Introduction

This book began in New Orleans amid the debris and destruction of Hurricane Katrina. In 2005, when the storm struck, I was living in New Orleans and teaching at Tulane University. The weeks after the storm were a confusing jumble of friends' couches, searches for clothing, and a growing sense that this would not end soon and that I would need to occupy my time until the university reopened. Doing something in New Orleans seemed better than passively watching the continuing disaster on CNN, so I moved back into my damaged but still standing home. As someone actually living in New Orleans when much of the city was unoccupied and in ruins, I received constant calls from acquaintances, friends, and friends of friends who were unable to return to the city. People needed help with insurance forms and mortgages, with locating relatives, procuring housing, finding documents, and, above all else, dealing with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its arbitrary and changing policies and procedures. In the wake of such an enormous catastrophe and the haphazard response by the government, many people needed a witness and advocate on the ground.

FEMA established a series of disaster recovery centers in and around New Orleans that were intended to function as “supermarkets” for hurricane aid. In these centers, victims could apply for FEMA benefits; procure information on repairing a roof; speak to the Army Corps of Engineers; receive a disaster tax rebate; find a Bible, a hot meal, a friendly ear. In theory, the centers were an excellent idea; in practice, they resulted in hundreds of people waiting in long lines for hour after hour. One day I approached a FEMA manager, handed her my résumé, and asked if I could set up a legal-information booth. She allowed me to do so without
Introduction

asking a single question. The “booth” consisted of a folding table and my cell phone. I organized a handful of attorney friends, and we staffed our station six days a week for two months.

I noticed that of the thousands of people who stopped by, few needed anything that I understood to be legal advice. A series of complicated emergency rules temporarily allowed volunteer attorneys like myself to practice law. Yet I had no clear understanding of whether I was covered by those rules or for whom I worked. Nor did I have the resources or expertise to practice law in any traditional sense. Instead, I functioned as a sort of mediator, personal advocate, legal educator, and social worker.

People came to our booth because they were desperately frustrated and needed help in whatever form it would come. Victims would call their insurance companies and be put on hold indefinitely; by the time somebody answered, the callers would be too infuriated to speak and would hand the phone to me. I would try to argue that a policy covered a particular type of damage, but often all I could do was schedule an appointment for an agent to inspect a damaged home. At times I had to document that a check from an insurance company or FEMA could not be mailed to a victim’s address because that home no longer existed.

More often I mediated between FEMA representatives and people applying for benefits, and tried to understand how FEMA was interpreting its ever-changing rules. I informed inexperienced FEMA workers what the agency’s policies were on that day, and alerted FEMA employees, all working in the same room, that they were interpreting policy in diametrically opposed ways. Most of all, I listened to people’s stories, as the storm produced as many stories as there were survivors. Narrating their stories seemed crucial to those who were trying to process events that had happened so quickly, and people needed someone to hear and validate their experiences.

As time went on, those still seeking assistance were even more desperate for housing and funds. These were people who were poor before the storm but now were destitute. I spent time procuring FEMA trailers for those still homeless. Even if FEMA approved, shipped, and notified an applicant that a trailer was at a particular location and ready for occupancy, it did not mean that in reality the trailer was present or habitable. I tracked down missing trailers, asked why plumbing did not work, why the key did not fit the lock. At the very end, I simply tried to find vacant motel rooms — paid for by FEMA — but this did not provide a permanent solution for victims. On the worst days, I helped people obtain relatives’ death certificates.

This work made me reflect on what using my legal knowledge, legal skill in law school or during my decade in law school, law and social work bled to that performed by many women’s and early twentieth centuries. I was helping because people needed help. Work had anything to do with justice to the entire situation.

I want to believe that I made some amount of time, yet I was the greatest spent in the center, I was transform professional with authority and expertise, inexperienced FEMA personnel, pay authority was partially an illusion being a professor, my whiteness, and my claim reflect broadly on volunteer work and the ambiguities of what the practice of massive and aching need.

The development of organized free States has a rich history that has been Justice for the Poor uncovers the legal aid providers in the late nineteenth century, explores how ideologies of gender shifted and who would be its provider, “real” history of legal aid, a story that belongs to the field of legal aid intentionally made.

By beginning this history with reorientations, we see how they played legal institutions and how their lead to be part of a wider reform agenda. have brilliantly explored how such and wide-ranging social-reform activism work to the creation of settlement house benefit programs, and playgrounds.

