

**History 353:**  
**Women in American Culture and Society through 1865**

Fall 2009: Tues-Thurs, 1:15-2:30

Sears 541

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This is a multicultural course on American women's history from the age of European contact through the end of the Civil War. We will begin by coming to terms with the various meanings of "gender" and "sex." In the ensuing weeks, we will examine how those definitions changed over time and were shaped by class, race, ethnicity, region, and religion. After the first week, the class will assume a "survey approach" to U. S. women's history. Readings will *correspond with, not replicate*, the lectures. Students are invited to participate with questions and comments during the lectures, and are required to take part in class discussions.

In my effort to present a comprehensive and compelling class in multicultural American women's history, the syllabus for this class is complex. Some days I will lecture. On other days, we will have discussion. Regardless of the format, most days have required readings and they are broken into three basic forms: surveys, articles, and documents.

Objectives:

By the end of this course students should know the overall chronology, key events, themes and underlying patterns characterizing American women's history up to 1865. They should be familiar with current debates in the study of gender, sexuality, women and the family. Students should demonstrate improved writing, discussion, reading, research and analytic skills.

Prerequisites for the course: There are no course prereq.s for this course, but I do expect students to be familiar with American history.

Grading: For the semester grade, I will be using the CWRU grading system of A, B, C, D, F. Otherwise, I will use a numeric scale.

Accommodations: I am interested in meeting with students with disabilities who are registered with the Coordinator of Disability Services (X5230), who may need individual arrangements.

Meeting one-on-one: **I urge you to come by** during my office hours to discuss your papers and plans for the course. If my office hours do not work with your schedule then

we can set up an appointment. Do not miss an appointment! It will count as a class absence.

### **Assignments**

#### **Undergraduate assignments:**

One exam: worth **20%** of final grade.

Paper on *American Jezebel* **30%**

Paper on impact of industrialism**20%**

Journal writing: Students will keep journals. Suggested topics are noted for each day, but students should feel free to address topics of their choice as long as they engage similar material. **20%**

Participation: 10%

Attendance: NOTE that attendance is mandatory. Absences will affect your semester grade.

#### **Graduate Student assignments:**

### **Extra Credit:**

#### **No Extensions, absences, late papers, or emailed/faxed papers.**

Yes, there are exceptions to these rules. Just use your head about when is the right time to ask.

#### **My contract with you:**

As your professor, it is my job to convey information, help you work on skills relevant to the historical discipline, and to encourage your intellectual growth. I will not hold classes over the designated time limit, nor add extra assignments or class meetings. I will make time to meet with you if you need it, whether it is by appointment or during office hours.

#### **Required Texts:**

Ellen Carol Dubois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes*

Eve LaPlante, *American Jezebel*

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

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope*

#### **Notes on Reading:**

Students are required to engage the material. For some of you this may mean reading every word, for others it may mean reading "objectively"--with a pencil and paper in hand, taking notes, but not reading everything in entirety. My requirements are that you 1) understand and critique the arguments made in secondary readings 2) can take a "historian's" approach to the primary documents—that you read them to enhance both your understanding and your ability to critique lectures and secondary readings.

## **GAME PLAN for FALL 2009:**

### **Week one: Ways of thinking and writing about women's pasts.**

August 25 : Introduction to the Course: go over syllabus, timelines, and discuss terminology.

Suggested journal topic: explore your assumptions about women's history before embarking on this course. What do you see as major themes in women's history up to 1865?

August 27 : The field of American Women's History and Concepts of Womanhood

Reading: Kerber and De Hart, "Gender and the New Women's History" on Blackboard [hereafter B].

Journal suggestion: What is "gender" and how is the objective concept of gender useful for analyzing the historical past?

### **Week Two: Colonial Frontiers**

September 1: gender frontiers

Read: Dubois and Dumenil, pp. 2-14, 38-49.

Journal suggestion: What is your knowledge of slavery in this country—where does it come from? What is the major difference between women's history of enslavement and general history of enslavement?

September 3 : Race and Slavery and "levels of unfreedom."

**Journals due!** They should address readings up through Sept. 3.

Reading: Dubois and Dumenil, 15-24, and ads from the Virginia Gazette, 56-57; Hine and Thompson, "A New and Alien World."

