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Middlebury College
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-6:30 or by appointment, Axinn 331

History of American Women

HIST 0373

Warner Hall, 208

Tuesday / Thursday, 1:30-2:45 PM

Course Description

This lecture survey course will examine women's social, political, cultural, and economic position in American society from 1869 through the late twentieth century. Using both primary sources and secondary (scholarly) texts, we will explore shifting meanings of womanhood and femininity, as well as the effects of race, class, ethnicity, and region on women's lives. Major developments occurred during this period. Women won the right to vote, flooded the paid workforce, gained (limited) control over their reproductive destinies, reshaped the family, and forced their way in to nearly every institutionalized facet of American life.

To make sense of these large-scale processes, we will pay as much attention to personal life as to public developments. We will examine the beliefs and experiences of ordinary people alongside the pronouncements and policies of elites. Although concerned with facts and dates, we will be even more focused on analyzing the meaning of historical information, pondering questions of cause and effect and change over time. We will pay special attention to how sex and gender have intersected with other categories of social difference, such as class, race, and sexual orientation. Some other questions we will consider: how did ideas of femininity develop and change over time? How did women enact change in their own lives and in society? What relationship does feminism have to women's history?

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Explain the major themes, approaches, and interpretations basic to U.S. women's and gender history since the Civil War.
- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- Critically read secondary sources to determine historian's argument, point of view, and the kinds of evidence used.
- Offer constructive feedback on peers' work.
- Write more clearly and succinctly.
- Reflect on your own learning process and habits as scholars.

This is a 300-level course based on student participation. Tuesdays will involve mini-lectures, short student presentations, and whole-class discussions. On Thursdays you will divide into smaller sections for discussion. You will get more out of Tuesday classes if you've completed the readings, but you are not required to have read everything until Thursday's discussion.

Communication Guidelines

In Class

- During our first class, we will create a contract to establish collectively how we want to behave with each other.
- Please do not text, connect to the Internet, or check social media. I understand the temptation to check devices but I expect you to refrain; in exchange, I promise you my own undivided attention.
- You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. More than two unexcused absences will affect your participation grade dramatically. If you are unable to attend a session, you are responsible for asking your peers what you missed.
- Recording policy: Students may not make audio or video recordings of class sessions without my written permission.
- I will treat you like adults. There is no need to ask for permission to use the bathroom, and you are free to drink and eat during class. Out of respect for people's ability to focus, it is considerate to avoid noisy and/or aromatic food.

Discussion Sections

- A respectful and curious atmosphere is crucial for everyone to learn. Some good things to keep in mind:
 - People come to this course with different backgrounds and levels of knowledge. Everyone has to start somewhere. We each have something to offer, and we all have lots to learn (your professor included!).
 - We may only speak from our own experience; at the same time, our experiences may not align with others', even if they claim many of the same identity labels.
 - While personal experiences are important, even more important is the ability to discuss the assigned material. Come to class prepared. This means [close reading \(https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading\)](https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading), [engaged note-taking \(https://michaelhyatt.com/maximize-non-fiction/\)](https://michaelhyatt.com/maximize-non-fiction/), and arriving with things to say about the assigned texts.
 - Participation is not only about speaking one's opinions: listening carefully, asking a thoughtful question, and adding to your peers' contributions are other ways to create a dynamic exchange of ideas in the classroom.
 - Free speech is important, and people need to feel safe taking intellectual risks in this class. Making mistakes is part of life. If someone says something that hurts you, try to assume it was accidental. You are entitled to explain why their comment was hurtful, so that they and others can learn from your point of view. If someone says you've hurt them, you are expected to listen and try to understand their position. It is fair to ask for more information or to ask for time to consider your response. Try to talk things out face-to-face rather than over email, where miscommunications more easily occur.

Outside of Class

- Students should allow for a 24-hour response time to emails. Responses over the weekend may take longer.

