

WS 253 SPECIAL TOPICS

How Does Feminism Change History?

Instructor:

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Course Description:

Have these questions come to your mind? Why is history predominantly about men? Why are some stories and people written into history while others are not? What kind of historians can change the history books we read? A lot of scholars have tried to use their works to answer these questions. Since the 1970s, as a result and part of the vast social and political changes in the U.S. and around the world, women's studies has flourished as a field of critical studies and produced a great amount of excellent scholarship. Such scholarship has enabled us to rethink our past, how we remember and write about the past, and how a critical view of the past helps us understand the present and imagine the future.

In this course, you will have the opportunity to read some of the best-known feminist works, scholarship on women and gender produced in different fields such as literature, cultural studies and history, and some interesting historical source material. We will discuss how feminists have challenged many assumptions about history and the writing of history; we will look at how women's and gender history has contributed to feminist theorizing; we will also explore how feminism has deepened our understanding of the histories of race, class, nationalism, colonialism and imperialism, which transcends geographical boundaries. The course consists of several sections, each centering round a key term in history and feminism. These key terms include: "women," "gender," "patriarchy," "other," "race," "the body," "sexuality," "author" and "history." We will discuss how they have been defined, applied, complicated, and problematized in feminist scholarship of different geographical areas. You will see how "feminism" changes "history" in the most concrete ways.

Required Textbooks:

1. Course packet.
2. Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minnneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
3. Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage, 1984)
4. Florence Howe ed., *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from 30 Founding Mothers* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2000).
5. Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History* (University of Florida Press, 2007)

Writing Assignments:

You will be asked to write short response papers throughout the course. You will write a book review (4-5 pages) as the mid-term paper and a research paper (8-10 pages) as the final project for this class. The final paper will be an oral history project. You will use material from *Global Feminisms Projects*, course readings, and transcripts of the interviews you have conducted with African-American scholars (or scholars who do research in this area) to write this paper. During the course, you will have the opportunity to discuss your final paper topic with the instructor, write an outline, revise your draft, and present the project to your classmates. Together we will develop the final project in several stages:

1. Design the questions that you will ask your interviewees.
2. Find sources that will help you analyze these interview narratives.
3. Turn in and revise your outline.
4. Workshop your paper with peers.
5. Presentation in class.

Course Schedule:

Week 1:

a. Introduction of the course

b. “Women’s History”

--Gerda Lerner, “Placing Women in History: A 1975 Perspective” in Liberating Women’s History (1976), pp. 357-367.

--Elsa Barkley Brown, “What Has Happened There: the Politics of Difference in Women’s History” in The Second Wave (1997), pp. 272-287

Questions:

1. What problems does Lerner identify in women’s history in the year of 1975?
2. Why does Brown use “jazz” to describe history writing? What is she trying to argue about the writing of women’s history with the Anita Hill case?

Week 2:

a. “Gender History”

--Joan Scott, “Women’s History” and “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” in Gender and the Politics of History revised edition (1999), pp. 1-50.

Questions:

1. How does Scott define “gender”?
2. In Scott’s view, why is “gender” an important analytical category for historical analysis?
3. How does Scott describe the relationship between women’s history and gender history?

Response paper #1 (2 pages)

b. “Patriarchy”

--Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women” (1975) in The Second Sex, pp. 27-62.

--Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in Third world Women and the Politics of Feminism, pp. 51-80.

Questions:

1. How do these two authors approach "patriarchy"? How is "patriarchy" defined?
2. What is the sex/gender system in Rubin's article? What kinds of understanding of the oppression of women is she arguing against?
3. What kind of feminist scholarship is Mohanty criticizing? What examples does she analyze? What is danger of a universal "patriarchy?"

Week 3:

a. "Other"

--Malek Alloula, The Colonial Harem (1986).

--Donna Haraway, "The Persistence of Vision" in Feminism & "Race" (2001), pp. 145-160.

Questions:

1. What is Orientalism? What is Haraway trying to argue about "science?" In what ways Said's work support her argument?
2. How does Alloula explore Orientalism?

b. Revisiting "Patriarchy"

--Judith Stacey, "Principles and Contradictions of the Confucian Patriarchal Order" in Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China (1983), pp. 15-65

--Rey Chow, "Violence in the Other Country: China as Crisis, Spectacle, and Woman" in Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences (2001), pp. 345-364.

