

## History of Women and Gender in the United States

Professor: Laura Bier

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Office Hours: Wed. 3-4:30 or by appointment

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### Course Description and Logistics

Putting women at the center of interpretation, this course explores the impact of historical events on the lives of American women and the varied roles women played in shaping American history. A major focus will be to understand how class, ethnicity, and race influenced American women's work, family life, and organized activities from the invasion of North America by Europeans to the 1990s. Topics include: Native American women's lives; gender and family life under slavery; the impact of industrialization on women of different classes; the ideology of separate spheres; women's political activities including the antislavery movement, the suffrage movement, the 19th Amendment, and the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s; and transformations in the lives of modern women including work, politics, sexuality, consumption patterns, and leisure activities.

### Aims of the Course

1. To examine American women's lives across time, paying particular attention to the ways that race, class, and ethnicity shaped their experiences; and to understand the social and political arrangements that structured women's status. The course seeks also to understand how women both resisted and accommodated to this situation.
2. To gain familiarity with the kinds of sources historians of women use in constructing their interpretations, and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of those sources.
3. To analyze and evaluate the various historical explanations for women's past experiences.

### Required Texts (Available at the Engineers Bookstore)

Dubois and Dunenil (ed): *Through Women's Eyes*

Linda Kerber (ed): *Women's America*

Harriet Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Erica Jong: *Fear of Flying*

### Supplementary materials:

Other required readings are available on T-Square in the "Resources" section. They will be located in the folder designated for the week's lesson.

### Grading

**Participation 30**

**Midterm: 25%**

**Book Report: 20%**

**Final Group Project: 25%**

### **Reaction Posts and Leading Discussion**

Over the course of the semester, there are eleven class sessions (not including those devoted to discussion of the two novels) which will be wholly or partially devoted to discussion of the readings (in addition to what ever informal discussions arise. They are indicated clearly on the syllabus by an asterisk (\*) and the title "Discussion of the Readings." To facilitate discussion, students are required to write informal papers based on the readings. These "reaction posts" are designed to get you thinking and to give you an opportunity to reflect on the issues raised by the course. They should be approximately one page double spaced (300 words). You are required to do **eight** of these postings (**in addition to the reaction paper you are required to do on one of the novels**) which are due **by 11 pm the day before discussion**. You should post your reactions in the assignment section of T-Square. These posts are not intended as summaries; they are exercises in critical thinking and an opportunity to digest and synthesize course material--to formulate questions, suggest alternative interpretations and shape our discussion. They will be graded on a pass/fail (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) basis and will count towards your participation grade. In general, while I expect you to adhere to some basic standards of grammar, spelling and presentation, these posts are more intended to give you an opportunity to reflect critically on the issues raised in lecture and in the course readings than they are to be formal writing assignments. In addition, you (in cooperation with your fellow students) will be responsible for leading **one** of these discussion sections. I will pass around a sign-up sheet after the first week of class as well as guidelines for discussion leaders.

### **Book Report**

### **Final Group Project**

As a final project, the class will divide into groups and each group will do a final presentation based on outside research. I will discuss this in more detail over the course of the semester.

### **Course Policies and Procedures**

### **Honor Code**

Students in this class will be expected to abide by the Georgia Tech Honor Code and avoid any instance of academic misconduct, including but not limited to the substitution of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another individual or individuals; false claims of performance or work submitted by the student; possessing, using, or exchanging *improperly* acquired written or verbal information in preparation for, or in writing, an exam or paper. If you have any questions, please consult with me and read the Honor Code, which is available at:

[www.deanofstudents.gatech.edu/Policy/code.in.sections.htm#AHC](http://www.deanofstudents.gatech.edu/Policy/code.in.sections.htm#AHC) .

### **Communication and E-mail policy**

I encourage you to contact me concerning questions or problems you may have in relation to the course by coming to office hours. Office hours provide an extra occasion to discuss

the contents of the course and questions you may have about the material. Office hours are also an opportunity to talk broadly about historical or philosophical ideas you may wish to explore further or things which may be outside the confines of the class. I enjoy visitors and office hours are boring if no one comes, so you'll be doing me a favor. Note: *Unless your question requires only a quick (mostly yes or no) answer or you are notifying me of technical problems with T-square, email should be avoided.* If you cannot make it to office hours, we can schedule another time to meet. Also, I do not respond to e-mail after 5 pm in the evening or on Saturday or Sunday, so please try and plan accordingly.

