’s handwritten note explaining that “he had confidence in the way the Women’s Division was run.”³² At the front of the file of correspondence with Ruth Bryan Owen (U.S. ambassador to Denmark), Dewson directs users to “read about Ruth Bryan Owen in “An Aid to the End.”³³ Accompanying a letter from Mary Norton, the New Jersey Congresswoman, Dewson includes a note pointing the reader to some “rum tales” about Norton as chair of the Labor Committee.³⁴

In revealing the process behind the making of archives, Dewson’s collection claims an authority derived from self-reflection and understanding of how knowledge production is shaped by memory, archive practice and the historical discipline. Dewson’s Hyde Park collection also makes explicit the relationship between archive practice and autobiography through the inclusion of two contrasting political memoirs: a heavily annotated copy of a best-selling political memoir written by a New Deal insider, *Jim Farley’s Story*, and Dewson’s own, unpublished two volume manuscript, “An Aid to the End.”

New Deal Memoirs: *Jim Farley’s Story* and “An Aid to the End.”

“Pah!” and “Oh Yeah” are just a few of the interjections engraved by Molly Dewson on her copy of *Jim Farley’s Story*.³⁵ Farley was Democratic Party Chairman and Roosevelt’s campaign manager during the New Deal years. Dewson and Farley had worked together on

³⁰ One note placed among letters documenting the 1932 Presidential Election reads: “Whatever I saved from these years is in my scrapbooks.” Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4. Franklin D. Roosevelt folder.

³¹ See Cohen- Dewson correspondence in, Dewson Papers, FDRL. Box 1, Wilbur Cohen folder.

³² Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 2, Louis Howe folder.

³³ Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 3, Ruth Bryan Owen folder.

³⁴ Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 3, Mary T. Norton folder.

³⁵ Dewson included her annotated copy of Farley’s memoir in her archive at FDRL. All references refer to this copy. *Jim Farley’s Story: The Roosevelt Years*, (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948). 33, 41.

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campaigns over many years. Even if they had not always seen eye-to-eye, the two skilled campaigners retained a wary respect for one another. In 1940, however, Farley made a disastrous bid to become the Democrat's Presidential candidate. Following Roosevelt's unprecedented election to a third Presidential term, Farley retreated to New York where he continued to serve as state party chairman and wrote a memoir tracing the highs and lows of his relationship with Roosevelt.

Published in March 1948, Farley was not the first to try and shape the Roosevelt legacy. In a review of books published in the two years following FDR's death in 1945 Karl Schriftgiesser traced early efforts to shape the "Roosevelt legend" by the President's son Elliot Roosevelt, Frances Perkins and the historian Henry Steele Commager, among others. Ranging from biographical portraits of FDR to memoir, their stated aim, not always executed, was to offer an interpretation of the President.³⁶ Farley's memoir, however, was focussed on the demise of his formerly successful partnership with the President. Like many political insider stories, Farley's memoir was ghost-written. The man he chose to put pen to his feelings was Walter Trohan, a journalist who had worked the Washington bureau of the Roosevelt-hating Chicago Tribune in the 1930s. *Jim Farley's Story* was an instant hit. By April it had reached number two on the best-sellers list where it remained for the next two months ahead of Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*.³⁷ It was sympathetically reviewed in the New York Times, where James Hagerty made much of Farley's credibility, insisting that his facts were beyond challenge:

Few will dispute his assertions of fact particularly as it is known that his reports of conversations with Mr. Roosevelt (and other leading members of the Democratic Party) were written from memorandum made at the time."³⁸

That both Farley's contemporaneous memorandum and later interpretation of events might be fragmentary or in any way influenced by Farley's disastrous bid for the Democratic nomination was not entertained by Farley or his reviewer. Farley proclaimed the authority of his account at the outset. Asserting his "sincerity" and "high regard for the truth," the case for Jim Farley's credibility, was Jim Farley's credibility:

It is my belief that history should be told by those who had a hand in its shaping....During these decisive years, I kept extensive notes on each day's happenings.³⁹

³⁶ Karl Schriftgiesser, "The Incipient Roosevelt Legend," New York Times, 26 Jan. 1947, BR1.

³⁷ Schriftgiesser, who had been critical of other self-serving memoirs in his New York Times article of 1947, featured Farley's account as one of the "10 best" books for Christmas. Karl Schriftgiesser "The Books of 1948: A Dozen Christmas Lists of Ten Best," New York Times, 5 Dec. 1948, BR3.

³⁸ James A. Hagerty, "The Third Term Controversy as James A. Farley Sees It," New York Times, 7 Mar. 1948, BR3.

