

History 249  
Spring 2010  
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. (The "further readings" listed in the syllabus and Reading Guide are not required.) You are expected to attend all meetings of the seminar and to arrive prepared to participate in a discussion and analysis of 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—the 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 Bowdoin College Academic Honor Code and by the rules of citation described on the Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin Academic Honesty Site at <http://library.bowdoin.edu/1st/CBBhonesty.shtml>.

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; 2009 enlarged edition)  
Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976; 2003 reissue edition)  
Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior* (1976; 1989 edition)  
Kim Chernin, *In My Mother's House* (1983; Anniversary edition 2003)  
Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988; 2008 reprint edition)

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. 1/25 INTRODUCTION

1/27 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. 2/1 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.

2/3 EARLY VOICES: Travel Narratives

texts: Mary Rowlandson (c.1635-1711), *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.

further reading: 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. 2/8 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.  
*The Declaration of Independence* (1776).

2/10 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. 2/15 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; ed. Cathy Davidson, 1987).

further reading: Eliza Southgate (b. 1783), letters (1800-2), in Nancy Cott, *Root of  
Bitterness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 98-102.

- 2/17 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; enlarged edition 2009): vii-xli, 245-273 (2000 edition) or xix-lxi, 311-342 (2009 edition).  
 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. 2/22 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; enlarged edition 2009).
- 2/24 LIBRARY TOUR: Meet Ginny Hopcroft in Hawthorne-Longfellow at Bookhenge
6. 3/1 FILM: "Mary Silliman's War"  
*Instructions for viewing the films this week* (Reading Guide)
- 3/3 FILM: "A Midwife's Tale"
7. 3/8 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER CONFERENCES
- 3/10 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER CONFERENCES  
*Research paper prospectus due*: March 12
8. 3/29 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)
- 3/31 NINETEENTH-CENTURY LOCAL COLOR AND REALIST FICTION  
 texts: 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).  
 Kate Chopin (1851-1904), "The Story of an Hour" (1894).
- further reading: Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), "Transcendental Wild Oats" (1873), a newspaper sketch reprinted in *Silver Pitchers* (1873).  
 Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909).  
 Edith Wharton (1862-1937), "Expiation," *Cosmopolitan* (1908).  
 Willa Cather (1873-1947).  
 Rebecca Harding Davis (1831-1910), "Life in the Iron Mills," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1861).

9. 4/5 AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY WHITE AMERICA

essay: Cynthia Griggs Fleming, "Black Women Activists and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Case of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson," *Journal of Women's History* 4:3 (1993), 64-82. (Academic Search Premier)

text: Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976; reissue edition 2003), (Part I) Meridian: "The Last Return" through "The Attainment of Good."

further reading: Zora Neale Hurston, "Sweat" (1926) and "How it Feels to be Colored Me" (1928), in *NALW*, pp. 1637-1653.

4/7 WOMEN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

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

10. 4/12 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."

4/14 CHINESE AMERICAN DAUGHTERS

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

11. 4/14 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER CONFERENCES

4/21 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER CONFERENCES

*Introduction and first section of research paper due: April 23*

12. 4/26 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; Anniversary edition 2003). Part I: "Wasn't I Once Also a Daughter?"

*Note:* if you read the 1994 edition, read the Foreword after you finish the book; in the 2003 edition, the 1994 Foreword has moved to the end of the book to become the new Epilogue.

further reading: 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.

4/28 JEWISH MOTHERS AND JEWISH DAUGHTERS

text: Kim Chernin, *In My Mother's House: A Daughter's Story* (1983; reprinted 1994, 2003), finish.

13. 5/3 WORK-IN-PROGRESS REPORTS

5/5 WORK-IN-PROGRESS REPORTS

14. 5/10 WRITING A WOMAN'S LIFE

text: Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988; 2008 reprint edition with Introduction by Katha Pollitt).

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

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