1 On gender and Hurricane Katrina, see the Women’s Studies Association, NWSA Jour.
2 The literature on women’s clubs is enormous. Scott, “Most Invisible of All: Black Women’s 1990): 3–22; 1
This work made me reflect on what I was doing and whether I was using my legal knowledge, legal skill, or anything else that I had learned in law school or during my decade as a legal practitioner. In the FEMA center, law and social work bled together. My work seemed similar to that performed by many women's organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I was doing what had to be done. I was helping because people needed help. I certainly had no sense that my work had anything to do with justice; there was little that was just in the entire situation.

I want to believe that I made some people's lives a bit easier for a brief amount of time, yet I was the greatest beneficiary. During the hours that I spent in the center, I was transformed from a hurricane victim into a professional with authority and expertise that made other people, especially inexperienced FEMA personnel, pay attention. I also understood that this authority was partially an illusion based on my status as a lawyer and law professor, my whiteness, and my class. My legal-assistance project made me reflect broadly on volunteer work, charity, lawyers, social workers, and the ambiguities of what the practice of law means in an environment of massive and aching need.

The development of organized free legal aid for the poor in the United States has a rich history that has been overlooked, even buried. *Women and Justice for the Poor* uncovers the enormous role played by women as legal aid providers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It explores how ideologies of gender shaped and constructed what legal aid was and who would be its providers and clients. This book exposes the “real” history of legal aid, a story that the predominantly male leaders in the field of legal aid intentionally masked.

By beginning this history with nineteenth-century women’s organizations, we see how they played central roles in the creation of urban legal institutions and how their leaders understood that legal aid needed to be part of a wider reform agenda. In the past, historians of women have brilliantly explored how such organizations engaged in significant and wide-ranging social-reform activities, from suffrage and temperance work to the creation of settlement houses, kindergartens, reform schools, benefit programs, and playgrounds. This body of work is large and rich,

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2 On gender and Hurricane Katrina, see the special issue of the journal of the National Women's Studies Association, *NWSA Journal* 20, no. 3 (2009).

3 The literature on women’s clubs is enormous. Just a few examples include Anne Firor Scott, “Most Invisible of All: Black Women’s Voluntary Associations,” *Journal of Southern History* 56 (February 1990): 3–22; Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women’s
but it does not explicitly see such organizations as crucial and innovative legal institutions. On the other hand, most legal historians have paid little attention to such women's organizations; from the perspective of traditional legal history, they are largely invisible. This book frames a dialogue between the all-too-separate fields of women's history and legal history. It is simultaneously a much-needed institutional history of legal aid.

We begin by exploring how, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, women's organizations pioneered the provision of legal aid in major cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Although the actual everyday delivery of such aid was carried out primarily by upper- and middle-class women who were not professional lawyers, their work eventually created a female and feminized “dominion” of legal aid. These early organizations specialized in claims on behalf of poor women – first addressing mostly wage claims against employers and then expanding to domestic relations cases and other legal problems. Such organizations defined legal assistance broadly, to include multiple kinds of advice as well as the provision of material aid. They also situated legal assistance within a wider agenda that included equality for women in the workplace, the home, and the public sphere. As practiced by women's organizations, the provision of legal aid intentionally entailed the legal equivalent of a laying on of hands. Relations between poor women and women and they took place in an environment that some male lawyers, and judges, to transform it from its status as lay lawyers – to something more.

The history of legal aid thus fits professionalizing women's work an a to women. These new legal many clients were entitled to independence. Many clients of second immigrants, and attorneys imagined to these men served as a lesson in civic legal aid obscured women's presence professional lawyers. Moreover, new types of claims, especially that women typically sought to bring.

Picking up on and synthesizing legal aid, Reginald Heber Smith's J first extended "history" of legal aid bar associations and to dissociate

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3. Robyn Muncy's canonical Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) describes the work of a series of women's organizations and the reforms that they sought. Although Muncy does not discuss legal aid, her concept of creating a female dominion – in this case, one in child welfare that existed in an otherwise male empire of policymaking – is particularly apt in describing the history of legal aid and how female volunteers and social workers negotiated with a variety of male legal institutions.

organizations as crucial and innovative. Most legal historians have paid little attention to the role of women’s history and legal history. This book frames a dialogue between these two fields.