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Farley had not, he insisted, relied on memory, “but on a living record.” This record could be trusted, he explains, because it was made “for my own use, with no thought toward publication.” Ever the public servant, Farley uses his notes to craft his narrative only at the insistence of friends that he “owed it to history.”⁴⁰

The success of Farley’s memoir prompted Dewson to document and contest what she saw as a misleading, self-serving narrative posing as ‘history.’ Her refutation of Farley’s account clearly shaped the writing of her own memoir. But it was also manifested in her decision to write over and disrupt Farley’s smooth narrative. One of the most fascinating items in Dewson’s collection at the FDR Library is her copy of Farley’s book, replete with her vehement rebuttals and innumerable X marks. Making plain her intention to repurpose this troubled account, Dewson wrote her own name firmly on the frontispiece and pasted a newspaper clipping from the *Sunday Mirror*, documenting her response to it:

Mary Dewson (“Molly” to her pals) was one of FDR’s earliest and most devoted associates....James Farley sent her a copy of his book about FDR...She returned it with this note: “The Lord forgives- but I don’t.”⁴¹

If Dewson could not bear to receive a copy of the book from Farley himself, she clearly procured another copy in order to record her views of it for posterity. Interrupted by Dewson’s annotations, under linings and large crosses placed in the margins, Farley’s text is transformed from a polished coherent narrative documenting the significance of a seasoned campaigner and talented glad-hander, to a case study exemplifying the problem of the authoritative, unified “I” of the autobiographical text.

Dewson unpicks and challenges Farley’s statements throughout the nearly four hundred page text. Detailed corrections to what Dewson perceives as anything ranging from inaccuracies to outright lies, are supplemented by regular underscoring of text and crosses in the margins to flag the most egregious examples of Farley’s self-aggrandizement. So too, Dewson highlights passages revealing of what she considered his major failing, his lack of interest in the policies and ideas of the New Deal. Markings come thick and fast as the narrative progresses from how Farley got Roosevelt elected President to how Roosevelt prevented Farley from inheriting the office of the President. Dewson found it deeply depressing. Farley’s account was, she wrote to former FDR secretary Grace Tully, “so sordid and so psychopathic it has thrown me into a deep gloom.”⁴² But Dewson’s ire was also provoked by what Farley left out and in particular his failure to address the role of women in the Democratic Party and political life more broadly. As Dewson recorded in her own

³⁹ *Jim Farley’s Story: The Roosevelt Years*, (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948), 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Frontispiece, *Jim Farley’s Story*. The newspaper clipping was from a column by Walter Winchell in the *Sunday Mirror*, 4 Apr. 1948.

⁴² Ware, *Partner & I*, 251.

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memoir, Farley dedicated “just one sentence of eighteen words in a 377 page book,” to the work of the Women’s Division of the DNC – a poor summary, Dewson felt, of her innovative work in engaging thousands of women to support FDR and bring out the women’s vote.⁴³

In both her memoir and archive, Dewson sought to shape how Farley’s memoir was read by others: in addition to writing copious notes over her copy, she drew attention to its most glaring deficiencies in her own memoir. Where Farley pompously claimed to be able to produce an authoritative and accurate record of the past, because he had been there shaping it, Dewson took care to present her own methods in opposition to such a presumption. Her growing awareness of the contradiction between the fragmentary nature of archives on the one hand, and the authoritative claims of political memoirs and historical writing on the other, shaped her approach to writing and curating the archive of her own career. The process of writing a memoir and preparing her archive was a slow, and at times, painful one for Dewson. The two projects overlapped, continuing intermittently through the 1940s and into the early 1950s. By 1952, Dewson had produced a two volume memoir, organized and donated much, though not all of her New Deal papers to the FDR Library and the archive of her earlier career to the Radcliffe Women’s Archives. The length of time devoted to the curation of her papers and the production of an unpublished memoir to be read alongside her archival collection, might suggest Dewson’s efforts at autobiography were not successful. But Dewson was not attempting to create a “clean” or finished account of her life. Rather she understood archiving and writing women into New Deal history as a continuation of her work in promoting women’s issues and women to public office in the 1930s.

Quest for Authority

Written between 1949 and 1951, covering 372 pages, with an extensive appendix of women who served in public office during the Roosevelt administration, “An Aid to the End,” is hard to categorize. It is, in part, a research guide: Dewson frequently interrupts her narrative to direct readers to other parts of the archive as well as to important collections on women in politics held elsewhere. It also reads like a collective feminist biography. Foregrounding the roles and achievements of women who helped get Roosevelt elected, and who led welfare reform outside and within the administration, the manuscript includes long lists and descriptions of women who worked in government. “An Aid to the End” positions women at the heart of the Democratic Party and as architects of the New Deal in the 1930s. Centering the perspectives of women and drawing on female-authored sources, it is also an attempt to assert women’s authority to write the history of the New Deal too.

