

AMERICAN STUDIES 320

Women in American Society

Fall 2010

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Learning Goals

This is an interdisciplinary course that aims to understand the meaning of womanhood from a variety of perspectives: psychological, sociological, cultural, and biological. It emphasizes change over time and how ideas of womanhood have interacted with economic circumstances to create cultural dissonance and social contradictions as well as an integration of thought and behavior. Social scientific concepts will be used to deepen students' understanding of the forces within American society that have propelled or impeded specific changes in women's lives. Particular attention will be given to how culture shapes social interaction and self-image.

This course approaches the individual woman as an integrated whole with the goal to understand her life cycle and how it has been constructed and altered through biological, psychological, technological, social, and cultural influences. The individual woman's life will be examined as an intersecting grid of general experiences shared by all women in America, intermediate experiences shared only by women in particular groups (for example, ethnic, class, regional, and sexual subcultures) and unique experiences that shape the personality.

Diversity among women is a central concern of this course. Three important ethnic traditions will be examined: African-American, Mexican-American, and Chinese-American. The goal will be to understand how the internal dynamics of a particular culture interacted with the external structures of discrimination and opportunity in America to create differences and similarities in women's lives across a spectrum of diversity. Students should be better able to recognize and evaluate how their own cultural history has affected their sense of self and relationship to others.

Finally, civic responsibility is examined as it relates to the ideology of women's role over time. Women's fight to get the vote is considered in terms of its cultural meaning, its political consequences, and its long-term implications for public policy and gender bias.

Reading List

All the books listed below are available at Little Professor Book Store in Fullerton (very close to the campus). Maps will be provided in class.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, [A Midwife's Tale](#)

Alice Rossi, ed. [The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir](#)

Joan Brumberg, [The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls](#)

Amy Tan, [The Joy Luck Club](#)

Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez, [The Dirty Girls Social Club](#)

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE ASSIGNMENT SHOULD BE READ **BEFORE** THE CLASS DATE ON WHICH IT APPEARS. **Also note that modifications will be made to the schedule as needed at the beginning or end of each class. You are responsible for changes to the syllabus that will be made in class. Poor attendance is no excuse.**

Course outline

August 24: Introductions/ Understanding the Present through the Past

Colonial America: Anglo-American Women

August 26: The Origins of American Dominant Culture: Basic definitions of culture and subculture

Assignment: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, [A Midwife's Tale](#), Introduction

August 31: Demographic Patterns and Everyday life: Martha Ballard's Diary (1785-1812)

Assignment: Ulrich, [A Midwife's Tale](#), Intro. plus chapter 1

September 2: The Concept of Women's Inferiority and the Realities of a Pre-industrial Economy: A Cultural-Social Structural Disjunction

Assignment: Ulrich, chapter 2

September 7: Patriarchy and Pre-Modern Sexuality: Rape and Cultural Power

Assignment: Ulrich, chapters 3

September 9: Courtship and Marriage: Pre-modern and Modern Concepts of Love

Assignment: Ulrich, chapter 4

September 14: Birth and Colonial Women's Culture

Assignment: Ulrich, chapter 5

September 16: Martha as Wife and Mother: Aging, Dependency and the Family cycle

Assignment: Ulrich, chapters 6, 8

The Industrial Gender Bargain: Home versus World

September 21: Eve's Defenders: Religious Change and a Gender Revolution

Assignment: Lecture

September 23: Industrial Transformations and the Social Bargain

Assignment: Lecture

September 28: The Enlightenment vs. Separate Spheres

Assignment: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 25-85 in Alice Rossi, ed., The Feminist Papers

The First Woman's Movement: Winning the Vote

September 30: The Grimke Sisters, Antislavery, and a Public Role for Women

Assignment: Rossi, ed. "From Abolition to Sex Equality: Sarah Grimke & Angelina Grimke" pp. 282-318