- Please address emails with a salutation, such as "Dear Professor Povitz," and sign off appropriately ("Sincerely," "With thanks," "Regards," "Best Wishes," etc. followed by your name). Please also include a subject heading for your message, so I can better keep track of a large volume of emails. Do proofread your emails for typos and clarity before pressing send. It is customary to show respect for people's education by using "Professor" or "Dr." rather than "Mr." or "Ms." And certainly avoid "Mrs." It makes assumptions about a female-identifying professor's marital status (and note that no such similar term exists for men).
- Generally speaking, if you have a question or issue that I cannot address in a sentence or two, I'd much prefer to discuss it during office hours or a pre-arranged appointment.
- That said, if I or someone else takes the time to craft a substantive email reply, it is polite to acknowledge this message with a brief note of thanks.
- Logistical queries and requests for minor clarification are welcome; questions that can be answered by reading this syllabus are **not**, so please peruse this document carefully!

Academic Honesty

According to Middlebury, "Plagiarism is passing off another person's work as one's own [including] the ideas, research, writings, creations, or inventions of another. It makes no difference whether the source is a student or a professional." According to the College's Honor Code, students must sign the statement "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment" on exams and research papers. Do familiarize yourself with the Honor Code by visiting <http://go/honorcode/>. Ignorance will not be a good excuse if you are found in violation.

I invite you to think of your work as a reflection of yourself and to take pride in your intellectual labor. There will be negative consequences for all instances of plagiarism, cheating, and breaches of academic integrity. At the very least, you will receive a failing grade on that assignment. Middlebury also reserves the right to pursue further punishment as outlined in the College policy. Suspected cases will be reported to the Judicial Affairs Office (JAO) and your Dean.

You can avoid breaching the Code in your research paper by **carefully citing all the sources you reference**. You can find guidelines for using Chicago Manual style at <https://middlebury.libguides.com/friendly.php?s=citation/chicago> or through go/chicago. This policy applies equally to Internet sources. Wikipedia, despite its many charms, is **not** an appropriate academic source. Middlebury Libraries' guide to US history provides links to encyclopedias, books, articles, journals, historical newspapers, and more. You can find it at <https://middlebury.libguides.com/history-us>. This is a good starting point for research papers.

When it comes to preparing for the midterm and final exams, you should know that *it is not considered plagiarism for you to cooperate by sharing study notes with each other*. The format of the exams (short answer questions and a longer essay) does not lend itself to plagiarism: answers are to be written in your own words. Formal citations are not expected on exams.

Remember: *PROCRASTINATION* may lead to *DESPERATION*, and thence to *PLAGIARISM*. Start early!

Names and Pronouns

I will of course address you by your chosen name and your appropriate pronouns. Class rosters are given to me with students' legal names, so please advise me as soon as possible if changes should be made.

Accommodations

[Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) keeps documentation on file of physical, psychological, or learning disability and provides services to students with disabilities. It also acts as a liaison between students and professors. If you need accommodations to make the class more accessible, please contact SAS and me as early in the semester as possible, before the add/drop period ends.

Please contact the ADA Coordinators for more information. Michelle Audette can be reached at maudette@middlebury.edu (phone: 802-443-2169) and Jodi Litchfield, at litchfie@middlebury.edu (phone: 802-443-5936). All discussions will remain confidential.

Please note, *a letter from SAS will not excuse for late or missed work or absences*. If, after consulting this syllabus, you anticipate needing alternative formats or timelines for assignments, or if you expect to have to miss class, please see me.

A Word About Difficult Content

The content and discussion in this course will engage with sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. At times, students might find it emotionally challenging. I will flag especially graphic content and will do my best to make the classroom a space where we can engage empathetically and thoughtfully with difficult content. If you are feeling triggered, you should do what you need to take care of yourself.

Assignments

- ❖ Class takeaways (20 classes—may not include midterm) (10%)
- ❖ Midterm exam (20%)
- ❖ Research paper (30%)
 - Feedback on your peer's draft (8% of 30)
 - Final submission (22% of 30)
- ❖ Final exam (20%)
- ❖ Attendance; class participation in lectures and discussion sections; 5-minute oral presentations; may include pop quizzes but I hope not (15%)
- ❖ Reflective and evaluative notes on the last day (5%)
- ❖ (Extra credit reports, up to 3%)

Absences and Late policy

Absences can only be excused by deans or doctors. Athletes, please plan appropriately. Late assignments (your peer review feedback; your final research paper submission) will be marked down one point for every day late, including weekends. Your final reflective and evaluative notes cannot be late; they are crucial to your ability to fully participate in the final class. Work more than five days late will not be accepted unless cleared with your Dean.