Written for historians and not, as she explained to one researcher, for “the scavengers of the press,” Dewson deposited copies of her manuscript in her archives at Radcliffe and the FDR Library, reserving her own copy for her alma mater Wellesley, “when I completely

⁴³ *Jim Farley’s Story*, 15; Dewson, “An Aid to the End,” 40-41.

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‘fade away.’”⁴⁴ It is significant that Dewson imagined her memoir being read in an archive and in particular amidst her broader collection. For those who turned its pages would be immersed in and have to access to other records and accounts, whether of the New Deal at the FDR Library or of women’s history at the Radcliffe archive. For Dewson never understood or attempted to present her memoir as a complete or comprehensive source on FDR, on women and the New Deal, or even on the subject of Molly Dewson. Depositing her memoir within her collections at the Presidential and Women’s Archives, “An Aid to the End,” can be read as an intervention in the politics of archive making and autobiography. Where Farley insisted his was an authoritative account, Dewson resisted narratives codes which assumed fullness and finishedness. Emphasizing instead the constructed nature of the archive, Dewson was able to imagine a form of archive making and self-writing which revealed, rather than concealed its process from the reader. For women to “stay in history” they needed to find not just new ways of writing, but alternative ways of being read.

In her discussion of feminist literary recovery projects, Jacqueline Wernimont discusses the ways in which digital projects often imagine users as “welcoming an unchallenging, “clean” experience that facilitates comfortable and easy interaction.”⁴⁵ Wernimont argues for the need to document and publish the expressions of rules which shape how digital literary archives are organized and searched. When the processes which shape the construction of digital literary archive projects are made visible they are, she argues, no longer “an expression of scholarly fact or opinion” but understood as “generative, as productive of a model of the text, but not the sole or authoritative model.”⁴⁶ Dewson refuses to present her readers with a “clean experience.” In her unpublished manuscript, the overlaid comments on Jim Farley’s memoir and in her retrospectively annotated archives, Dewson shows us the rules which shape the crafting of her archive. By continually cross-referencing between unpublished memoir and archive, Dewson draws attention to the “craftedness” that shapes the production of both. At the same time, she questions the imperative of autobiography to weave together contradictory and incomplete fragments into a single, coherent whole: “I can give no coherent account of events,” she tells her reader.⁴⁷ By emphasizing the connection between the “incoherent” narrative and the “crafted archive” Dewson imagines a reader empowered to use her archive, to construct an alternative narrative. In this way, Dewson’s memoir and broader archive can be considered an archive of process. For documentary film maker and film studies scholar Alexandra Juhasz, the archive of process is one in which process is valued and documented. “A theory and practice for being seen and remembered,” it foregrounds the process of preservation and serves to disrupt

⁴⁴ Dewson to Mr. Mitchell, n.d., Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 2, Felix Frankfurter folder; Dewson to Tully, 21 Apr. 1951, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Grace Tully folder.

⁴⁵ Jacqueline Wernimont, “Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 7: 1, 2013: 12-13; 14

⁴⁶ Wernimont, 13.

⁴⁷ “An Aid to the End,” 1: 96.

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linear narratives which frame documentary film production, and, we might add, autobiographical writing.⁴⁸

That Dewson chose to draw attention to the fragmentary nature and partial perspective of her memoir might seem surprising. As Estelle Jelinek and Malin Lidstrom Brock have argued, such characteristics have long been dubbed feminine, that is to say disruptive to the existing order but more easily silenced and dismissed. Tracing a women's autobiographical tradition, Jelinek argued it was always constructed and must be read differently to the self-writing of men.⁴⁹ Dewson understood that her account would be read differently to the autobiographies of her male contemporaries. Not only was it written by a woman, but it was also about women. Other women who had written accounts of FDR, including Frances Perkins and Grace Tully, had taken care to place Roosevelt at the centre of their accounts. Even so, Tully's book was dismissed as "pleasant, feminine chatter."⁵⁰ Dewson recognized that what she wrote and how she wrote would be shaped by her imagined reader. Accordingly she restricted readership of Volume 1, especially, concerned that her "frank analysis" might hurt the feelings of former colleagues such as Farley.⁵¹ Dewson therefore claims legitimacy because she has not written an account shaped by contemporaneous expectations of what a political autobiography should look like: "Because this background material is brought together for the use of historians only," she explains, I have written with complete frankness."⁵² Writing for the archive, she need not stitch together one coherent narrative to hold together the contradictions of political lives. Dewson's title similarly serves this purpose, as she explains in the manuscript: "I am no historian, just an aid to an end."⁵³ As an aid, she is not obliged to provide the finished product.

