

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITA GERDA LERNER

On January 2, 2013, Gerda Lerner, Robinson Edwards and Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation Senior Distinguished Research Professor Emerita of U.S. Women's History, passed away in Madison, surrounded by her family. A refugee from Austria during World War II, she told her story in the memoir Fireweed published in 2002.

Born Gerda Kronstein in Vienna, Austria on April 30, 1920, Professor Lerner emigrated to the United States and ultimately settled into a happy marriage with the filmmaker Carl Lerner. Among her creative projects she published a novel, *No Farewell*, and co-wrote the screenplay for "Black Like Me," directed by her husband. She was also a poet and in 2009, together with her friend and art photographer Sandy Wojtal-Weber, they self-published a book entitled *In Praise of Aging*. One of the founders of the field of Women's History in the United States, Professor Lerner received her Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1966 and, after teaching at Sarah Lawrence for a number of years and founding a graduate program in Women's History there, came to Madison in 1980 and founded the Program in Women's History here. A prolific historian, she was the author of numerous books on women's history, not only about the United States but more broadly. The recipient of countless awards and prizes, she received the Austrian Cross of Honor for Science and Art in 1996 and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1998.

Gerda Lerner's impact on the fields of U.S. History and Women's History, on the lives of students and colleagues, and on the UW History Department, was immense. Among the ways she was described at a memorial event held in April 2013 was as "brave and outspoken and full of passion"; "a pathbreaker"; "an inspirational speaker whose implicit audience was always far broader than academia". She was a supportive mentor who could also be demanding and sometimes harsh, but it was always in the interest of making people's work better. She never forgot her roots as an activist, and "she was an example to all of us." Graduate students who arrived in Madison after she had already retired noted that their work "would be virtually impossible without the discipline-shifting insights of Gerda Lerner." A colleague who met her when she interviewed for the position here also made clear that, as someone who survived on the UW campus both before and after Gerda, there was no doubt that after Gerda was better.

Gerda enjoyed getting to know colleagues and students personally, and supporting them and their families. She greatly enjoyed keeping up with my two boys as they grew and became independent. We enjoyed numerous meals together over the years and, after my sons moved away, she always asked how they were.

A consistent part of any meal at Gerda Lerner's house, at least between April and October, was a tour of her garden that was her pride and joy. Another way in which her love for nature emerged was in her avid dedication to hiking, and she would always convince you to take a walk with her when you visited.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE
Florescia E. Mallon