Women in American History, 1600-1900

The roles and experiences of women in American history have been shaped by social, cultural, economic, 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 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 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 246 Reading Guide on Blackboard provides questions to help focus your reading for the class discussions. If you miss a discussion section meeting, you are expected to write a thoughtful evaluation (3-4 pages) of the assigned monograph. All reading assignments are available on e-reserve through the Library Reserves link on Blackboard or by link to an online source or database from the Reading Guide on Blackboard. You are encouraged to purchase the assigned texts from the bookstore (a copy of each of the assigned books is on reserve in the library).

The essay assignments are an integral part of the course. Two critical analyses of primary documents (5-7 pages each) will be due during the semester [together, 40% of final grade]. A final take-home essay (8-10 pages) is due by the scheduled final-exam date for the course [40% of final grade].

All students are expected to read, understand, and abide by The Bowdoin College Academic Honor Code at http://academic.bowdoin.edu/academics/plagiarism/.

Joan Jensen, Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850 (1986)
Jean Friedman, The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900 (1985)
Anzia Yezierska, Bread Givers (1925; new edition 1999)

The History 246 Reading Guide, Electronic Reserve Reading Links, and other online Resources can be found on Blackboard Academic Suite at http://blackboard.bowdoin.edu/, or at http://academic.bowdoin.edu/faculty/S/smcmahon/courses/hist246/index.shtml
WEEK 1.
1/23 “WOMEN’S HISTORY” — “WOMEN HISTORY”: Introduction

1/25 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.
1/30 THE CHESAPEAKE BAY: White and black women in a predominantly male society

2/1 ENGLISH WOMEN IN NEW ENGLAND: Traditional ideas and new circumstances
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)
Guidelines for Writing a Critical Analysis of a Primary Document (LINK)
History 246: Collections of Primary Documents (LINK)
Extension Policy (LINK)

WEEK 3.
2/6 RELIGIOUS CONFRONTATION (continued) AND SOCIAL CONFLICT: The Salem Witchcraft Episode


2/8 DISCUSSION: COLONIAL WOMEN’S WORK AND ROLES IN NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

Week 4.
2/13 Anglo-American Women during the Revolution and the Early Republic: “Republican Mothers” and “Republican Wives”

Nancy F. Cott, et al., eds., “Abigail Adams’s Letters from the Home Front” (1776-77); “A Father’s Advice to his Daughter” (1788); “Eliza Southgate Reflects” (1800-02), Root of Bitterness 2nd ed. (1996), 71-76, 91-102. (e-reserve)

2/15 Midwifery on the Maine Frontier in the Early Republic: The Midwife and the Historian
Film: A Midwife’s Tale (88 minutes), a film by Laurie Kahn-Leavitt (1998), based on Laurel Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812 (New York, 1990)

First Paper Due: February 15 (critical analysis of a primary document written between 1600 and 1800)

Week 5.
2/20 “Woman’s Separate Sphere”: Myths, realities, and historiography

2/22 Discussion: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women: The evolution of women’s traditional roles in the household economy, 1750-1850
Joan Jensen, Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850 (1986)

The Nineteenth Century
Week 6.
2/27 The World of Urban, White, Middle-Class Women: Domestic roles, fashionable expectations, and the medical view of women


3/1 Women’s “Public” Activities: Education, religion and reform

**WEEK 7.**  
3/6 **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)  
Louisa May Alcott, “Servant” from *Work: a story of experience* (1873), Ch. 2, 14-33, online at Cornell University Library, *Making of America*.  (LINK)

3/8 **DISCUSSION: SOUTHERN WOMEN**  

**WEEK 8.**  
3/27 **BLACK WOMEN IN WHITE AMERICA: Slavery and Freedom in the 19th century**  

3/29 **DISCUSSION: BLACK WOMEN, WORK, AND THE FAMILY**  
NOTE: if you read the 1985 edition, read the “Epilogue” from the 1995 edition.

**WEEK 9.**  
4/3 **WORKING-CLASS WOMEN: The “Uprising of the 20,000” and the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. Factory Fire**  
Film: *Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl: A Documentary Produced by the American Social History Project* (1993)
Film: *New York: A Documentary*, directed by Ric Burns (PBS 1999)

Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day* (1905)  (continued)

*Second Paper Due*: April 3 (critical analysis of a primary document written between 1800 and 1900)

4/5  **DISCUSSION**: IMMIGRANT WOMEN: Balancing old-world and new-world expectations

**WEEK 10.**
4/10  **NATIVE-AMERICAN WOMEN**
Readings: Nancy Shoemaker, “The Rise or Fall of Iroquois Women,” *Journal of Women’s History* 2.3 (1991), 39-57.  (e-reserve)


4/12  **DISCUSSION**: FRONTIER WOMEN

**WEEK 11.**
4/17  **THE “SCRIBBLING WOMEN”**: Women writers on “womanhood”

4/19  **THE “WOMAN MOVEMENT”**: The beginnings of white middle-class feminism and “woman’s rights” in the 19th century
Readings: 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 (1848), at *Zulich Home Page*, Wake Forest 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.**
4/24  **THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT**: Moderates versus Radical Feminists

The Late Nineteenth Century

4/26 The “New Woman” and the Public Options for Single Women (continued)
Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Hull House in the 1890s: A Community of Women Reformers,” *Signs* 10 (1985), 657-77. (JSTOR)

Further reading: Jane Addams, Ch. VIII, “Problems of Poverty,” *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910), at Intute, The Intute Consortium. (LINK)

WEEK 13.
5/1 THE “NEW WOMAN” (continued): Continuity and change in perceptions and experiences of girlhood, womanhood, marriage, and sexuality
Readings: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” *Signs* 1 (1975), 1-29. (JSTOR)


5/3 DISCUSSION: WOMEN AND THE CULTURE OF CONSUMPTION

WEEK 14.
5/8 STRIVING FOR “AUTONOMY” IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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