In auto/biography, the 'life' is presented as the case study used to explore ideology, an example of how, or how not, to live.⁵⁴ Dewson's memoir and archive offer a case study to explore how women might both enter and also stay in history. Yet "An Aid to the End," presents no one narrative of how women write themselves into history. Dewson both positions women authored sources at the centre of her narrative and claims validation for her project from influential men. Dewson shows her readers the source base upon which she drew for her memoir and directs them to consult it for themselves. "I have gone through ten fat and colourful scrapbooks and consulted my line-a-day books for meetings, conferences and dates. The Democratic Digest, an excellent magazine prepared and published by the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee from 1935 up to today, has been

⁴⁸ Alexandra Juhasz, "A Process Archive: The Grand Circularity of Woman's Building Video," in *Doin' It In Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building*, (Otis College of Art and Design, 2011), 98-99.

⁴⁹ Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography*: Brock, *Writing Feminist Lives*, 25-26.

⁵⁰ Nash K. Burger, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, 26 Sept. 1949, 23.

⁵¹ Dewson to Tully, 21 Apr. 1951, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Grace Tully Folder.

⁵² "An Aid to the End," 1:4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1:10.

⁵⁴ Brock, 6.

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invaluable.” Importantly, she validates this material by telling her readers that it will be deposited at the FDR Library, “following President Roosevelt’s request made to me personally.” The text of FDR’s request, written in a memo to Dewson in 1940, is reprinted in full, on page three of her memoir.⁵⁵

Dewson also legitimizes the project by showing the reader her decision making processes. She regularly breaks away from the narrative sequence to reflect on her methodology. Forty or so pages into her memoir, and after Roosevelt has secured his first Presidential nomination, Dewson pauses the narrative to ponder “The Difficulties of a Minor Historian.” Reflecting on the nature of political history, Dewson wonders about its capacity to convey the experiences of women entering formal politics for the first time. Political history, as it is traditionally conceived, Dewson reasons, “can be stated briefly.” It can, for example, merely describe events: a bill was passed and “created such and such dire results.”⁵⁶ But Dewson’s narrative does not fit easily into “authorized and institutionalized modes of expression.”⁵⁷ Accounting for the unprecedented involvement of women in political campaigns and government required her to stretch, and even exceed, the parameters of political memoir. Accordingly Dewson breaks off her narrative to ask her reader to consider the appropriateness of interrupting narrative. Is it “less distracting to the reader to complete the small instance at once?” she ponders, or to pull together in one place a series of incidences which take place over a period of time. Her most difficult decision, she confesses, is where to place Jim Farley. Disregarding “time,” she concedes, “badly interrupts the continuity of my experiences and my reaction to them.” On the other hand, pulling together incidences relating to Farley, allows her to consider “how Farley appeared from the woman’s angle.”⁵⁸ Placing women’s perspective and experiences, rather than the development of Farley or any one individual career at the centre of the analysis, reframes the perspective from which we read political history.

It is through her use of the archive in “An Aid to the End” that Dewson is able to make the woman’s angle, rather than Farley, Roosevelt or indeed Dewson herself, the subject of her memoir. Inserting archival sources at regular intervals throughout the text, interrupts the narrative and any notion of a unified, autobiographical “I.” Both volumes are filled with quotations and letters from women who campaigned for and held office during the Roosevelt years. Perhaps most extraordinary of all are the final thirteen or so pages of volume one where Dewson lists and describes the important posts held by women in government departments, bureaus and New Deal agencies. The list is extensive, yet Dewson frequently breaks off to warn that her lists are “far from complete” and to outline the immense task

⁵⁵ “An Aid to the End,” 1: 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 38.

⁵⁷ Nussbaum, xiii

⁵⁸ “An Aid to the End,” 1: 38-39.