### **Participation and Classroom Conduct**

Participation is a significant part of your grade in this class. You are expected to come to class prepared to contribute actively to classroom discussions and activities. This will not only enhance your own learning experience but the experience of your fellow students. Good participation entails not only speaking and sharing your thoughts on a regular basis, but also being considerate and respecting the views of others. To earn high points in the participation part of the final grade, students will have demonstrated their awareness of the different functions of classroom comments by:

1. varying their discussion strategies,
2. considering what they say before they say it,
3. taking intellectual risks, and
4. always respecting the feelings of peers by not interrupting classmates while speaking and acknowledging interesting ideas.

Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect on the part of the student and the instructor. Neither instructor nor student should be subject to others' behavior that is rude, disruptive, intimidating, or demeaning. The instructor has primary responsibility for and control over classroom behavior and maintenance of academic integrity.

Instructor responsibilities:

- Start and end class on time.
- Treat all students with courtesy and respect.
- Be open to constructive input from students in the course.
- Ensure that opportunities to participate are enjoyed equally by all students in the course.

Student responsibilities:

- Come to class on time, and refrain from packing up belongings before class ends.
- Turn off all electronic devices that might create a disruption in class.
- Be quiet and give full respectful attention while either instructor or another student is speaking.
- When speaking, use courteous, respectful language and keep comments and questions relevant to the topic at hand.

I expect you to fulfill your responsibilities to me and to your fellow students. By the same token, if I am not meeting my responsibilities to you I expect you to let me know. In short, let's make our classroom a comfortable space for real intellectual dialogue, where everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

### **Introduction: What is Women's History?**

Jan. 7 (M): Course introduction

Jan. 9 (W) What is Women's History?

*Women's America*: Introduction

*Through Women's Eyes*: Introduction

Jan. 11 (F) Reading Primary Sources

### **Colonial Communities**

Jan. 14&16 (M&W) Readings

*Women's America*: Ulrich, Brooks

*Through Women's Eyes* 3-37

\*Jan. 18 (F) Discussion of Readings

*Women's America*: Norton, Karlson; Law of Domestic Relations (55-58)

The Law of Slavery (67-69)

*Through Women's Eyes*: 55-62

#### **T-Sq**

"Church Trial and Excommunication of Ann Hibbens"; "Case of Sarah Taylor, Indentured Servant"; "Susanna Martin, on Trial for Witchcraft"

### **American Revolution, Democracy and Republican Motherhood**

Jan 21 (M) MLK's Birthday: No Class

Jan. 23 (W) Readings:

*Women's America*: Kerber

Jan. 25&28 (F&M) Film: A Midwife's Tale

\*Jan. 30 (W) Discussion of the Film and Readings

Readings:

*Women's America*: Dayton, Mohr (183-192)

#### **T-SQ**

"A Law for Regulating Midwives"; "Letter from an Indentured Servant"; "Moll Placket Hole"; "A Father's Advice to His Daughter"

### **The Cult of True Womanhood and Women's Expanding Spheres**

Feb. 1&4 (F&M) Readings:

*Women's America*: Block, Boyden

\*Feb. 6 (W) Discussion of Readings:

*Women's America*: Rosenberg

*Through Women's Eyes* 124-130

**T-SQ**

Catherine Beecher

"Sarah Grimke" "The Peculiar Responsibilities of American Women"; "Sweethearts and Wives"

### **Gender and Industrial Labor**

Feb. 8&11 (F&M) Readings

*Through Women's Eyes* 146-159

\*Feb 13 (W) Discussion of Reading

*Through Women's Eyes* 169-174

**T-SQ**

"Petition for a 10 hour work day"; "The Sweating System"; "The Story of a Sweatshop Girl"; "Speak Out on Domestic Service"

### **Slavery and the Civil War**

Feb. 15 (F) Readings

*Women's America*: Belkin, Faust, Painter

\*"Distress and Discord in Virginia Slave Families"

**T-SQ**

\*"Ain't I a Woman?"(Account by Frances Gage)

