WOMEN IN AMERICAN HISTORY, 1600-1900

The roles and experiences of women in American history have been shaped by social, economic, cultural, and political values and institutions often conceived of and controlled by men, but also contributed to and/or contested by women, both individually and in groups. Yet women’s roles and experiences differed profoundly across time and space, and within class, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. The historical analysis of gender roles and relations provides a way of understanding both similarities and differences in the experiences of women in American society and it reshapes the questions that historians ask about that society in general.

The course examines the social, economic, cultural, and political history of women in America between 1600 and 1900. We will examine women’s changing roles in both private and public spheres, and the circumstances of women’s lives as these were shaped by class, ethnic, and racial differences. Throughout the course, we will explore the recurring conflict between the ideals of womanhood and the realities of women’s experience, and we will focus on women’s family responsibilities, paid and unpaid work, religion, education, reform, women’s rights, and feminism.

Course requirements: The course consists of two class meetings each week. The reading assignments for each class should be completed by that class meeting. (The further readings listed in the Reading Guide are not required.) You are expected to attend class and to come to all class meetings and discussion sections prepared to discuss and analyze the readings [20% of final grade]. The History 2126/GSWS 2251 Reading Guide on Blackboard provides questions to help focus your reading for the class discussions as well as electronic links to all of the assigned articles, either through e-reserve or an online Library database. If you miss a discussion section meeting, you are expected to write an informal (ungraded) but thoughtful evaluation (2-3 pages) of the assigned book. You are encouraged to purchase the assigned books from the bookstore; a copy of each of the assigned books is on reserve in the library.

All three essay assignments are integral parts of the course. Two critical analyses of primary documents (5 pages each) will be due during the semester [together, 40% of final grade]. A final take-home essay (10-12 pages) is due by the scheduled final-exam date for the course [in most cases, 40% of final grade]. For guidelines and exceptions, see the Extension, Deadline, and Grading Policy on the Blackboard course home page.

All students are expected to read, understand, and abide by the Bowdoin College Academic Honor Code and by the rules of citation described on the Academic Honesty and Plagiarism site at https://www.bowdoin.edu/dean-of-students/judicial-board/academic-honesty-and-plagiarism/index.html.

Anzia Yezierska, Bread Givers (1925; new edition 1999)

The History 2126/GSWS 2251 Reading Guide, Electronic Reserve Reading Links, and other online Resources can be found on Blackboard at https://blackboard.bowdoin.edu/, or at https://web.bowdoin.edu/faculty/s/smcmahon/courses/hist246/index.shtml.
WEEK 1
1/22 “WOMEN’S HISTORY” – “WOMEN HISTORY”: Introduction

1/24 ENGLISH AND EUROPEAN HERITAGE: Gender and Patriarchy
reading: Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” American Historical Review 91.5 (1986), 1053-71. (JSTOR)

Colonial, Revolutionary, and Early National American Society
WEEK 2
1/29 THE CHESAPEAKE BAY: White and black women in a predominantly male society

1/31 ENGLISH WOMEN IN NEW ENGLAND: Traditional ideas and new circumstances
reading: Jane Kamensky, “The Misgovernment of Woman’s Tongue,” in Kamensky, Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England (1997), Ch. 3, 71-98; notes, 227-238. (e-reserve)
document: Anne Bradstreet, “Prologue,” from The Tenth Muse Lately sprung up in America (1650), reprinted by Poetry Foundation. (LINK)

Guidelines for Writing a Critical Analysis of a Primary Document (LINK)
History 246: Collections of Primary Documents (LINK)
Extension, Deadline, and Grading Policy; A Brief Guide to Footnote Citations in History; A brief guide to correction marks (LINKS)

WEEK 3
2/5 RELIGIOUS CONFRONTATION (continued) AND SOCIAL CONFLICT: The Salem Witchcraft Episode

2/7 DISCUSSION: COLONIAL WOMEN’S WORK AND ROLES IN NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

WEEK 4
2/12 ANGLO-AMERICAN WOMEN DURING THE REVOLUTION AND THE EARLY REPUBLIC: “Republican Mothers” and “Republican Wives”