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ahead for historians wanting to understand the role of women and the history of the New Deal.⁵⁹

Dewson writes women into New Deal history by citing the testimonies of other women. In addition to reprinting letters authored by the First Lady, Dewson references the published memoirs of both Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins. Quoting from *This I Remember* and *The Roosevelt I Knew*, respectively, Dewson chose passages which illustrate the significance of the Women's Division of the DNC and the broader women's network to the two most important women in American politics in the 1930s.⁶⁰ This cycle of citation is significant: the strategy of using other women to affirm the value of a given statement or assessment of affairs was one Dewson deployed regularly throughout her career and to which she draws the reader's attention in both the archive and memoir. For example, Dewson confirms the credibility of Louis Howe essay on "Women's Way in Politics," published in *The Woman's Home Companion*, by citing the verdict of *Democratic Digest*, the publication of the Women's Division.⁶¹

Dewson's quest for authority compels her to consider the limits and benefits of memory. At the very outset Dewson explains that she has also drawn on her "unaided memory" in recalling certain "dramatic incidents," "for how could one forget certain scenes?" she asks her reader.⁶² Yet she also acknowledges how memory is shaped by emotion and experience in ways that serve to neglect the ordinary and the everyday. Reflecting on the early days of the Roosevelt administration, Dewson recalled "the details of those years have sunk into a world of French "horizon blue." Nothing much in my mind stands out unless it is lit up by deep satisfaction, surprise or amusement."⁶³ For example she cannot forget the Governor of Massachusetts describing FDR as a "damned cripple." "I have no record of it," she explains but being from Massachusetts, the phrase stuck.⁶⁴ In other parts of the manuscript, Dewson describes an incident as coming from her "unaided memory."⁶⁵ It is a striking phrase, one that both signals the connection between her archive and memoir writing- reminding the reader of all those "aided," "verifiable," even artificial memories inspired by the archive, but also evoking the title of the manuscript, "An Aid to the End." Though Dewson was helped by her archive in the writing of the memoir, the very act of writing the manuscript also influenced the construction of her archive.

Dewson represents her memoir and wider collection as partial and particular. Indeed she organizes the memoir as a series of scenes framed through the perspective of the viewer

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 135.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2: 209-210.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2: 211.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1:3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1:10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 92. Dewson describes her memory of a difficult conversation between Franklin Roosevelt, and his son Elliot.

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and the relationship with the subject. For example, when Dewson draws wider conclusions about FDR as a leader beyond her own specialist fields she reminds the reader that “I can speak only for my own.”⁶⁶ Speaking “only for my own” is Dewson’s method for representing the relationship between her documented experiences and her memories of them. Similarly she reflects on the evolving nature of her relationship with Jim Farley and how it has been shaped by events subsequent to their political relationship in the 1930s. Her ideas and experiences of Farley fluctuate over time and are shaped by memory and retrospection, how he presented himself in his memoir, and how he appeared to others. As such, while Dewson sought to correct many of the claims of Farley’s memoir, she is not concerned to search for some internal essence of the man. “Farley was an able salesman of James A. Farley,” she notes. The press liked him, and, she admits “I liked and respected him myself as long as he stayed in character.”⁶⁷ Dewson makes no effort to provide the authoritative characterization of Farley usually required in auto/biography. Where auto/biography relies on the idea that the “self” exists and can be represented in text,” Dewson views the self as an ideological construct rather than a truth to uncover.⁶⁸ Trying to account for Farley’s actions, Dewson speculates on his motivations, but is clear “I do not accept my thoughts about Farley’s actions as facts,” a mistake repeated by Farley “many, many times when discussing Roosevelt in his Story.”⁶⁹

From Archive to History book: Dewson and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

In her memoir and archive, Dewson explored a range of methods for legitimizing her truth claims for future historians. But even as she wrestled with her the writing of her manuscript and the organization of her archive, historians were preparing the first drafts of New Deal history. Dewson’s archive would shape these histories; in turn, her memoir writing and archiving were influenced by the relationship she cultivated with one of the earliest and most influential New Deal historians, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Dewson sought out the Harvard historian and Pulitzer prize-winning author of the *Age of Jackson* just as he was starting research for his multi-volume account *The Age of Roosevelt*. Schlesinger seemed like a good bet: beginning in the early 1920s he had taken to print to criticize the historical profession’s ignorance and exclusion of women from history; in 1937, he challenged the *Dictionary of National Biography* for its failure to include women.⁷⁰ In addition to becoming the most influential chronicler of the New Deal, speechwriter and advisor to Democratic Presidential nominees and “court historian” to John F. Kennedy, Schlesinger was an important figure in

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1. 48

⁶⁸ Nussbaum, xii.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1: 43.

⁷⁰ Patricia Miller King, “Forty Years of Collecting on Women: The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College,” *Special Collections* 3: 77; des Jardins, 302n15.