Note: an interesting searchable database on runaway slave advertisements: [etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/runaways/1730s.html](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/runaways/1730s.html).

### **Week Three: Colonial Households**

September 8: New England colonies.

Reading: Eve Laplante, *American Jezebel*, up to 157; also Dubois and Dumenil, 24-37.

Journal suggestion: Does the view of women's experiences in the N.E. colonies challenge or support your previous knowledge of life in this time and place?

September 10 : Finish discussion on Hutchinson

Reading: Eve LaPlante, *American Jezebel*, 158-end.

### **Week Four: Revolution**

September 15: Women and Revolution

Reading: Dubois and Dumenil, 70-96, 110-118.

Journal suggestion: How do you see wars challenging and/or confirming gender politics?

September 17: Judith Sargent Murray and Republican Motherhood

Reading: , and Judith Sargent Murray, “Observations of Female Abilities” in Dubois and Dumenil, 127-130. Hine and Thompson, “Tale of Three Cities.”

Journal suggestion: What is the central argument of Republican motherhood and why is it so revolutionary?

### **Week Five: Early Households**

September 22 : Film: “A Midwife’s Tale”

Reading: sample chapter from *A Midwife’s Tale*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (B).

Journal suggestion: respond to issues raised in the movie. How did seeing a re-enactment of early Republican life change or confirm your image of the period?

September 24: Household labor and Great Awakening. **Journals due!**

Reading Dubois and Dumenil, 96-101; and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, chapters from *More Work for Mother* (B).

### **Week Six: New Nation**

September 29: Wage labor

Reading : Dubois and Dumenil, 136-154.

Journal suggestion: Why is it significant that women began to strike for higher wages and better working conditions early in the history of women in the industrial workforce?

October 1: Overflow

### **Week Seven: Home and Work**

October 6: Domesticity and Moral Influence:

Reading: Dubois and Dumenil, 182-189. “Prostitution in New York City,” in Dubois and Dumenil, 169-174

Journal suggestion: Why was prostitution such a well-founded form of business? Why was it one of the first “social ills” addressed by women’s reform groups?

October 8: North and South

Reading: Dubois and Dumenil, 154-178; Paula Baker, “Domestication of Politics” (B)

Journal suggestion: the gulf between the lives of northern women and southern women is widening. What do you see as the principle reasons for this division?

### **Week Eight: Women’s Rights and Abolition**

Oct. 13: First half of “Not for Ourselves Alone”

Journal suggestion: Respond to the movie. What do you believe you will remember about this film long after this class is behind you?

**October : Nighttime film showing to finish the movie (2 hours): 7-9, location tba**

Oct.15 : discuss women’s rights and abolition

Reading: Dubois and Dumenil, 213-228.

Journal suggestion: If, as an activist, you were forced by Amendment 14 to make a choice about where to put your time and effort, what would you have chosen to do?

**Week Nine: Women in the West**

Oct. 19-20: Fall Break—no class! Enjoy

October 22: First discussion of Uncle Tom's Cabin

Reading: Uncle Tom's Cabin, "Intro," chapters 1-10.

Journal suggestion: How does the character of Uncle Tom confirm or challenge the popular notion of "Uncle Tom."

**Week Ten:**

October 27: Women in the Trans-Mississippi West

Reading: Dubois and Dumenil, 202-213; Amelia Stewart Knight (B)

**Journals due!**

October 29 : overflow

**Paper due** on the impact of industrialism on the home.

**Week Eleven:**

November 3: **Exam** on material covered so far. Study sheets will be provided ahead of time.

November 5: In class film: "The West", part of episode two

**Week Twelve:**

November 10 : Second discussion of UTC

Reading: chapters 10-20.

November 12 : *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Reading: *Incidents*, first half.

Journal: What might you have done in the place of Harriet Jacobs? Why does she take such pains to emphasize her chastity given the choices she makes?

**Week Thirteen: Thanksgiving Break**

November 17: Discussion of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Reading: second half of *Incidents*.

Journal: How do you see color (degree of pigment in skin) as affecting the lives of slaves in both *Incidents* and UTC?

November 19 : Women and Civil War

Reading: Dubois and Dumenil, p. 228-235.

Journal suggestion: Why is the Civil War sometimes referred to as the "woman's war?"