October 5: Seneca Falls, New York, 1848: *Declaration of Sentiments*

Assignment: Rossi, ed. "Along the Suffrage Trail," pp. 407-421

African-American Women: Slavery, Segregation, and Gender

October 7: Sojourner Truth: *And Ain't I a Woman?* Examining Gender and Race

Assignment: Rossi, ed. "*History of Woman Suffrage*," pp. 426-432

October 12: The Post Civil-War Women's Movement: Breaking Apart, Reunification, and the Final Campaign to Get Women the Vote

Assignment: Lecture

October 14: A Catch-up Day

October 19: **FIRST MIDTERM**

The Politics of Reproduction in Nineteenth-century America

October 21: Women, Demography and Sex: Birth Control and Family Limitation

Assignment: Lecture

October 26: Understanding Victorian Culture: Public Restrictions (especially the Comstock Act) and Private Intimacy

Assignment: Lecture plus Joan Brumberg, The Body Project, Introduction and chapter 1

Growing Up Female: Body Image, Role Models, and Self Esteem in the Twentieth Century

October 28: Menstruation, Mothers, and the New Industrial State

Assignment: Brumberg, chapter 2

November 2: The New Women of the 1920s: The Body as Proxy for the Self

Assignment: Brumberg, chapter 4 plus lecture

November 4: Culture over Biology: Women's Higher Education, The Roots of Modern Feminism and the Concept of Female Intelligence

Assignment: Lecture and Discussion

November 9: NO FORMAL CLASS MEETING/ OPTIONAL SECOND MIDTERM FOR THOSE ELECTING IT

November 11: Veteran's Day—CAMPUS CLOSES

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender: Immigrant Mothers and American Daughters

***November 16: Growing Up Asian American: Chinese Values and American Acculturation

Assignment: Amy Tan, The Joy Luck Club--Read the book in this order--

-Suyuan and Jing-Mei Woo (pp. 19-41, 132-144, 197-209, 267-288)

-Lindo and Waverly Jong (pp. 49-66, 89-101, 166-184, 253-266)

-Ying-ying and Lena St. Clair, (pp. 67-83, 102-115, 149-165, 242-252)

-An-mei Hsu & Rose Hsu Jordan (pp. 42-48, 116-131, 185-196, 215-241).

What I have done is organized the scattered material in the book into a cohesive structure built around each mother-daughter pair. If you follow this linear structure in your reading, which I have provided above, I believe you will achieve greater clarity, cohesion, and more effective analysis. For the purposes of class discussion, please be certain that you have read at least the first two mother daughter pairs: Suyuan and Jing Mei Woo and Lindo and Waverly Jong. Note that the entire book must be read for the extra-credit assignment and for the final exam.

***Extra-credit essay due **before** class begins on **all** of The Joy Luck Club. ALL of the book must be read before the final exam and/or earlier if you are doing the extra-credit assignment.

Challenging Separate Spheres: The Roots of the Second Women's Movement

November 18: The Second Revolution in Women's Work

Assignment: Lecture

November 22-November 26: FALL RECESS—NO CLASSES

U.S. Latinas : Family Legacies and Female Identity

***November 30: Constructing a Latina Identity in Twenty-first Century America: Women as Consumers, Friends, and Lovers

Assignment: Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez, The Dirty Girls Social Club

***Extra-credit essay due **before** class begins on **all** of The Dirty Girls Social Club

Who (and What) is a feminist? The Second Women's Movement Reconsidered

December 2: The Second Women's Movement: The Radical Legacy of the 1960's

Assignment: Lecture

December 7: Who Wants to Be a "Feminist"? Media, Stereotypes, and Female Identity

Assignment: Lecture plus discussion

December 9: Feminism, the Body Project, and Changing Standards of Self-Esteem

Assignment: Continue discussion of The Dirty Girls Social Club and The Joy Luck Club

Final Examination: Tuesday December 14 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. This test covers books read (Brumberg, Tan, and Valdes-Rodriguez) and lectures given only after the first midterm.

Assessment and Course Requirements

PLEASE NOTE: A book is available to substitute for The Dirty Girls Social Club with the permission of the instructor. Such substitution will be limited to persons with religious or moral objections to explicit sexual content. Consent of the instructor must be obtained BEFORE this substitution is made. Thereafter all relevant course requirements, including assessments, may be completed with the alternate book.