2/14 MIDWIFERY ON THE MAINE FRONTIER IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC: The Midwife and the Historian
Film: A Midwife’s Tale (88 minutes), by Laurie Kahn-Leavitt (1998), based on Laurel Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812 (1990)

First Essay Due: Thursday, February 18 (critical analysis of a primary document written between 1600 and 1800)
WEEK 5
2/19 “WOMAN’S SEPARATE SPHERE”: Myths, realities, and historiography
further reading: Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,’’ American Quarterly 18 (Summer 1966), 151-174 (JSTOR)

2/21 THE WORLD OF URBAN, WHITE, MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN: Domestic “roles” and fashionable expectations

The Nineteenth Century
WEEK 6
2/26 WOMEN’S “PUBLIC” ACTIVITIES: Education, religion and reform

2/28 DISCUSSION: PROSTITUTES, BUSINESS CLERKS, AND NEWSPAPERS: The changing social, economic, and cultural order in Jacksonian New York City

WEEK 7
3/5 DISCUSSION: PUBLIC MORALITY, MURDER, AND PUBLIC OPINION: The double standards of opportunity, reputation, and judicial privilege

3/7 THE NEW ENGLAND MILL “GIRLS” BECOME A WORKING CLASS OF WOMEN
Lise Vogel, “With Hearts to Feel and Tongues to Speak,” in M. Cantor and B. Laurie, Class, Sex and the Woman Worker (1974), 64-82. (e-reserve)

WEEK 8
3/26 BLACK WOMEN IN WHITE AMERICA: Slavery and Freedom in the 19th century
3/28 DISCUSSION: BLACK WOMEN, WORK, AND THE FAMILY

WEEK 9
4/2 NATIVE-AMERICAN WOMEN
readings: Nancy Shoemaker, “The Rise or Fall of Iroquois Women,” *Journal of Women’s History* 2.3 (1991), 39-57. (PROJECT MUSE)

4/4 DISCUSSION: FRONTIER WOMEN

WEEK 10
4/9 WORKING-CLASS WOMEN IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY: Sexual Harassment, the 1909 Shirtwaist Makers Strike, and the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Second Essay Due: Monday April 12 (critical analysis of a primary document written between 1800 and 1900)

4/11 THE “SCRIBBLING WOMEN”: Women writers on “womanhood”

WEEK 11
4/16 DISCUSSION: IMMIGRANT WOMEN: Balancing old-world and new-world expectations of womanhood

4/18 THE “WOMAN MOVEMENT”: The beginnings of white middle-class feminism and “woman’s rights” in the 19th century
documents: Sarah Grimke, “Letter in Response to the Pastoral Letter” (July 1837), at Zulick Home Page, Wake Forest University. (LINK)
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments,” Seneca Falls Convention, Seneca Falls, NY (1848), at The Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B Anthony Papers Project, Rutgers University. (LINK)
Sojourner Truth, “A’n’t I a Woman?” Women’s Rights Convention, Akron,Ohio (1851), at Zulick Home Page, Wake Forest University. (LINK)
WEEK 12
4/23  THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT: Moderates versus Radical Feminists
              74.3 (1987), 836-862. (JSTOR)

The Late Nineteenth Century
4/25  THE “NEW WOMAN” AND THE PUBLIC OPTIONS FOR SINGLE WOMEN
    reading: Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Hull House in the 1890s: A Community of Women Reformers,”
             Signs 10 (1985), 657-77. (JSTOR)
    optional document: Jane Addams, Ch. IV, “The Snare of Preparation,” Ch. VI, “The Subjective
                        Necessity for Social Settlements,” Twenty Years at Hull House (1910), from the Build-A-
                        Book Initiative at the Celebration of Women Writers, FullBooks.com. (LINK)

WEEK 13
4/30  THE “NEW WOMAN” (continued): Continuity and change in perceptions and experiences of girlhood,
       womanhood, marriage, and sexuality
             (JSTOR)
    optional reading: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Hearing Women’s Words: A Feminist
                      Reconstruction of History,” in Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender
                      in Victorian America (1985), 1-52.

5/2  DISCUSSION: WOMEN AND THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION

WEEK 14
5/7  STRIVING FOR “AUTONOMY” IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Final Take-Home Essay Due: Tuesday, May 14, 5:00 p.m.