Class takeaways

After each class, please note down the main things you took away – between two and four points – writing no more than a few sentences about each. By articulating what seemed most important, surprising, useful, and/or otherwise worth remembering from each class, you will “fix” the important lessons of the course in your mind. You may very occasionally comment on classroom dynamics, since these are also integral to learning, but takeaways should normally focus on concepts and ideas, drawing on readings **and** material presented in class.

You have 24 hours after a class ends to post your takeaways to Canvas. Post them under the Discussions tab (select +Discussion in the upper right-hand corner). Where it says Topic Title, please title your contribution by date, e.g. “Class takeaways 9/13,” “Class takeaways 11/29,” etc. You may skip any four classes (no need to tell me which). Note that the Class takeaways will not receive letter grades. As long as you do the reflective work and submit within 24 hours, you will get full points. Late posts will not be given points.

Research paper

You will write a short paper analyzing a primary source that illuminates a topic from U.S. women's history during the late nineteenth or twentieth century. The primary source may be text-based (a manifesto, a diary entry, a letter, a court record, etc.) or not (an art work, photograph, cartoon, map, video, film, sound recording, artifact, etc.). You will also read secondary sources that enrich your understanding of the primary source.

To analyze a primary source, you should consider certain questions:

- Who is the author?
- When was the source produced?
- Who was its intended audience?
- Why was it produced?
- From what historical context(s) did the source emerge?
- Was the source commissioned by anyone or published by a press with a particular viewpoint?
- How is it typical or atypical of other sources of its kind?
- In what ways might the creator's race, class, gender, and/or other subjective characteristics have shaped the source?

(For a list of additional questions to ask about non-text-based sources, see Rampolla, pp. 14-15.)

All primary sources contain biases, and many contain inaccuracies and distortions, sometimes intentional, sometimes accidental. The critical questions above will help you become aware of these biases. What have other historians said about the general topic your source represents, the source itself, and the creator of that source? In answering these questions through secondary source reading, you will be able to provide context for your primary source.

For this assignment, you should cite at least 8 secondary sources, although you might need to consult and cull through a larger number than that to find work that is useful. The paper should be approximately (and no more than) 8 double-spaced pages, in standard format: Times New Roman or similar font; size 12; 1-inch margins. You will be evaluated not just on *what* you write but *how* you write. Do not merely answer the list of questions posed above in a string of unconnected paragraphs. Instead, pay attention to the flow of ideas: each paragraph should connect to and build on the previous one. I expect your prose to be clear, lively, fluid, and proofread. A good test is to ask someone non-academically inclined to read a draft. If they find it clear and interesting, you're likely on the right track. See Rampolla, sections 4e, 4f, and 4g for writing help. A style guide such as Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style* can also be useful.

Please notify me of your topic and chosen primary source no later than **Tuesday, October 2**. Feel free to consider topics not covered in class and to discuss ideas with me beforehand.

On **Tuesday, October 23**, we will talk through the conventions of writing a paper, discuss peer review and any questions you may have, and visit the library to learn more about research.

On **Tuesday, November 6**, hand in a complete first draft to your peer, either printed or, if you'd prefer to receive feedback digitally through Track Changes, you can email it. Whose work you read and who reads yours will be determined by alphabetic order using the class roster.

On **Tuesday, November 20**, you will return the work, providing printed copies (one for your peer and one for me), or digitally. You are expected to have engaged carefully, and respectfully with your peer's writing, marking up the margins and line-editing where needed. You will also write a 1-p. cover letter (standard format), sharing your understanding of the paper's thesis, the strongest parts of the essay (most insightful, interesting, or surprising), sections needing revision, development, or clarification, and any other thoughts that could help produce a better paper.

The final draft is due at the beginning of class on **Tuesday, December 4**.

