

History 249
Spring 2008
MW 1:00-2:25, CT 16 Harrison-McCann

McMahon
S11 Hubbard Hall
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A History of Women's Voices in America

This intermediate-level seminar will take a long view of women's voices in North America, from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, as these voices emerged in private letters and journals, autobiographies, poetry, short stories and novels, essays, addresses, and prescriptive literature. We will explore the content and form of the writing from a historical perspective, determining women's expectations, reactions and responses to the opportunities and "boundaries" of their lives (roles, status, domain) as these were defined by the particular era—and society—in which they lived. The syllabus follows a basic chronological organization; within that framework, the readings are organized by topic. We will examine a selection of readings each week, comparing the issues women addressed, the questions they asked, the assumptions they made, and their particular perspectives. In most weeks, an essay from the secondary literature on the subject will accompany the primary readings, providing a—but not the only—historical framework for considering the women's voices.

Course requirements: The course consists of two meetings each week. All of the reading assignments for each class should be completed by that class meeting. You are expected to attend all meetings of the seminar and to arrive prepared to participate in a discussion and analysis the assigned readings [35% of final grade]. The *History/GWS 249 Reading Guide on Blackboard* provides questions to help you focus your reading for the class discussions, so that you can make the most efficient use of your time. If you miss a class, you are expected to write an informal (ungraded), but thoughtful discussion (2-3 pages) of the assigned readings for that class. 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).

During the first half of the course, students will write three short (3-4 pages) essays on three of the assigned primary texts [10% each]. During the second half of the course, students will design and pursue research projects that focus on some aspect of women's experience in North America, using women's voices—primary texts written by women—as the primary sources for the project, in conjunction with secondary sources which will help you locate your study in the broader historiographical literature. A research paper (12-15 pages) will be due on or before the scheduled final exam date for the course [35% of final grade].

All students are expected to read, understand, and abide by the rules of citation outlined in *Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgement* (Dartmouth College, 1998) and by the Bowdoin College Academic Honor Code.

Texts: Hannah Foster, *The Coquette* (1797), ed. Cathy Davidson (1987)

Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), ed. by Jean Yellin (2000 edition)

Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976)

Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior* (1976)

Kim Chernin, *In My Mother's House* (1983; reprinted 1994)

Mary Crow Dog (with Richard Erdoes), *Lakota Woman* (1990; reissued 1994)

Online Resources: on *Blackboard Academic Suite* at <http://blackboard.bowdoin.edu/> or at

<http://www.bowdoin.edu/faculty/s/smcmahon/courses/hist249/index.shtml>

1. 1/21 INTRODUCTION

1/23 READING WOMEN'S VOICES: "Reading as a Woman"

texts: Charles and Mary Lamb, Preface, *Tales from Shakespeare* (New York, 1806).
Ursula Le Guin, "She Unnames Them," *The New Yorker* (January 21, 1985), 27.
Women's Voices: Instructions for Writing the Short Essays (Link)

2. 1/28 EARLY VOICES

essay: Mary Beth Norton, "Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America,"
American Historical Review 89.3 (June 1984): 593-619. (JSTOR)

texts: Anne Bradstreet (c.1612-1672), Selected poems. *Representative Poetry On-line*,
Department of English, University of Toronto (2003): 1,4,7,8,9,10,11. *Note*:
There is a short biography of Anne Bradstreet ("Notes on Life and Works")
following the Index to Poems.

1/30 EARLY VOICES: Travel Narratives

texts: Mary Rowlandson (c.1635-1678), *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together
with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed, Being a Narrative of the
Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, (Boston, 1682).
Note: scroll through "The Small Print" until you get to the narrative.
Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727), *The Journal of Madam Knight* (1704), read the
entries for Oct. 2 to Dec. 21, 1704; Dec. 24, 1704 to the end.

3. 2/4 WOMEN'S READING AND WRITING DURING THE REVOLUTION AND THE EARLY REPUBLIC

essay: Linda Kerber, chapter 8, "Women's Reading in the Early Republic," *Women of the
Republic* (1980), 233-264. (e-reserve)

texts: Abigail Adams (1744-1818), Correspondence between Abigail Adams and John
Adams, March—May 1776. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.
(Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2002).
Abigail to John, 31 March—5 April 1776; John to Abigail, 14 April 1776; Abigail to
John, 14 April 1776; Abigail to John, 7-9 May 1776; John to Abigail, 22 May
1776; John to Abigail, 27 May 1776.

2/6 WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER IN HISTORY

readings: Bowdoin College Academic Honor Code (Link)
Guidelines for writing a Research Paper Prospectus: History/GWS 249 (Link)

4. 2/11 MASQUERADE: An Eighteenth-century "Best Selling" Novel as History

texts: Hannah Foster (1758-1840), *The Coquette, or The History of Eliza Wharton; A
Novel; Founded on Fact* (1797).
The Declaration of Independence (1776).

recommended: Eliza Southgate (b. 1783), letters (1800-2), in Nancy Cott, *Root of
Bitterness*, 2nd ed., 98-102.

