

History 150W-01/WMST 150W-04

### **Women and Work in American History**

T/TH 11-12:20

James Blair 213

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#### **Course Description:**

Why are there men's jobs and women's jobs? Why don't "women's jobs" pay as well? When is housework considered work? This seminar will consider the history of women and work in the United States from the colonial period to the present. We'll consider all kinds of jobs from those performed by slaves to factory workers, sex workers, waitresses, professionals and moms.

#### **Course goals:**

This course has several goals, only one of which is having you learn how women's working lives have changed over the last two hundred or so years. I'm equally committed to developing your skills as writers and researchers. Note that this course also fulfills the university's writing requirement and the History Department and Women's Studies Program's computer proficiency requirements. Given all that, this course should help you:

- articulate your thoughts clearly and concisely;
- write well and persuasively;
- learn how to research a topic and analyze what you find critically and creatively;
- use the online reference and word processing tools most often employed by historians.

You may never take another history course, but if you work on these skills, you'll have an easier time in other courses and, hopefully, in whatever work you end up doing.

#### **Assignments:**

**Readings:** We will read a combination of **secondary sources** (books, book chapters, and articles by scholars) and **primary sources** (documents left by people in the past, such as diaries, letters to the editor, census data, photographs, etc.). The books listed below are on sale in the bookstore and on reserve in Swem. You can also find Hacker's *Pocket Style Manual* in the History Writing Resources Center (James Blair 347) if you don't want to buy it. Shorter items are compiled in a loose "coursepack" that you'll need to purchase at Duplicating in Swem. **See "Tips On How To Read" and on note-taking** below. As you can see, the assigned readings are fairly light in this class because you'll be doing independent readings as part of your research paper assignment.

### **Books to buy:**

Cameron, Ardis. *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Publisher, 2002.

Hacker, Diane. *Pocket Style Manual*. Bedford-St. Martin, any edition.

McCunn, Ruthanne Lum. *A Thousand Pieces of Gold: A Biographical Novel*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. New York: Norton, 1985.

Yeziarska, Anzia. *Breadgivers: A Novel*. NY: Persea Press, 1975.

Coursepack on sale at Duplicating. Don't bind it because you'll need to add to it. Hole-punch it and put it in a binder instead.

### **Papers:**

Instead of assigning papers and assuming you know how to write them, we'll take things one step at a time. The first two writing assignments will emphasize several important skills: interpreting primary documents, quoting from sources, writing a good paragraph, and crafting an introduction. Later, we'll working on finding and citing sources and on editing. You'll put all these skills to use in the longer research paper.

Mini-paper I: This paper will represent your first stab at writing about primary documents (at least in this class). Due on Tuesday, February 8, it will analyze *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book*. You'll only be writing one paragraph, but budget a good bit of time to do it; this assignment is harder than it looks and it's worth 5% of your grade.

Mini-paper II is also short but will be harder still. In this case, you're going to imagine the paper you would write about another primary source, Ruth McCunn's *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*. Instead of writing the whole paper, however, you're just going to write the introduction, which will include a "hook," the subject of your paper, and statement of your thesis, all written in your best prose. This assignment is due Tuesday, February 22, and will be worth 10% of your grade.

Research paper: This paper will be a longer, more involved assignment that will put to use the skills you've learned in the mini-papers and at Swem. To make it manageable, you'll do it in stages and get feedback along the way. This time your primary sources will be an oral interview or interviews that you do yourself. You will then search for other primary and secondary sources to help you understand and analyze the interview(s). So, for example, if your grandmother worked in a war industry during World War II, you might supplement your interview with newspaper articles and government reports written during the war. You'd also read books and articles by historians who have studied women workers during World War II. If you interview the housekeepers in your dorm, you might look for information about the history of domestic service in the South. Your research proposal and interview questions will be due March 3. On March 22, you'll turn in a bibliography of primary and secondary sources. On the 29<sup>th</sup> you'll turn

in your introduction and an outline of the rest of the paper and a draft of the whole thing will be due on April 12. The final version is due on the last day of class. Along the way, we'll discuss how to do oral interviews, how to write footnotes and a bibliography, and how to edit your own writing. It will be graded as follows: proposal and questions 5%, bibliography 5%, introduction and outline 5%, first draft 10%, and final draft 20% (total 45%).