In the later decades of the nineteenth century, legal aid associations began to be established in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and other cities. Although early legal aid was often provided by lawyers who were not professional lawyers, their work was seen as an important service for women and children. The concept of “dominion” of legal aid was integrated into claims on behalf of poor women and children, and legal aid was provided to those who could not afford to pay for legal services.

The history of legal aid thus fits into a much larger pattern of women’s activism. Women’s organizations were often the first to recognize the need for legal aid, and they were instrumental in establishing the first legal aid organizations. Women’s organizations were also deeply involved in the fight for equal rights, and their efforts were often linked to the fight for legal aid.

Picking up on and synthesizing what was already occurring within the legal aid field, Regina Heber Smith’s Justice and the Poor (1919) was the first extended “history” of legal aid. It was written to curry favor with bar associations and to disassociate legal aid from philanthropy, women’s
organizations, and lay lawyers. Moreover, Smith believed that lawyers (especially graduates of elite law schools) had unique skills and training far beyond anything possessed by women lay lawyers or even women professional lawyers, no matter their experience. Smith hoped, further, that allying legal aid with bar associations would place legal aid in a manly sphere of law and thus generate prestige and financial support. *Justice and the Poor* succeeded in part—it essentially became scripture, providing legal aid with a usable past and a blueprint for the future. Generations of scholars have accepted *Justice and the Poor* as an accurate account of the history of legal aid. Within legal aid circles, Smith’s work is still hailed for its originality and thorough research. That legal scholars have missed the connections between women’s organizations and the development of legal aid is proof of how well Smith and others hid them. Moreover, unlike later male-led legal aid organizations, the documentation of legal aid organizations run by women is sparse, buried in archival material seemingly unrelated to law, and consisting primarily of annual reports.

In the midst of the reconfiguration and professionalization of legal aid, social work first appeared as a profession, and at least some women lay lawyers began to consider themselves social workers. Male leaders of legal aid quickly concluded that no role in providing legal assistance to female lawyer allies contested the preclude it in the professional world authority over providing legal aid, specialized juvenile and domestic relations by female social workers and lay lawyers began to teach law to their predomi that these students would provide legal

By the early 1920s, male leaders relationship to social work, their craft authority, expertise, and profession raised questions about what constituted of law meant, what was a legal pr of aid should provide, and which cler issues was a fundamental qua- process-based form of justice by all it intended to create substantive justice have long pointed to its conservati an alternative, more expansive version of social justice. In exploring these issues, demonstrates how law and social work and how each helped to define the other to see law and social work as distinct to the other largely female.


Moreover, Smith believed that lawyers (tools) had unique skills and training women lay lawyers or even women their experience. Smith hoped, further, that legal aid would place legal aid in a main-ge and financial support. Justice and initially became scripture, providing reprint for the future. Generations of the Poor as an accurate account of the just circles, Smith’s work is still hailed by others hid them. Moreover, those organizations, the documentation of legal aid was, sparse, buried in archival materials existing primarily of annual reports. Legal and professionalization of legal education, and at least some women who call themselves social workers. Male leaders

(See New York: Carnegie Foundation, 1939).


For All: The Past and Future of Civil Legal Aid (CA: Praeger, 2014).

L. J. Walkowitz, Working with Class: Social Identity (Chapel Hill: University of North Car-Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond lina: University of Illinois Press, 2004); in the Shadow of the Poorhouse; Ellen Fitz-
of legal aid quickly concluded that social workers should have little or no role in providing legal assistance. Yet social workers and their often female lawyer allies contested the project to masculinize legal aid and situate it in the professional world of lawyers. They asserted their own authority over providing legal aid, especially with the development of specialized juvenile and domestic relations courts, which were often staffed by female social workers and lay lawyers. New schools of social work began to teach law to their predominately female students, with the idea that these students would provide legal services to the poor.

By the early 1920s, male leaders in legal aid panicked over legal aid’s relationship to social work, their concerns linked to issues of gender, authority, expertise, and professionalization. The resulting controversy raised questions about what constituted the practice law, what the rule of law meant, what was a legal problem, what types of services legal aid should provide, and which clients legal aid should serve. Central to these issues was a fundamental question: Was legal aid meant to offer a process-based form of justice by allowing access to an attorney, or was it intended to create substantive justice? Although scholars of legal aid have long pointed to its conservative nature, social workers presented an alternative, more expansive version of legal aid based on ideas of social justice. In exploring these issues, Women and Justice for the Poor demonstrates how law and social work were in contest with each other, and how each helped to define the other in that opposition. It thus refuses to see law and social work as distinct disciplines – one largely male and the other largely female. 10