This course will *require* two in-class exams—a midterm and a final. For extra-credit, you may write a short essay based on either The Joy Luck Club or The Dirty Girls Social Club (Your extra-credit paper will be a response to one or the other, NOT both.) You will, however, be tested on both books.

The midterm will be composed of one longer essay question on A Midwife's Tale plus a number of identification and short answer questions from the lectures and the assignments in The Feminist Papers. The final will include one multi-part essay question plus identification and short answer questions. The final will NOT include material on the first midterm. For the final exam, you will be responsible for The Body Project, The Joy Luck Club, and The Dirty Girls Social Club. Essay questions or short answer questions may be drawn from one or all of these books.

The exams in this course will NOT test your memory of obscure details from the reading. My goal is not to encourage memorization per se (though you will be required to remember course content) but rather I plan to test your understanding of the important issues raised by the course. Short answer questions will include concepts, people, issues, and events drawn from the books, lectures and class discussions. ***I do intend to ask questions that reward class attendance.***

An optional second midterm will also be offered. YOU MUST TAKE THE FIRST MIDTERM TO BE ELIGIBLE TO TAKE THE SECOND OPTIONAL MIDTERM. The optional second midterm is especially designed for those who do poorly on the first exam. It may also prove useful to those who wish to improve their passing grades. I will use the second midterm grade in place of the first if you score higher on the second midterm. I will also substitute the lower grade if you score less than your first midterm. Though it can substantially benefit your grade, it is unwise to take the second midterm unless you are truly prepared. The optional second midterm will cover everything on the first midterm plus the lectures on nineteenth-century sexuality, demography, women's activism, and the lectures and discussion of The Body Project.

The extra-credit essay (length should be 4-5 double-spaced, typed pages) will give you an opportunity to write about either The Joy Luck Club or The Dirty Girls Social Club—your choice of one. (Your essay should be based on the **ENTIRE BOOK**.) This assignment allows you to think and write outside the classroom. I will be handing out a specific question for your response along with general guidelines for this assignment. There is one absolute requirement that should be clear from the beginning: whichever book you choose to engage, the extra-credit essay must be turned in before class begins on the first day of discussion as listed in the syllabus (whether or not the class is behind schedule). The point is to encourage independent thinking and personal musings. Thus I will NOT accept late extra-credit papers!!!! Please don't copy or closely paraphrase material off the Internet. If I find that more than one paragraph is closely paraphrased from external sources, I will sadly conclude that you have not fulfilled the assignment. The result will be no extra-credit points.

The first midterm will count 125 points, the final will total 175 points and the extra-credit essay could add up to 20 points.

Class discussion will also be considered seriously in the final grade for this course and will be especially significant in borderline cases. Several extra credit points may be earned for class participation. The quality of observations will be judged more positively than their quantity.

For your final grade, I will be using a plus/minus grading system based on a standard percentage scale i.e. 90-100, 80-89, etc. Scores that hug the top or bottom of a grade scale cut-off will receive a + or -.

Incompletes are strongly discouraged and will only be given in extreme emergencies such as incapacitating bodily injury. Incompletes will not be given for poor planning, work overload, or failure to keep up with the assigned reading.

The syllabus is only an approximation of our actual progress through the semester and modifications may be made as we proceed. Students are responsible for daily assignments given in class.

Please note that anyone caught cheating on an exam will be given an automatic “0” for that portion of the course.

Students’ right to receive accommodations for documented special needs through the Disabled Student Service Office (DSS):

The University requires students with disabilities to register with the Office of Disabled Student Services (DSS), located in UH-101 and at (714) 278 – 3112, in order to receive prescribed accommodations appropriate to their disability. Students requesting accommodations should inform the instructor during the first week of classes about any disability or special needs that may require specific arrangements/accommodations related to attending class sessions, completing course assignments, writing papers or quizzes/tests/examinations.

An important reminder: PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE BEFORE CLASS!!

I hope this course is a meaningful intellectual experience that results in significant personal insight for each of you.