I will post more detailed instructions on our Blackboard site.

### **Exam:**

The exam will be your opportunity to show, not just that you've done the reading, but that you've been putting it all together in your head. The exam will consist of a big, open-ended question or questions that will force you to make an argument, and support it with evidence gleaned from the course readings. This exam will be open book, open notes, so the better you keep up with the readings and the better you take notes on them, the easier the exam will be. The final will be worth 20% of your final grade.

### **Participation and preparedness:**

Your participation and preparedness are essential to the success of the class. There will be no lectures, so if you don't talk, we're all going to sit around and look at each other. Lively discussions will not only make the course more interesting, they will also sharpen your analytical skills as you weigh your classmates' interpretations against your own. Clearly, the success of our class depends less on me than on whether you all come prepared, whether you listen to and respect the opinions of your peers, and whether you are willing to take some intellectual risks. If you are nervous about talking in class, keep in mind that I define participation broadly. Asking questions, confessing to abject confusion, talking in small groups, and fomenting rebellion against the professor all count as participation. I will also take into account both the quality *and* quantity of your participation when arriving at your grade, so someone who offers an insight and asks really good questions might do better on participation than someone who talks all the time but seems ill-prepared. You will also be graded on your preparedness for class, your contributions to in-class projects like small group exercises, and your work on the "small assignments" that I will frequently assign (I might, for example, ask you to write down the ten most important words in a document or come prepared to debate a particular issue). Note: there's no attendance grade (it seems silly to reward students simply for showing up) but, clearly, you can't participate if you're not there, so poor attendance will be reflected in your preparedness and participation grade which is worth 20% of your grade.

### **Schedule of readings, discussions and assignments:**

Thursday, January 20: A history of us.

Tuesday, January 25: Have read: Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, all.

Thursday, January 27: Have read: Irene Padavic and Barbara Reskin, *Women and Men at Work* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2002), 1-36.

Tuesday, February 1: Have read: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 3-101.

Thursday, February 3: Have read: John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 3-9, 110-118; Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-27; Catherine E. Beecher, *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book*, iii-viii, 204-208, 223-224, 227-241.

Tuesday, February 8: Site visit to Colonial Williamsburg. **Due: Mini-paper I.**

Thursday, February 10: Discussion of women and the trades at Colonial Williamsburg.

Tuesday, February 15: Have read: Deborah Gray White, *Ar'nt I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985), all.

Thursday, February 17: Library Visit. **Small assignment:** Find the full text of the *Virginia Gazette* on the website of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's libraries. Click on "S" and look for 10-12 items having to do with slaves and servants. What research topics do the articles suggest? What conclusions might you draw?

Tuesday, February 22: Have read: Ruthanne Lum McCunn, *A Thousand Pieces of Gold: A Biographical Novel*. (Beacon Press, 1991), all. **Due: Mini-paper II.**

Thursday, February 24: Have read: Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), xi-xvii, 1-72.

Tuesday, March 1: **Due: Research Paper Proposal plus ten questions you plan to ask your interviewee. Note: you should have arranged your interview(s) by now.**

Thursday, March 3: Film: "1900 House." Have read: Janet Golden, "Trouble in the Nursery: Physicians, Families, and Wet Nurses at the End of the Nineteenth Century," 125-140, in Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton, eds., *To Toil the Livelong Day: America's Women at Work, 1780-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

March 8 and March 10: Spring Break

Tuesday, March 15: Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, remainder.

Thursday, March 17: Have read: Anzia Yezierska, *Breadgivers: A Novel*. (NY: Persea Press, 1975), all, including introduction by Alice Kessler-Harris.