Introduction

Placing women, as both legal aid providers and clients, at the center of this history forces us to reexamine some of our fundamental assumptions about the development of the American legal profession and the relationship and boundaries between “professional” lawyers and “lay lawyers.” Specifically, this book questions what it means to “practice law” and blurs the conventional division between lawyer and nonlawyer. Although traditionally we have believed that, from the late nineteenth century onward, bar associations actively policed the practice of law, for decades bar associations knew but did nothing about the fact that women lay lawyers and social workers were engaged in a wide variety of legal activities. The next conventional narrative of the legal profession’s steady monopolization of legal services looks messier when we acknowledge the roles that social workers played in legal aid organizations. Likewise, the book’s geography or locus of inquiry is not spectacular courtroom trials but office practice, the provision of everyday legal advice, and the mediation of legal claims. Similarly it is not about legal doctrine; rather, it provides a new way of thinking about the legal profession and the practice of law. From such different perspectives, the practice of law was more democratic and heterogeneous – and less male – than we understood it to have been.

How legal aid developed reflected larger societal tensions and contradictions involving the role of women and how gender functioned in society. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, gender served as both a practice and a discourse through which people articulated, constructed, and defined rights and obligations. As a relational construct, it symbolized, mobilized, and even subverted power. This book examines how historical actors spoke and wrote about manhood and womanhood and what they claimed in connection with social work, charity, and professions. Connotations of men’s and women’s professional hierarchies. Gender is discrete and visible and whose labor was not subverted by dominant gender roles.

This study also engages with an understanding of the history of women lawyers. The miniscule number of women in the bar in the 1870s after having risen in the 1860s and 1870s began applying for entry. Pioneers fought with law schools for legislatures to permit women to sit and be admitted into a state’s bar. State

11 W. Wesley Pue and David Sugarman have written that the category of lawyers might actually include a wide variety of subgroups, and the demarcations between lawyers and nonlawyers are often historically contingent. See “Introduction: Towards a Cultural History of Lawyers,” in Lawyers and Vampires: Cultural Histories of Legal Professions, ed. Pue and Sugarman (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2003), 9.


15 There is a vast literature on gender and history; see, e.g., Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” American Historical Review 91 (December 1986):
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Field: The Transformation of the New York
Sage Foundation, 1988); Auerbach, Unequal
Topologies: Lawyers, State Crises, and Professionalization


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what they claimed in connection with those ideas — and it also articulates how gender systems had real material consequences. The very terms social work, charity, and profession are gendered, insofar as they carry connotations of men’s and women’s appropriate roles and social and professional hierarchies. Gender even defined whose labor was valued and visible and whose labor was not — or whose could not be recognized without subverting dominant gender constructs.

This study also engages with an expanding and important literature on the history of women lawyers. Scholars have documented the story of the insubordinate number of women who began seeking admission to the bar in the 1870s after having read law. Other women in the 1880s and 1890s began applying for entrance into law schools. These women pioneers fought with law schools for admission, and battled courts and legislatures to permit women to sit for bar examinations and then be admitted into a state’s bar. State and federal courts found that the
Introduction

Fourteenth Amendment did not require states to admit women to the bar, just as it did not give them the right of suffrage.19 Those opposed to women lawyers reasoned that if a woman lawyer was permitted to represent others, why couldn’t she represent herself and therefore vote, be a juror, or hold public office? Women’s entry to the legal profession was thus a slippery slope to null citizenship. But even as legal barriers dropped, female lawyers well into the twentieth century found scarce employment opportunities; some found work by joining legal aid organizations or establishing solo practices that represented the poor.

Although groundbreaking, the literature on women lawyers prioritizes their professional status in shaping our understanding of what it meant for women to practice law, and in the process it leaves unexplored a much larger field of women’s legal activities. When we look only at professional women attorneys, the history of women in the law appears to be one of slow but steady progress from the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. In contrast, when we include women lay lawyers and, later, social workers in the analysis, the conventional story of progress over time becomes less linear and more complicated, revealing periods of declension that bring the narrative of progress into question.