**Week Fourteen: Thanksgiving**

Nov 24 & 26: No class

**Week Fifteen:**

December 1: On the battlefield

Readings: Selection *Uncommon Soldier*.

December 3: War's end.

Journal suggestion: Have your views on women's experience in America changed because of this course? If so, how? If not, why not?

**Journals due**

## Assignments

### Journals

Each student will keep a journal in a notebook used exclusively for this assignment. The journal is intended to help you engage materials from class discussions and readings over the course of the semester. It is also intended to help me understand your thinking throughout the semester.

You must write ONE entry (2-4 pages) for each DAY of class excepting the days when the journals are due, as noted in the syllabus. I encourage students to write by hand, but if you must type, you should have at least 2 double-spaced pages per entry.

I have made suggestions for journal topics for each day, but these are only suggestions. Feel free to address what you will as long as you engage the material we are covering in class. I will let you know if you are wandering too far afield.

Above all, think critically about what you read and hear. What are an author's strengths and weaknesses? How did issues raised in class challenge or confirm your own interpretation of an article or document? How do class discussions relate to issues of importance today?

IMPORTANT: summaries of readings will not count! If you find yourself summarizing, you'd better clarify why you've done so and how it moves your thinking forward, or you will receive a zero for that entry.

You will hand in your journal as indicated on the syllabus. You will receive comments on your journal over the course of the semester.

**Exams:** Designed to test both procedural and conceptual knowledge, these exams will be taken in class and will consist of identification, short answer, and essay. For examples, see "sample exam" on blackboard.

**Paper:** Each student will write a short (roughly 6-8 page) essay examining an aspect of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. We will have spent the semester doing close readings and discussions of this book as it relates to American women's history and patterns in American cultural production. This is your chance to pull from those discussions what has intrigued you the most and develop it into a full analysis.

We will discuss possible paper topics in class.

**Research Paper: Graduates Students ONLY.** The final assignment is designed to give you maximum freedom to follow your own interests. The only requirement is that the paper be 15-20 pages, plus citations (footnotes or endnotes only) and a bibliography. It must be double-spaced, numbered, and include a cover sheet.

We will discuss topics in class as well, both to hone ideas and to enlist each other's help. You are urged to talk and work with both classmates and myself on this project. Your writing must be your own, but sharing or trying to explain your ideas will enrich the process and strengthen your work.

A word of advice: do not choose an easy topic over one that truly interests you. Everyone writes a better paper when they are enthralled with the subject. You may need help in making the project manageable, but let your interests be your guide.

Here are a few suggested topics, but do not feel restricted by this list:

- A) Choose a woman's diary found in the archives of the Western Reserve Historical Society. Examine the account she gives of her days and/or aspirations and explore what conclusions you might draw about the lives of American women during that time in general (paying attention, of course, to factors such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, and region). Do not forget to use sources such as city directories or census records to flesh out the story; they often give details not mentioned in diaries, such as the number of children in the family, area of residence, etc.
- B) Do a newspaper search to find examples of advertisements for runaway slaves and/or wives during the antebellum period. What do these advertisements tell us about white public understanding of slave women, ownership of individuals, human rights, etc. Be aware that there is literature on this subject, so be sure to use secondary sources.
- C) Examine changes in images of women and their clothing as depicted in *Godey's Lady's Book* (on microfilm at WRHS). How do changes in fashion reflect or differ from what we know about women during those periods. You will probably want to choose two different decades, such as 1830s and 1850s. Include images with your paper when possible.
- D) Investigate the short fiction that ran in newspapers during the 1830s-50s. What are the resulting images of women? Are they complex or simple? Do they reflect what you read about images of women during that time? Lots of secondary literature on this, so use it.
- E) Examine newspapers for blurbs on women and crime. What are the prevailing stereotypes? What are the typical crimes? Analyze the language used in these blurbs and discuss it in terms of women's history in particular.
- F) Study advertisements for "help wanted" in antebellum newspapers. Analyze what they tell us about women's labor during that particular time and place. Remember to be careful not to generalize. If you can, compare papers regionally or along a time line.
- G) Politics: focus on some aspect of the movement to establish legal, political, social and/or economic rights for women. You could do this by

focusing on a movement, such as clothing reform, or examining records of divorce cases in light of contextual movements.