Feb. 18 (M) Discussion: *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*

**Book report due**

### **Medicine, Sexuality and the Body**

Feb. 20 (W) Readings

**TBA**

\*Feb. 22 (F) Discussion of Readings

**T-Sq**

"On Female Health in America"; "The Murders of Marriage"; "Testimony as to the Insanity of Elizabeth Packard"; "Abortion in New York"; "Sex in Education"; "Effeminate Men, Masculine Women"

### **Expanding Boudaries I: Westward Frontiers**

Feb. 25 (M) Readings

"Cherokee Women and the Trail of Tears";

\*Feb. 27 (W) Discussion of Readings

*Women's America*: Pascoe; "Zitkala-Sa" (282-86)

#### **T-SQ**

"Domestic Life in the Diggings"

"Cherokee Women Address Their Nation"; "Missionary to Indian Territory";

"Reaching Oregon"; "The Great Indignation Meeting"; "An Indian Teacher Among Indians"; "Iron Teeth Remembers"

### **Expanding Boundaries II: Immigration, Race and Social Activism**

Feb. 29 (F)

*Women's America*: Sklar, Yung, Orlek

\*March 3 (M) Discussion of Readings

*Through Women's Eyes*: 373-392

#### **T-SQ**

"A Moral Reformer Makes Her Rounds"; "On Idle Daughters and Working Mothers"; "Rescued Chinese Prostitutes Testify"

March 5 (W): Film: Ida B. Wells

Schecter

### **March 7 (F) Midterm**

#### **Claiming the Rights of Citizenship--Votes and Laws**

March 10&12 (M&W) Readings

*Women's America*: DuBois, Hunter

*Through Women's Eyes* 424-432

\*March 14 (F) Discussion of Readings

*Women's America*: "Reconstruction Amendments" (247), "Declaration of Sentiments" (214), "Mackenzie vs. Hare" (365); "Equal Suffrage Amendment" (367)

### **March 17-21 Spring Break**

#### **The New Woman: The 1920s and Post-Suffrage Politics**

March 26 & 28(M&W)

*Women's America*: Cott

\*"Black Women Leaders and Party Politics in the 1920s"

\*March 30 (F) Discussion of the Readings

*Women's America*: Cowan, Brumberg, Margaret Sanger (pg. 370) Comstock Law (250)

\*"Making Faces: The Cosmetics Industry and the Cultural Construction of Gender"

*Through Women's Eyes* 460-465.

### **The Great Depression and WW II: Rosie the Riveter**

April 2(M) Reading

*Women's America*: Jones, Kessler-Harris, Reagan

April 4 (W) Film: Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter

\*April 7(F) Discussion on Readings and Film

*Women's America*: Milkman

\*Prostitutes on Strike

\*"This Changing World for Women"

\*"Can Women in War Industry be Good Mothers"

### **June Cleaver: Was the 1950s Really the 1950s? The Cold War and the New Domesticity**

April 9 (M) Readings

*Women's America*: Horowitz, "The Problem that Has no Name" (573) "I First Understood as a Woman"

*Through Women's Eyes* 593-608

**T-SQ**

"Atomic Age Motherhood";

April 11 (W): Film: Tupperware

Documents from the Tupperware website

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/tupperware/>

Under Special Features "Generation T"; "Women and Work"

Under People and Events "Brownie Wise" "Selling Tupperware" "Home Parties and Jubilees"

Under Positive Thinking: Motivational Writings from the 1950s "How to Sell Tupperware" "Women, Wishes and Wonder"

\*April 13 (F) In Class Debate: Was the 1950s Really the 1950s?

### **New Demands: Second Wave Feminism and Beyond**

April 14&16 (M&W)

*Women's America*: Dehart, Douglas, Bailey

*Through Women's Eyes* 628-658

\*April 18(F) Discussion of Readings

*Women's America::* Dimensions of Citizenship II (537-551) and Making the Personal Political (576-593)

April 21 (M) Class Discussion: *Fear of Flying*

**Essay due**

**Wrap-up: (Post) Feminism at the Turn of the Century**

April 23 (W)

*Through Women's Eyes* 665-676

April 25 (F) Show and Tell

**Please bring into class an image, written source, or artifact of women's lives in the year 2008. Come prepared to discuss how your piece of contemporary life fits into the course's themes and issues. Does it represent a significant change in women's lives or is it a reminder of continuity? (Be creative in your choice; we don't want to end up with 50 issues of *Vogue*! Be respectful as well; don't just bring material for its shock value.)**