I suggest reading through Rampolla's *Pocket Guide to Writing in History* to anchor you in what you're doing. In particular, sections 3a. and 3b. will guide you in reading secondary sources: how to *evaluate* their usefulness, *analyze* their significance, and *synthesize* your findings. 3c-1. will help you think about your primary source. Section 4 covers the conventions of academic history writing. For a short paper in a survey course, I don't want you to worry too much about elaborating a full argument, but do make sure you have a thesis as Rampolla defines it on p. 56: "*a statement that reflects what you have concluded about the topic of your paper, based on a critical analysis and interpretation of the source materials you have examined.*"

Exams

There will be both a mid-term and a final exam in this class, each consisting of short answer and a long-form essay question, based on mini-lectures and reading materials. For suggestions on how to prepare for exams, see “How to Succeed in Exams in This Course” under Welcome & Support Materials on Canvas. The **midterm exam**, on **Thursday, October 11**, will be worth 20%. The **final exam**, which will be scheduled during the exam period, will be worth an additional 20%. A passing grade on the final exam is required to pass the course. Note that formal citations are not expected on exams.

Class readings and participation

Each week, you are to read primary and/or secondary source readings that coordinate with the theme of lectures. Secondary source readings are often case studies that provide specific examples of the broad topics laid out in lecture. They may also provide supplementary information or alternative views on the ideas offered in class. Primary sources provide a sense of the original evidence on which historians have based their arguments. Total readings normally run around 200-250 pages per week, a substantial but manageable amount. Students should complete readings in time for Thursday’s discussion sections, which offer an opportunity to analyze and digest course content, ask questions, and make connections to contemporary issues.

The participation grade considers timeliness and attendance at all lectures and discussion sections, quality of discussion contributions (this includes both intellectual and interpersonal), and a five-minute oral presentation on a topic relevant to that week’s theme. If people seem not to be giving sufficient attention to the readings, I will be forced to assign pop quizzes. Attendance will be taken each class and counts toward your participation grade.

Reflective and Evaluative Notes

Reflection and evaluation help us track our growth and show us where we have room to develop. In addition to collecting the late-September Check-ins and the regular Class Takeaways, I will ask you to come to our final class with a substantial set of typed notes that reflect upon and evaluate your experience of this course.

Please take some time to address the following:

- What is the most important big-picture idea you learned about the history of American women?
- How did you, as a learner, relate to the following activities:
 - Readings? (Include within this your favorite(s) and least favorite(s), and why.)
 - Class takeaways assignment?
 - Lectures?
 - Discussion sections?
 - Library visit?
 - Midterm exam?
 - Peer review?

- Research paper?
- What could the professor have done to better support your learning?
- What could you have done better in supporting your own learning?
- Comment on the class dynamics: In what ways were they helpful? In what ways challenging or frustrating?
- What have you learned about yourself from this course?
- If applicable, name any glaring omissions: topics you think should have been covered, and why.
- What questions are you leaving with?

Informal (but still clear and proofread) writing is fine: bullet points, fragments, immoderate use of em-dashes and other idiosyncratic grammar, "non-academic" language – go for it! The real work is to distill your experience into insights that will serve you in the future.

Extra credit

Students may earn up to three points of extra credit on their final grade by attending a lecture, film, or other event on or off campus related to the study of women's history, and writing a brief, (1-2 pages, standard format) response paper summarizing and commenting on the event, noting any connection to our course materials or topics. I will announce events as I learn about them. I also encourage you to alert your peers to relevant opportunities.

Required Books

We will be reading substantial sections of the titles listed below, if not the entire thing. If not listed here, selected chapters will be scanned and available under Modules according to the week.

Vivian Gornick, *The Solitude of Self: Thinking About Elizabeth Cady Stanton*

Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965*

Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*

Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*

Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*

These titles will also be available on short-term reserve in the library.

Text and reference books (optional but recommended)

Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*

Linda K. Kerber et al, *Women's America*

Week 1 [9/11, 9/13]: Introductions to Women's and Gender History

- Tuesday: Review course expectations; create class contract
- Alice Kessler-Harris, "Do We Still Need Women's History?" *Chronicle of High Education* (2007)
- Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" *American Historical Review* (1986): 1053-75
- Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race": 251-274

Week 2 [9/18, 9/20]: Suffrage

- Gornick (entire)
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "[The Solitude of Self](#)"
- Angela Davis, "Racism in the Woman Suffrage Movement," *Women, Race & Class* (9 pp.)
- Michele Mitchell, "'Lower Orders,' Racial Hierarchies, and Rights Rhetoric: Evolutionary Echoes in Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Thought during the Late 1860s" in *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Feminist as Thinker: A Reader in Documents*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Richard Cándida Smith (2007): 128-151.