Tuesday, March 22: Film: "With Babies and Banners: the Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade." **Due: Bibliography of primary and secondary sources.**

Thursday, March 24: .

Tuesday, March 29: Visitor: Jean Blackwell. **Due: Introduction and outline.**

Thursday, March 31: . **No class. Work on research paper.**

Tuesday, April 5: Film: "Rosie the Riveter." Have read: Beth Bailey and David Farber, "Hotel Street: Prostitution and the Politics of War," *Radical History Review* 52 (Winter 1992): 54-77.

Thursday, April 7: Have read: Kevin Boyle, "The Kiss: Race and Gender Conflict in a 1950s Automobile Factory," *Journal of American History* (September, 1997): 496-523 (**not in coursepack. I want you to find it online. If you have trouble, email me or a classmate**) and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, "'Not in Somebody's Kitchen': African American Women Workers and the Impact of World War II" in Lillian Schlissel and Catherine Lavender, eds., *The Western Women's Reader* (HarperCollins, 2000).

Tuesday, April 12: **Due: Draft of Research Paper.**

Thursday, April 14: Have read: Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), xi-xvi, 4-36.

Tuesday, April 19: Nancy Maclean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class," *Feminist Studies*, 25 (Spring 1999), 43-78 (**On-line. Find it!**); and Susan Eisenberg, *We'll Call You If We Need You: Experiences of Women Working Construction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 37-48.

Thursday, April 21: Film: "The Global Assembly Line."

Tuesday, April 26: Have Read: Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), ix-xxi, 3-28, 114-134 and "Supermoms draw line in sandbox," *Chicago Sun Times*, October 10, 2004 (find online).

Thursday, April 28: Last Class. **Due: Final draft of Research Paper.**

## Tips On How To Read

Thought you knew how to read? Well, think again. It's not enough to read a book or article, jot down the information you gleaned from it, and decide whether you found it interesting. Hopefully, you'll find all the assigned readings interesting and informative but there's more to college-level reading than that. You have to evaluate what you read *critically*. That doesn't mean that you have to criticize it. It means you have to read it closely, analytically, and actively. You want to determine not just whether you like an assigned reading but what you *think* of it. Most importantly, you'll need to figure out what the author is trying to say and whether you are convinced by his or her argument.

You may be thinking: "how should I know?" Here, then, are some tips on how to read critically:

You may want to read through each assignment relatively quickly at first, trying to get a sense of the text as a whole and marking those passages which seem most important. Then, go back through a second time, looking for answers to the following questions:

1. What is the **subject** of the reading (think: who, what, where, when)?
2. What is its significance (that is, why does it matter)?
3. What is the author trying to say about this subject? In other words, what is his or her **thesis**?
4. What sort of evidence does the author use to support his or her claims?
5. Does that evidence seem adequate?
6. Do you think the author is downplaying or ignoring issues that would undermine his or her argument?
7. Does the author approach the subject with a particular agenda or with assumptions that shape the outcome?
8. Who is the author's intended audience? How does that effect the author's product?

Pay attention to how you're responding as you read. Does anything

1. surprise you?
2. challenge your assumptions?
3. confirm or contradict what you have learned from other readings or what you knew before taking this class?
4. If you're delighted, bored, frustrated, or puzzled, ask yourself why.
5. If you find yourself drawn to or repelled by a particular character, event, idea, or theme, try to figure out why.

## Taking Notes

Take notes but do so strategically. The first time you read through an assignment, you may want to mark a few passages that you want to go over more closely later (please don't write in library books!), but resist the temptation to underline or highlight all through the book the first time you read it. It will just slow you down and may not help you remember much later.

Instead, once you've read the item quickly and reread important sections more thoroughly, close it and jot down answers to the questions listed above. Also note any questions you may have.

If you do this every time you read, you'll have much better recall of the material and you'll find that you have more to say about it. You'll also have great notes that you can use to write the final exam.