

Honorary Degree Recipient
ANNE FIROR SCOTT
DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS

Anne Firor Scott, a pioneering historian of American women whose efforts helped open the doors of the history profession to female scholars, is William K. Boyd Professor Emerita of History at Duke University.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Scott was a founder of the field of U.S. women's history, and especially of southern women's history. Her path-breaking book "The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics" (1970) moved women from the margins to the center of southern history. Later works explored women's biography, voluntary organizations, education and relationships across racial lines. Scott's scholarship drove home the simple yet transformative point that we cannot understand American history while ignoring half of the nation's people—an idea captured in her 1984 essay collection "Making the Invisible Woman Visible," and reinforced in her 1992 volume, "Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History."

Inspired to study women reformers after working for the National League of Women Voters in the 1940s, Scott had earned her Ph.D. at Harvard/ Radcliffe in 1958. In 1961, she took a history position at Duke until a "suitable replacement" for a departing man could be found. By 1980 she was William K. Boyd Professor of History and the first woman to chair Duke's history department. She would go on to serve as president of the Organization of American Historians (1983–84) and then the Southern Historical Association (1989), and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2004.

Scott reflected upon her professional journey in her 1984 essay "An Historian's Odyssey," and profiled her female scholarly forebears in "Unheard Voices: The First Historians of Southern Women" (1993). Scott's seminal "The Southern Lady," meanwhile, has never been out of print. Its central questions continue to be debated—while Scott and the dozens of historians she mentored expanded inquiry into crucial questions of how gender, race and class have combined to shape women's lives. In 2008, at the age of 87, she published the edited collection, "Pauli Murray and Caroline Ware: Forty Years of Letters in Black and White."