Likewise, scholars have recently begun to study the role of race in the provision of legal assistance.20 Superficially, all the legal aid organizations examined in this book claimed to accept cases without regard to race, religion, or creed. Such pronouncements were important to these organizations, as they confirmed that justice was available to all. Yet in decades’ worth of legal aid material, there is little discussion of African Americans either as clients or legal aid providers. In fact, among women’s organizations the very claim to legal authority was partly based on their members’ whiteness. The providers of legal aid, whether lay lawyers or professionals, were primarily white, creating a complicated nexus of race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

African Americans, however, certainly used the services of legal aid organizations. The Legal Aid Society of Chicago employed publicity photographs that clearly depicted African Americans and argued that the organization did not provide such assistance on occasion.21 Similarly, legal aid organizations in other countries, such as those in Europe, and racial minorities may have used legal aid organizations before turning to others.22 Although this book at times points leaves to others the important work of legal assistance.

The provision of free legal aid in the United States, but it flourished in Witt’s conclusions regarding insurance and the absence of strong state paternal bureaucracy.23 Issues of small and at least threatening to be

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19 See Bradwell v. Illinois, 83 U.S. 130 (1873); Minor v. Happersett, 88 U.S. 162 (1873).
Photographs that clearly depicted African American clients. Yet, as we shall see, other organizations adopted supposedly neutral eligibility policies that had the effect of limiting the number of African American clients. Most blatantly, legal aid was slow to grow in the South, where it was feared that even the smallest claims of African Americans against whites would subvert white supremacy. Whether in the North or the South, none of the legal aid organizations examined here saw the dismantling of racial discrimination as being within their purview. Across decades, legal aid organizations studiously separated the everyday provision of legal aid from cases that overtly challenged white supremacy.

This book examines only organizations that specifically understood and identified themselves as providing free, organized, civil legal aid to the poor on a continual basis. Undoubtedly, many individual lawyers provided such assistance on occasion, and organizations such as mutual aid societies, churches, labor unions, settlement houses, and a vast array of social service agencies provided some legal assistance. For instance, male African American lawyers held high positions in black fraternal orders; it is certainly possible that such orders provided legal assistance to members. The poor, especially immigrants who were not from Western Europe, and racial minorities may have looked first to this wide array of other organizations before turning to established legal aid organizations. Although this book at times points to those alternative institutions, it leaves to others the important work of uncovering the full range and mix of legal assistance.

The provision of free legal aid to the poor was not unique to the United States, but it flourished in America. Paralleling John Fabian Witt’s conclusions regarding insurance and personal injury cases in the late nineteenth century, it is clear that the growth of legal aid was propelled indirectly by the lack of powerful unions (especially for women) and the absence of strong state regulation or a robust administrative bureaucracy. Issues of small and great consequence depended on bringing or at least threatening to bring individual lawsuits. The largest

Introduction

category of legal aid claims in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved employees’ wages; the second largest involved domestic relations. Yet the weak state does not fully explain the phenomenon of legal aid, because the later development of the administrative state and even the “semi-welfare state” of the 1960s did not retard the growth or use of legal aid organizations.24

From one perspective, legal aid stood at the margins of the legal profession because it ministered to the poor and least empowered. Some studies imply that legal aid organizations were moribund until the 1960s, when federal funds began to flow to legal aid and an energetic cadre of young lawyers aligned with the New Left worked to revamp it.25 But long before the 1960s, legal aid organizations provided services to an enormous number of people: from the 1870s up until 1938, such organizations handled more than five million cases.26 Throughout the twentieth century, the demand for legal aid consistently outpaced the capacity of legal aid organizations. As legal aid offices opened, people flocked to them.

Studying legal aid is not only important because of the vast number of clients served but also because it brought together men and women of all classes, from the poorest of the poor to some of the most elite lawyers in America. Well-known women’s reform organizations, such as Boston’s Women’s Educational and Industrial Union and the Chicago Women’s Club, and some of the most prestigious bar associations, including the Association of the Bar of the City of New York (which long prohibited women lawyers from membership) appear here because legal aid brought them into (often confrontational) contact. Such legal luminaries as Roscoe Pound, Charles Evans Hughes, and Sophonisba Breckinridge were forced to reckon with one another’s ideas of what constituted justice.

Legal aid could have transformative possibilities. It could permit lawyers to stand momentarily outside the market and allow upper- and middle-class women to function as lawyers; a desperately poor person could become a rights-bearing individual in a new stability. Legal aid also could allow poor persons often disciplined workers to fight for freedom, and some of them put tremendous energy into winning breadwinners. Additionally, many divorce cases and failed to see wives who they worked to uphold the prerogatives of men. They were also hesitant to take the claims being the labor practices of elites. At the same time, they expressed a profound dislike for and revolt against the poverty, but few organs of law to promote structural reforms to undo white supremacy. Instead, legal aid in response to poor people’s political an attempt to placate workers and rights movements. This study draws on the voices of the legal aid workers who had a large role in these movements.