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the development of the Women's Archives at Radcliffe. Involved in the archive from its inception, he encouraged Radcliffe College President Jordan to enlist the expertise of Mary Beard. When the Women's Archives became a separate department of the college in 1950, Schlesinger was appointed to head the Advisory Board. Following his death in 1965, the Library was renamed to honour both Arthur and his wife Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger who had also published on women's history.⁷¹

Dewson initiated their relationship in 1947, tracking Schlesinger down through the Library of Congress.⁷² By the beginning of 1948 the pair corresponded frankly and frequently about the New Deal. Dewson even dropped off the first eighty pages of her unpublished memoir at Schlesinger's home in Cambridge as she journeyed up to Castine in the spring of 1948.⁷³ Although they covered a variety of subjects the two most frequently discussed topics were the role of women in the New Deal and Jim Farley and his reliability as a source for historians of the New Deal. In March 1948 Schlesinger wrote to Dewson to discuss the publication of *Jim Farley's Story*. Their correspondence reveals Dewson's efforts to shape the historians interpretation of Farley:

I have just been reading Farley... I am very much interested in your remark that the quotations from FDR seem out of character, for I had supposed that Farley was probably pretty accurate (or at least honest) in his reporting of detail. Your formulation of the basic differences between Roosevelt and Farley seems to me very exact; but I had supposed that within the political sphere Farley placed a premium on honesty...⁷⁴

Dewson's responded by creating a bespoke archive for the historian. In addition to writing him letters outlining her views and experiences, Dewson sent Schlesinger clippings, private letters and personal recollections, as well as reviews of *Jim Farley's Story*. She also continued to send Schlesinger drafts of her memoir.⁷⁵

Although much of their correspondence reveals Dewson trying to influence Schlesinger, the relationship worked both ways. Like a good dissertation supervisor, Schlesinger offered advice and encouragement to Dewson as she drafted her manuscript. And he encouraged her to name the her diverse source base: "When you finish, I hope you will

⁷¹ Des Jardins, 77-79.

⁷² David C. Mearns to Dewson, 25 Apr. 1947, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder.

⁷³ Ware, Partner & I, 214n23.

⁷⁴ Arthur Schlesinger Jr to Dewson, 14 Mar. 1948, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder.

⁷⁵ For example, in response to a letter from Schlesinger's enquiry about Farley's interest in the New Deal, Dewson explained: "You were interested when I said Jim Farley did not take any interest in FDR's objectives rather in the methods by which they were achieved. The enclosed clipping is Jim's acknowledgement that I spoke the truth." Dewson to Schlesinger, 29 May 1958; also see Schlesinger to Dewson, 28 June 1958, both in Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder. Dewson sent Schlesinger Ralph M. Blagden's review of Farley's memoir: "Jim Farley's Story Reveals the Smallness of his Mind," *New Hampshire Sunday News*, 2 May, 1948, 17, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder.

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add to your preface a description of the materials from which you have drawn in your narrative—how much from memoranda made at the time, how much from letters, how much recollection etc.”⁷⁶ In turn, Dewson had source suggestions for Schlesinger. Delicately, she reminded him that sources authored by and about women might be missing from his research. “Have you ever seen the Democratic Digest, the monthly of the Women’s Division?” she wonders. Perhaps there are other female authored sources he might have missed but which could be corrected through a visit to consult her scrapbooks next time he is in New York? Inviting him to view her private archive before it is made available to other researchers, Dewson establishes their legitimacy through reference to the FDR Library: “Mr Shipman of the FDR Library is quite taken with them.”⁷⁷

When Schlesinger published his three volume study *The Age of Roosevelt* (1857-1960) Dewson’s influence, especially on the third volume, is clear. Dewson is cast as a forward-looking and influential member of the New Deal who played an important role in persuading FDR to support wage and hour legislation. Schlesinger singles out her effective plans to mobilize women as voters for the Democrats and to promote women to political appointments. He also notes her views on FDR.⁷⁸ By contrast, in Schlesinger’s account, Farley is cast as a politician of the old school, rooted in the party political machine: “Confident in his power and skill, Jim remained majestically oblivious to the new political conceptions rising about him.” Unlike Dewson, Farley is not flexible enough to adapt to the new politics based on coalitions of trade unions, women, workers, farmers and others. Schlesinger cites and endorses Dewson’s assessment that Farley was concerned only with attaining power, and uninterested in Roosevelt’s plans and policies. Quoting Dewson directly, Schlesinger concludes that by 1935 Farley was losing his central role as chief campaign strategist to the President and was “almost on a plane of equality” with the New Deal’s “other ambassadors,” Molly Dewson to women, Eleanor Roosevelt and Harold Ickes to black Americans. Farley was, he concludes “a casualty of the shift from the First to the Second New Deal.”⁷⁹

Schlesinger also cites accounts by other New Deal women. Frances Perkins, whose significance Dewson felt was underplayed in Farley’s memoir, is described as a perceptive observer of FDR in her account *The Roosevelt I Know*.⁸⁰ Dewson would likely have been delighted that Perkins’s memoir also shaped *The Politics of Upheaval*. In “An Aid to an

⁷⁶ Schlesinger to Dewson, 8 June 1948, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder.