Questions:

1. According to Stacey, what are the characteristics of the Confucian patriarchy? How do feminists understand its relationship with Chinese women's oppression? What does she say about "footbinding"?
2. How does Chow challenge the dichotomy of oppressor/victim? How does she think Western feminist theory should be applied to the case of Chinese women?

Week 4: Footbinding I

a.

--Dorothy Ko, Every Step A Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet (2001)

--Ko, Cinderella's Sister

b.

--Patricia Ebrey, "Gender and Sinology: Shifting Western Interpretations of Footbinding, 1300-1890," Late Imperial China 20:2 (1999), pp. 1-34

--Hill Gates, "Footloose in Fujian: Economic Correlates of Footbinding," Comparative Studies in Society and History 43:1 (2001): 130-148

Questions and assignments:

1. What are these three authors' (Ko, Ebrey, Gates) arguments about footbinding? In what ways are their approaches different and/or similar? What kind of primary sources do they use?
2. Write a **2-page** review essay comparing Ko, Ebrey and Gates.

Week 5:

a. Footbinding II

--Primary source reading: "Letters by Women of the Ming-Qing Period" (translated by Yu-yin Cheng) in Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History, pp. 169-177.

--Find an article and some visual material about footbinding and bring it to the class for discussion (you may use Google search or Mirlyn online journals and newspapers).

Questions:

1. What arguments about Chinese women of pre-modern times can you make with the letters?
2. What do you want to show to your classmates in the material that you are bringing? Why do you think this material is important for our study of the historical writing about footbinding?

b. "Race" and Feminism I

--Angela Davis, Women, Race & Class (1984). Chapter 1-5 (1-98).

Week 6: "Race" and Feminism II

a. --Angela Davis, Women, Race & Class (1984). Chapter 7-9, 11, 12.

Questions:

Write one paragraph to summarize each chapter. In this paragraph, you should try to answer the following questions: What is Davis's main argument in this chapter? How does she argue it—what historical events is she analyzing and what evidence supports her argument?

b. --Primary source: Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?" (1851) in Reading Women's Lives, pp. 49-50.

--Nell I. Painter, Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol (1996), chapter 14, 18 (pp. 121-131 and 185-199)

Questions:

1. What is Truth trying to accomplish in her speech? How does Truth's speech contradict the cult of true womanhood as a feminine ideal? What issues does she introduce about race and class?
2. How do the versions of Truth's speech differ? What does the difference reflect about feminist movement of her time? In what ways would you use this speech as a primary source?

Draft of the review of Angela Davis due (4-5 pages). Instructor will email you feedback in two days.

Week 7: “Race” III

- a. --James Oliver Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke: Gender Conventions Among Antebellum Free Blacks,” *Feminist Studies* 12:1 (1986): 51-76.
--Everlyn Nakano Glenn, “Integrating Race and Gender” in Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor (2002), pp. 6-17.
--Antoinette Burton, “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and ‘The Indian Woman,’ 1865-1915” in Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance (1992), pp. 137-157.

b. Study Break

Final draft of review due.

Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954,

Week 8: “The Body”

- a. --Denise Riley, “Does A Sex Have A History?” and “Bodies, Identities, Feminisms” (1988) in “Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History, pp. 1-17 and 96-114.
--Patricia J. Williams, “On Being the Object of Property” (1988) in Theorizing Feminism, pp. 276-294.

Questions:

1. In what ways has the body become important for sexual and racial identities? How could the body be socially constructed?
2. How do Riley and Williams challenge the construction of identity based on biology? In what ways could their arguments contribute to theorizing feminism and writing gender history?

b. The Fragmented Body

- Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe, 1815-1817” in Deviant Bodies: Cultural Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture (1995), pp. 19-48.
--Screening: Bartmann the “Hottentot”

Question:

1. How do the article and the film grapple with the topic of Hottentot differently?
2. In what ways can visual representation become part of racial discourse?
3. **Response paper due during the weekend.**

Week 9:

a. The Confusing Body

- Mary Niall Mitchell, “Rosebloom and Pure White,’ Or So It Seemed,” American Quarterly 54:3 (2002): 369-410.

