

Jean Fagan Yellin

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Doctor of Humane Letters

May 25, 2005

Pace University distinguished professor emerita, consummate scholar, researcher, and teacher of literature, you, Jean Fagan Yellin, epitomize what we seek to instill in all of our graduates: a lifelong love of learning and a commitment to community engagement. Your pioneering work has brought you international renown for its intellectual rigor and breadth of scope. For 20 years, you researched *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to validate and verify the authenticity of the story and its author, which culminated in your book *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*. The United Press International calls it “the best nonfiction book on the subject of slavery in 2004.” Moreover, your work will soon reach a new level when the *Harriet Jacobs Papers* are published as the first scholarly edition of the papers of an African-American woman held in slavery. You have opened the eyes of the world.

You have taken a story that was attributed to an abolitionist writer, and proved that it was written by the hand of a young slave girl, Harriet Jacobs, who was born in 1813 in North Carolina. In so doing, you confirmed a story of not only physical slavery but also emotional slavery, bringing to life the woman’s flight from a former master who pursued her, and identifying the true voice of a slave who spent seven years in hiding. Your work helps all who read it come to a truer realization of the horrors of slavery and the atrocities that took place during the early years of the United States. Jacobs’s life story unfolds under your scholarly guidance.

The recognition you have received for more than 20 years of rigorous scholarship is formidable. You are the recipient of the 2004 Frederick Douglass Book Prize, one of the nation’s top literary awards; a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship; the W.E.B. DuBois Institute for Afro-American Research Fellowship; the Ethnic Scholar of the Year award; the Shomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library Scholar-in-Residence; a Pulitzer Prize nomination; and awards too numerous to list. You have engaged a worldwide community through your research of slavery memoirist Harriet Jacobs by producing award-winning books, articles, essays, exhibitions, and internationally received lectures and television documentaries.

For your significant contributions to research, African-American women’s heritage, and the subject of slavery in the United States, for being a role model for teacher-scholars, and increasing our understanding of history, and for opening the eyes of the world to the ravages of slavery, Pace University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereunto.

Aniello A. Bianco '61

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