Finally, although Women and Justice, it speaks to the present as well as the future. It is written for the twenty-first century, as government funding for legal aid has declined, so have the use of nonlawyers. Some controversial proposals to regularize the use of nonlawyers.27 Some argue that nonlawyers may actually hinder the provision of legal aid and services. Under the new model of legal services, disputes and providing social services, the use of a justice community, Jeanne Charn, a lawyer who is necessary.28 She claims that low-income clients and informal advice from nonlawyers o

24 Michael Katz uses this term in In the Shadow of the Poorhouse, 342.
26 National Association of Legal Aid Organizations, Reports of Committee, 1938-1939 (Rochester, 1939), 29. In 1939 NALAO stopped estimating the aggregate number of cases handled, understanding that such numbers were probably inaccurate because they did not include the work of many organizations and because of disagreement regarding what counted as a case.
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second largest involved domestic violence, but could not fully explain the phenomenon of the administrative state. The 1960s did not retard the growth of legal aid, though it was at the margins of the legal profession and was poorly funded. Some organizations were moribund until the 1960s, as legal aid and an energetic cadre of New Left worked to revamp it. But throughout the twentieth century, the capacity of aid offices opened, people flocked to legal aid, and important because of the vast number of lawyers who saw the law as a tool of social change. To some of the most elite lawyers in the form of organizations, such as Boston’s Early Settlement Union and the Chicago Women’s Christian Bar Association, included the New York City Bar Association. But many of the legal luminaries as Roscoe Pound or Breckinridge were forced to change their views. Security possibilities. It could permit the market to work and allow upper- and middle-class lawyers; a desperately poor person could become a rights-bearing individual; an abused wife could find new stability. Legal aid also could be conservative: legal aid organizations often disciplined workers to fit into a capitalist, wage-based economy, and some of them put tremendous pressure on men to become steady breadwinners. Additionally, many organizations refused to handle divorce cases and failed to see wife beater as a serious problem. Instead, they worked to uphold the prerogatives of husbands. Such organizations were also hesitant to take the claims of domestic servants, thereby shielding the labor practices of elites. At moments, legal aid providers openly expressed a profound dislike for and distrust of their clients. They might deplore urban poverty, but few organizations before the 1960s used the law to promote structural reforms that might eliminate either poverty or white supremacy. Instead, legal aid organizations were often founded in response to poor people’s political and labor activities and represented an attempt to placate workers and elide class conflict. Where possible, this study draws on the voices of those seeking legal assistance, but for the most part it makes use of the documents of legal aid organizations, which were written, of course, by the providers of legal aid.

Finally, although Women and Justice for the Poor is a work of history, it speaks to the present as well. Legal aid is in crisis in the early twenty-first century, as government funding shrinks and poverty expands. Some controversial proposals to reinvigorate legal aid call for increasing the use of nonlawyers. Some advocates claim that the presence of nonlawyers may actually hinder the productive resolution of poor clients’ legal problems because attorneys escalate disputes and create delays. Under the new model, legal services would focus more on mediating disputes and providing social services to clients, and less on the adversarial process and formal law. One of the leading voices in the access-to-justice community, Jeanne Charny, argues for a “functionalist, pragmatic approach” that would use lawyers only when specialized legal expertise is necessary. She claims that low-income people prefer readily available, informal advice from nonlawyers over formal advice from lawyers. The

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Introduction

adversarial attorney-based model of law would be replaced by negotiation and problem solving. Likewise, scholars are beginning to question whether the legal profession should have a monopoly over law and how social workers and others might deliver legal assistance in a wide range of areas.32

There is a long, hidden history of nonlawyers providing legal assistance along with social services.32 And there is no evidence that, historically, the work of nonlawyers was inferior to that of lawyers. Given this, we should ask why lawyers believe that they alone should handle the legal needs of the poor. Women and Justice for the Poor establishes a very different, more capacious view of legal aid grounded in women’s history and legal history.

30 Ibid.
32 For an important older work that argues against such an approach while demonstrating the long history of mediation and arbitration in the United States, see Jerold S. Auerbach, Justice without Law (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).