⁷⁷ Schlesinger to Dewson, 8 June, 1948; Dewson to Schlesinger, 13 June, 1948 both in Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder.

⁷⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, *The Politics of Upheaval: 1935-36: The Age of Roosevelt*, Vol. 3, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1960),439-440

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 441-443

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 650, 652, 654. While Schlesinger draws on the Dewson archive and memoir, as well as Perkins oral history and published memoir, he frequently deploys female authored accounts for descriptions of Roosevelt “Behind the mask,” and to describe his daily routine. See especially Chapter 32, “Behind the Mask,” 556-569.

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End,” Dewson had noted with satisfaction Schlesinger’s high opinion of Perkins’ account: “Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. of Harvard who is now writing the Age of Roosevelt, told me in May 1948, Miss Perkins in her book, The Roosevelt I Knew creates what seems to me the most accurate portrait of FDR.”⁸¹ Overall, Dewson approved Schlesinger’s account. After the publication of the first volume, she wrote to express her gratitude: “Without *The Crisis of the Old Order* I would get only a few kind words in my increasing years.”⁸² Yet she did not hesitate to express her disagreement with Schlesinger’s assessment of Henry Wallace, Roosevelt’s third-term Vice President, in Volume two. Nor she was alone. Acknowledging that Frances Perkins “thought I was a little hard on Wallace too,” Schlesinger reflected: “Perhaps I was over-reacting to his later career.”⁸³

A New Political History

If Dewson’s account, and those of other women, shaped early histories of the New Deal, they did not fare so well in subsequent years. Women as political actors remained largely absent from accounts of the New Deal until the revival of women’s history during and after the women’s liberation movement. In the 1980s feminist historians began to question masculine definitions of politics and sought to write a “new political history of women” which recognized the importance of women’s friendships and communities to U.S political history. The historian Susan Ware argued that a women’s network with its roots in the progressive reform and social welfare activities of the 1920s was able to flourish in the experiments of the New Deal and was crucial in allowing women to access power in government and politics in this period. As such, women’s networks were worthy of study in their own right, and not simply because what they may or may not reveal about how men operated.⁸⁴

While many women historians and historians of American women welcomed Ware’s contribution to a political history that attended to how women influenced and experience change, rather than how they were impacted on by men, for others it missed the point: the point that because power was masculine prerogative, the most significant historical agents were men.⁸⁵ Ware was criticized for “assigning major significance” to Dewson and her networks’ political efforts in the 1930s and for relying on sources written by Democratic women. If only, the historian James T. Patterson lamented, “she had devoted more attention to sources revealing the attitudes of Democratic National Committee Chairman James Farley

⁸¹ “An Aid to the End,” 1: 87.

⁸² Dewson to Schlesinger, 28 May 1958, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder.

⁸³ Dewson to Schlesinger, Mar. 1959; Schlesinger to Dewson, 10 Mar. 1959, Dewson Papers, FDRL, Box 4, Schlesinger folder.

⁸⁴ Ware, *Partner & I*, xvi-xvii, and Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁸⁵ For positive reviews of Ware’s “flawless scholarship” and “command of sources,” in *Partner and I* see Martha Swain, “Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics,” *Journal Of American History*, 75: 2, (1988): 660-661; And on *Beyond Suffrage*, Ware’s earlier and broader study of women in the New Deal, see Alice Kessler-Harris, “Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal,” *Reviews in American History*, 10:3 Sept. 1982, 419-423.

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and other male politicians,” If only, he continued, she had “stepped back more often from her sometimes total identification with her protagonists.”⁸⁶ In particular Patterson singled out Ware’s use of Dewson’s “self-congratulatory autobiography,” which occupied 58 out of 110 sources in chapters 12 and 13 out of her fifteen chapter biography.⁸⁷ Historians who draw on women authored sources to analyse how women represented those experiences are liable to have their credibility questioned. The same attention to the gendered source base is rarely applied to those who purport to write history from a ‘universal’ perspective. For example a 2014 study of Molly Dewson, Eleanor Roosevelt and their development of women’s roles within the Democratic Party, references the memoirs of both Dewson and Farley, but suggests a more “objective” account of the relationship between the two could be found in the 2006 biography of Jim Farley written by Dan Scroop. The author remains curiously silent about Susan Ware’s study of Molly Dewson.⁸⁸