2/13 SLAVE WOMEN: A Radically Different Degree of Unfreedom

essays: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* (Winter 1992), 251-274. (ACADEMIC SEARCH PREMIER)

Jean Fagan Yellin, "Preface," "Introduction," "Chronology," and "Correspondence," in Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861; edited and with an introduction by Jean Fagan Yellin 2000), vii-xli, 245-273.

text: Sojourner Truth, "Arn't I a Woman?" (1851). Reprinted in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women (NALW)*, 252-3, or online link.

5. 2/18 LIBRARY TOUR: Meet in Hawthorne-Longfellow at Bookhenge

2/20 AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN: From Slavery to Freedom

text: Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861; reprinted with an introduction by Jean Fagan Yellin, 2000).

6. 2/25 FILM: "Mary Silliman's War"

2/27 FILM: "A Midwife's Tale"

Research paper prospectus due: February 29

7. 3/3 LOCAL COLOR FICTION AND THE "REALITY" OF WOMEN'S LIVES

essay: Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (1988), 9-39. (JSTOR)

texts: Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), "Transcendental Wild Oats" (1873), a newspaper sketch reprinted in *Silver Pitchers* (1873).

Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909).

Kate Chopin (1851-1904), "The Story of an Hour" (1894).

Mary Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930), "The Revolt of Mother," *Harper's Monthly* (September 1890), reprinted in *A New England Nun and other Stories* (1891).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), "The Yellow Wallpaper," *The New England Magazine* (January 1892).

Edith Wharton (1862-1937), "Expiation," *Cosmopolitan* (1908).

Willa Cather (1873-1947).

Note: see the Reading Guide for instructions on selecting short stories to read.

3/5 MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY REALIST FICTION

text: Rebecca Harding Davis (1831-1910), "Life in the Iron Mills," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1861).

8. 3/24 AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY WHITE AMERICA

essay: Cynthia Griggs Fleming, “‘More than a Lady’: Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and Black Women’s Leadership in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,” *Journal of Women’s History* 4:3 (1993), 64-82. (Academic Search Premier)

text: Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976), *Meridian*: “The Last Return” through “The Attainment of Good.”

recommended text: Zora Neale Hurston, “Sweat” (1926) and “How it Feels to be Colored Me” (1928), in *NALW*, pp. 1637-1653.

3/26 WOMEN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

text: Walker, *Meridian* (1976), finish.

9. 3/31 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER CONFERENCES

4/2 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER CONFERENCES

10. 4/7 ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN

essay: Judy Yung, Chapter 3: “First Steps: The Second Generation, 1920s,” *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (1995), 106-125. (e-reserve)

text: Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), “No Name Woman,” “White Tigers.”

4/9 CHINESE AMERICAN DAUGHTERS

text: Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), finish.

11. 4/14 RESEARCH PAPERS: Interim reports

Introduction and first section of research paper due: April 18

4/16 NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN

essay: Rebecca Tsosie, “Changing Women: The Crosscurrents of American Indian Feminine Identity,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 12.1 (1988), 565-586. (e-reserve)

text: Mary Crow Dog, with Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (1990; reissued 1994), ch. 1-5 (1-72).

12. 4/21 NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS

text: Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (1990; reissued 1994), finish.

4/23 JEWISH IMMIGRANT WOMEN

essay: Sonya Michel, "Mothers and Daughters in American Jewish Literature: The Rotted Cord," in Elizabeth Koltun, *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives* (1976), 272-282. (e-reserve)

text: Kim Chernin, *In My Mother's House: A Daughter's Story* (1983; reprinted 1994).
Note: read the 1994 Foreword at the end of the book, as an Afterword. Part I: "Wasn't I Once Also a Daughter?"

recommended texts: Anzia Yezierska, "The Fat of the Land" (1920), *NALW*, pp. 1423-1442
Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing" (1953-4), "Tell me a Riddle" (1961), in Olsen, *Tell me a Riddle* (1976), or in *NALW*, 1788-1820.

13. 4/28 JEWISH MOTHERS AND JEWISH DAUGHTERS

text: Kim Chernin, *In My Mother's House: A Daughter's Story* (1983; reprinted 1994), finish, then read the 1994 Foreword.

4/30 WORK-IN-PROGRESS REPORTS

14. 5/5 WORK-IN-PROGRESS REPORTS

5/7 WOMEN WRITING WOMEN'S LIVES: "When the hope for closure is abandoned" (Carolyn Heilbrun)

Research papers due: Saturday, May 17, 5:00 pm