Feminist Historical Studies  
(HIGR205)  
Prof. Rebecca Jo Plant

Room: HSS 6008  
Wednesdays, 11am-1:50 pm

Contact Info:

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Office: HSS 6016  
Office hours: W 2-4 p.m.

Course Description:

The graduate-level course will introduce students to theoretical and methodological concerns in the related fields of women’s history, gender history and the history of sexuality. We will explore some of the fundamental problems and themes that have animated these fields, including the gender division of labor, the concept “separate spheres,” the psychic components of gender identity and sexuality, and women’s relationship to the nation state. We will pay particular attention to epistemological debates about what constitutes legitimate “evidence,” and the tension within feminist historiography between analyzing systems oppression on the one hand, and uncovering women’s “experience” on the other.

Requirements:

- Preparation and participation. A seminar only works if everyone participates in an informed and collegial way. Readings and attendance are mandatory. In addition, each participant will be in charge of introducing the readings for one week.
- A brief précis of each of the following: Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast,* and the first 50 pages of Foucault, *History of Sexuality.* A précis does not criticize or evaluate the book’s argument. Rather, you should attempt to encapsulate the book’s overall argument in your own words. Each précis is due on the day that we discuss the book.
- An historiographical essay (12-15 pages) addressing the emergence of “gender history.” Beginning in the 1980s, many women’s historians began to reject a static understanding of the category of “woman” in favor of a notion gender as a social and discursive construction. Referring to specific examples, discuss the concerns that propelled the shift from women’s to gender history and assess its intellectual impact. Be sure to consider how the rise of new theoretical views and methodological approaches have influenced historians’ depiction of women (and men) as historical subjects/agents.
Books:


Weekly Schedule

**January 9: Introductions**

- Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,”

**January 16: Feminism and Marxism**

- Luise White, *Comforts of Home*

**January 23: The Concept of “Women’s Culture”: Medieval Europe**

- Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, chaps. TBA

**January 30: “Separate Spheres”: Sentiment and the Marketplace in Antebellum America**

• Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” *American Literature* 70.3 (September 1998): 581-606

**February 6: Foucault and the History of Sexuality**

• Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*

**February 13: Gender History and the Linguistic Turn, I**

• Laura Lee Downs, “If ‘Woman’ is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35: 2 (April 1993): 414-37

**February 20: Gender History and the Linguistic Turn, II**

• Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*

**February 27: Masculinity and Men’s History**

March 5: Gendered Selves: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and History

- Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*

March 12: Women’s Rights, Gendered Citizenship and the State

- Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right.....*, preface and chaps. 1, 4-5
- Rebecca Jo Plant, “The Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages” (optional)

**Papers due on Friday, March 14**