Questions:

What kind of racial assumptions does Mitchell's historical analysis challenge? What kind of method does she use to make such an analysis?

b. "Sexuality" I

--Sander Gilman, Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness (1985), Introduction and chapter 3.

Question and assignment:

1. What categories does Gilman try to explore in the book? What argument does she try to make about the linkage of race, sexuality and pathology?
2. How does Gilman talk about "representation?"
3. How was the Hottentot linked to the prostitute?
4. **Think about the topic of your final paper.** What aspect of the second-wave feminist movement do you want to explore in this paper? What is your thesis? What secondary sources are you going to use? What kind of primary sources other than the interviews do you want to employ (press, visual material, oral interviews, etc.)? Turn in a **1-page proposal via email.**

Week 10:

a. "Sexuality" II

--Lucy Bland, "White Women and Men of Color: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War," Gender & History 17:1 (2005): 29-61.

Assignment:

Revise your proposal. Set up an appointment with the instructor to discuss your project.

b. "Heterosexuality"

--Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose (1993), pp. 203-224.

--Sang Tzu-lan, "Revisiting Premodern Chinese Female-Female Relationship" in The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China (2003), pp. 37-65.

Questions:

1. What does Rich try to argue about some feminists' view on the issue of sexuality? How does "compulsory heterosexuality" function in society?
2. Why does Sang think "compulsory marriage" is a better analytical term than "compulsory heterosexuality" for the period in her study? What does this tell you about the importance of term in historical scholarship?

Week 11: "Homosexuality" and "Friendship"

a.

-- Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America" in Feminism & History (1999), pp. 477-504.

--Sang Tzu-lan, "Translating Homosexuality: The Discourse of *Tongxing ai* in Republican China" in The Emerging Lesbian, pp. 99-126.

Questions:

1. What does Smith-Rosenberg say about doing the history of sexuality? What was the difference between friendship and same-sex desire in the world that she describes here?
2. What is Sang's observation of the impact that Western sexology had on Chinese people's way of understanding sexuality? Why is translation an important issue in her historical analysis?

b. Historical Writing: "Author"

--Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser, "Introduction" and pp. 167-196 in A History of Their Own: Women in Europe From Prehistory to the Present (1988 and 2000 versions)

--Carla Hesse, "The Cultural Contradictions of Feminism in the French Revolution" in The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750-1820 (2002), pp. 190-202.

Question:

1. Why did historians want to write a "history of their own" for European women in 1988? Why did we still need this historical project in 2000?
2. What is Hesse trying to accomplish in terms of challenging the general argument about the cultural and social effects of the French Revolution in conventional history?

Outline of research paper due. It should include: a thesis statement; main arguments that support your thesis statement and how you substantiate each of these arguments with your analysis of primary and secondary sources; a conclusion; a list of sources (at least one primary source).

Outline will be returned to you via email with the instructor's suggestions.

Week 12:

a. "History"

--Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1929), Chapter 1-3 & 6

Questions:

1. Bring two things to the class: a list (with citations) of five important issues for women writers that Woolf has touched upon in this book; a short biography of Woolf that you have found (anywhere).
2. Who is Woolf? How does she discuss "history"? What can historians learn from her? What does this tell us about the interdisciplinary nature of feminist historical scholarship?

b. Oral History I

--Screening of *Global Feminism Oral History Project*: Grace Lee Boggs interview

No reading for this session. Group presentation of research projects.

Draft of your research paper due (5-7 pages).

Week 13:

a. Oral History II

--The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimonies from 30 Founding Mothers. Choose one short essay from each of the six parts.

Questions:

1. How do you describe these "founding mothers'" historical consciousness and subjectivity from the testimonies?
2. What analytical categories do they discuss? What issues do they focus? What is missing in these testimonies?

Your draft will be returned with my comments and suggestions.

b. No class meeting. Revise final paper.

Week 14:

Evaluations, revision questions, etc.