Week 3 [9/25, 9/27]: Women, Gender, and the Progressive Era

- Linda Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890-1935," *American Historical Review*: 19-54
- Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, and Emma Goldman" *Chrysalis*: 43-61
- Thursday: Late-September check-in. Time will be given in class to complete these brief evaluations anonymously through Google Forms, so bring your laptops.

Week 4 [10/2, 10/4]: Women, Immigration and Labor

- Orleck (entire)
- Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies* (Chapter 2, pp. 47-80)
- Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, selection
- Tuesday: Deadline for notifying me by email about your choice of paper topic and primary source.

Week 5 [10/9, 10/11]: Women in the Long Civil Rights Movement and Midterm

- Ransby (entire)
- Tuesday: Discussion sections meet today instead.
- Thursday: MIDTERM EXAM

Week 6 [10/16, 10/18]: Motherhood and Domesticity

- Elaine Tyler May, "The Baby Craze: The Rise of Compulsory Parenthood," *Barren in the Promised Land*: 127-150

- Ruth Feldstein, "I Wanted the Whole World to See': Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till," *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz: 263-303
- Jodi Vandenberg-Davis, "Teaching Motherhood in History," *Women's Studies Quarterly*: 234-255
- Daniel Rivers, "The Road to Same-Sex Marriage: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Father, and the American Family," [Origins](#)

Week 7 [10/23, 10/25]: Gender and American Empire

- Briggs (entire)
- Tuesday: Discussion of research paper and library trip/information session with Brenda Ellis.

Week 8 [10/30, 11/1]: Women's Liberation

- Roth (entire)
- Jo Reger, "Finding a Place in History: The Discursive Legacy of the Wave Metaphor and Contemporary Feminism," *Feminist Studies*: 193-221.

Week 9 [11/6, 11/8]: Sexualized Violence

- Danielle L. Maguire, "'It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped': Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History*: 906-931
- Estelle Friedman, "Redefining Rape," *Chronicle of Higher Education*
- Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color"
- Jayne West, "Are Men Really the Enemy?"; Karen Lindsey, Holly Newman and Fran Taylor, "Rape: The All-American Crime," all from *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*: 88-90, 195
- Tuesday: Rough draft of essay due to your peer at beginning of class.

Week 10 [11/13, 11/15]: Lesbians and Transgender People

- Marcia M. Gallo, "'I'm Glad as Heck That You Exist': Feminist Lesbian Organizing in the 1950s" in *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985*: 47-62
- Sarah Schulman, "Making Lesbian History Possible: A Proposal," <http://outhistory.org/blog/making-lesbian-history-possible-a-proposal/>
- "The Woman-Identified Woman," *Radicalesbians*
- Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 40-59
- Susan Stryker, "Lesbian Generations –Transsexual... Lesbian... Feminist..." *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 375-83
- Donna Minkowitz, "How I Broke, and Botched, the Brandon Teena Story," <https://www.villagevoice.com/2018/06/20/how-i-broke-and-botched-the-brandon-teena-story/>

Thanksgiving Week [11/20]: Women and AIDS

- Jennifer Brier, “‘I’m Still Surviving’: Oral Histories of Women Living with HIV/AIDS in Chicago”
- Interview of your choice with a woman or genderqueer person from the ACT UP Oral History Project (<http://www.actuporalhistory.org>)
- Tuesday: Return essay to peer with your feedback at beginning of class. Discussion sections also meet.

Week 11 [11/27, 11/29]: Reproductive Justice

- Rickie Solinger, “‘A Complete Disaster’: Abortion and the Politics of Hospital Abortion Committees, 1950-1970” *Feminist Studies*: 240-268
- Sophia Smith *Voices of Feminism* [oral history interview by Barbara Smith of Loretta Ross](#)
- Jennifer Nelson, “‘Abortions under community control’: Feminism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Reproduction Among New York City’s Young Lords,” *Journal of Women’s History*: 157-180

Week 12 [12/4, 12/6]: Conservative Women, the Culture Wars, & Course Debrief

- Marjorie Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women’s Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics*, selections
- Robert Self, *All in the Family*, selections
- Tuesday: Final draft of essay due at beginning of class. Discussion sections also meet.
- Thursday: Bring your written reflective notes for final course debrief. Extreme potluck.