

Feminist Historical Studies  
(HIGR205)  
*Prof. Rebecca Jo Plant*

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

Contact Info:

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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:

- Luise White, *Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990
- Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987
- Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994
- Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1998
- Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982
- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, New York: Vintage Press, 1990
- Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1997

## Weekly Schedule

### January 9: Introductions

- Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture and Society*, eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974, 68-87
- Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women,"

### January 16: Feminism and Marxism

- Luise White, *Comforts of Home*
- Luise White, "True Confessions," *Journal of Women's History* 15.4 (2004): 142-44

### January 23: The Concept of "Women's Culture": Medieval Europe

- Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, chaps. TBA
- Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2 (April 2000): 268-30

### January 30: "Separate Spheres": Sentiment and the Marketplace in Antebellum America

- Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, intro, and chaps. 2-3
- Jane Tompkins, excerpt from *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, 122-46

- Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70.3 (September 1998): 581-606
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), chapters 25 and 26 [access at <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/utc/uncletom/uthp.html>]

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

- Jeffrey Weeks, "Foucault for Historians," *History Workshop Journal* 14 (1982): 106-19
- Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. I*
- George Chauncey, Jr., "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era," *Journal of Social History* 19 (1985): 189-211

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

- Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91:5 (1986): 1053-1075
- Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17: 4 (Summer, 1991): 773-797
- 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
- Regina Kunzel, "Pulp Fiction and Problem Girls: Reading and Rewriting Single Pregnancy in the Postwar United States," *American Historical Review* 100 (December 1995): 1465-1487

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

- Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*

#### February 27: Masculinity and Men's History

- Toby Ditz, "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History," *Gender & History* 16:1 (April 2004): 1-35
- Thomas A. Foster, "Deficient Husbands: Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Marital Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56:4 (October 1999): 723-44
- Michael Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity: The 'War Generation' and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950," *Journal of British Studies* 44:2 (2005): 343-62
- Frank Biess, "Survivors of Totalitarianism: Returning POWs and the Reconstruction of Masculine Citizenship in West Germany, 1945-1955," in *The Miracle Years Revisited: A Cultural History of West Germany*, ed. Hanna Schissler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 57-82.

March 5: Gendered Selves: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and History

- Judith Butler, “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification,” in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997)
- 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)
- Pamela Radcliff, “Imagining Female Citizenship in the ‘New Spain’: Gendering the Democratic Transition,” in *Gender & History* 13:3 (November 2001): 498-523

**Papers due on Friday, March 14**