“Not a Typical Political Narrative”

The “quest for authority” continues to haunt women’s history and autobiographical writing in the twenty first century.⁸⁹ When Hillary Clinton published her political memoir, *Living History* in 2003 it prompted a flurry of biographies which questioned the fact that she had seen fit to write her own biography. In the revealingly named *A Woman in Charge*, Carl Bernstein was critical of what he called Clinton’s “life-long quest to privately and publicly define herself” while in Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta Jr’s *Her Way*, the then New York State Senator was taken to task for attempting to narrate her own life. “Hillary herself has been the meticulous architect of her persona.”⁹⁰ Implicit throughout both narratives is the notion that Clinton’s ambitious attempt to narrate a version of her past in *Living History*, is symptomatic of an unseemly, and perhaps unfeminine self-regard, which has allowed Clinton to believe she can attempt to define herself on both on the public stage and in the historical past.

Reviewing the the reception of Clinton’s 2003 memoir, Jan Witt considers the notion that autobiographers need to offer “full disclosure” because the expectations and criteria for memoir are, in Sara Davidson’s terms, a “gray zone.” Clinton, she notes, does not employ an “Author’s Note,” as others have done, but instead “relies upon her readers to understand that she is depending on her own memory, that her memory is necessarily selective, and that her ultimate goal is not to entertain or to win a literary award but to run for the highest office in

⁸⁶ James T. Patterson, Book Review, *The New England Quarterly* 61:2 (1988): 317-18.

⁸⁷ Patterson, 317

⁸⁸ John Thomas McGuire “‘Extraordinary Opportunity’: Eleanor Roosevelt, Molly Dewson, and the expansion of women’s boundaries in the Democratic Party, 1924–1934,” *Women’s History Review*, 23:6, (2014), 937n31(922-937)

⁸⁹ Brock, Chapter 2.

⁹⁰ Carl Bernstein, *A Woman in Charge: The Life of Hillary Rodham Clinton*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 341. Jeff Gerth and Don Van Natta Jr., *Her Way: The Hopes and Ambitions of Hillary Rodham Clinton* (New York: Little Brown, 2007), 7.

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the land.”⁹¹ Whether or not Clinton was able to “rely” on her readers in 2003 is open to debate: critics predicted low sales and it inspired biographers like Bernstein who thought they could do a better job; yet *Living History* broke sales records for a non-fiction book and became an international bestseller. Either way, Clinton was writing and being read within a tradition of political autobiography defined by and built upon the experiences of white, dominant class men. Fifty years earlier Dewson did not rely on her readers to understand.⁹² It was not enough to write a traditional political narrative. Dewson searched for alternative ways for her life to be written and read. Writing for and in her archive, Dewson invested in a version of history that would be written after her time.

Archive making and autobiographical writing are important to how we understand the production of knowledge about women’s roles within and histories of exclusion from politics. Felicity Nussbaum has argued that narratives of self are significant because they “make possible the definition of previously unavailable subjectivities.”⁹³ In imagining different ways of writing and reading narratives of self, Dewson was concerned with how women entering politics could claim and shape their own subjectivities. This quest haunts Clinton’s 2017 memoir. Comparing her “story...of a life shaped by and devoted to the movement for women’s liberation” to that of other recent Presidential candidates, including Obama and Bill Clinton, she reflects on why she was never able to communicate her story as well as she might. Hers was not, she concedes, “the typical political narrative.”⁹⁴ But might it also have something to do with how she is read?: “storytelling requires a receptive audience, and I’ve never felt like the American electorate was receptive to this one.”⁹⁵ If Dewson felt her readers were not yet receptive to her story she found a way to make sure she stayed in history for a time when they were.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Jan Witt, “The Gray Zone”: Hillary Clinton and the Ways we Live (And Tell) History,” *Women’s Studies*, 39:8, 851-876 (2010).

⁹² Michael Wilson, “Senator Clinton Offers a Cure For Foot-in-Mouth Disease,” *New York Times*, 10 July, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/10/nyregion/senator-clinton-offers-a-cure-for-foot-in-mouth-disease.html> last accessed 12.10.17; Deirdre Donahue, “Clinton memoir tops Best-Selling Books list,” *USA Today*, 17 June, 2003, https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2003-06-17-hillary-list_x.htm last accessed 12.10.17.

⁹³ Nussbaum, xiv.

⁹⁴ Hillary Rodham Clinton, *What Happened*, (London: Simon & Schuster U.K, 2017), 112.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

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