

HI 301: WOMEN AND GENDER IN US HISTORY  
FALL 2018



Professor Nina Silber  
Room 408, 226 Bay State Road  
353-8307; [nsilber@bu.edu](mailto:nsilber@bu.edu)  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1-2 pm and 3:30-4:30 pm; Thursdays 9:30-10:30 am  
(Email works best for contacting me)

Office hours for Rachel Wilson (Teaching Fellow):  
Thursdays, 12-2 PM in B10, 226 Bay State Road

Course website (copy and paste the link below):  
[https://learn.bu.edu/webapps/blackboard/execute/modulepage/view?course\\_id=\\_50389\\_1&cmp\\_tab\\_id=\\_156677\\_1&editMode=true&mode=cpview](https://learn.bu.edu/webapps/blackboard/execute/modulepage/view?course_id=_50389_1&cmp_tab_id=_156677_1&editMode=true&mode=cpview)

*COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:*

Current events have put women in the spotlight in ways unimaginable a few years ago. In some ways, women are more publicly visible and influential than they ever have been, routinely occupying places we used to think were reserved only for men: as Supreme Court justices, as corporate executives, as TV comedians, and as presidential candidates.

At the same time, our society continues to debate, sometimes heatedly, an array of issues related to women's roles, ranging from employment opportunities to their access to health care. Many women saw the election of 2016 as a potential threat to women's rights, leading to one of the largest public demonstrations to occur in recent US history, the "Women's March" of January 2017. And in 2018, many sectors of American society looked more closely at sexual harassment as the #MeToo movement gained momentum. All this points towards American women's distinctive, and constantly changing, historical experiences and some of the ways women themselves have shaped the broad contours of American history.

In this course, we will ask: what have been the distinctive experiences of women in US history, extending from the 1600s through today? In what ways, too, have "women" exerted influence as a distinctive group, and in what ways have women been divided by class, race, ethnicity, and more? Despite the power that elite white women have often wielded, how have less privileged women and women of color shaped the historical landscape?

Another central question drives this course: how has US history, in terms of its broad political, cultural, and socio-economic developments been shaped not only by the specific activities of women, but also by gender? In other words, how have the various ideas and attitudes associated with "male" and "female" had a profound impact on the way historical events in the US have unfolded?

After taking this course, students will be able to:

- \*Explain how women's historical experiences in the US have changed over time.
- \*Explain how gender has been a central factor in US historical development.
- \*Explain how women of different class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds have shaped US history and have crafted their own narratives about the female experience.

Like most courses you will take in college, this one identifies certain "learning outcomes" and "objectives". Nonetheless, as a teacher of history and the humanities, I do not believe that what you will take away from this class can be reduced to a simple list of "outcomes". So aside from specifics like those outlined above, I am hopeful that this course can give you a deeper appreciation for the complexity of the human experience and suggest new ways for thinking about historical and contemporary problems and culture.

This course counts towards the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies minor. You can learn more about the program and the minor at their website: <http://www.bu.edu/wgs/>

#### *COURSE REQUIREMENTS:*

There will be one in-class midterm (worth 25% of the final grade) and one final exam to be given during the final examination period (30%). There will also be two short paper assignments. In one assignment (4-5 pages) you will work with a few different scholarly essays in the *Women's America* collection, analyzing and evaluating the way historians

make their arguments. In the other (5-6 pages), you will focus more specifically on 1-3 primary source documents, analyzing those documents in the context of a specific historical moment. More detailed instructions on these papers will be forthcoming (the first is worth 15%, the second 20%, of the final grade; see syllabus for due dates). Finally, students are required to make three postings to the Blackboard discussion page. These are due at specific points identified on the syllabus and should be about 150-200 words. These postings, along with other contributions you make to class discussions, will count for 10% of your grade. Please note that “other contributions” consist of speaking up in our classroom discussions, but can also take the form of conversations with me or the teaching fellow during office hours or even sending either of us brief email reflections on course readings that you find compelling or interesting.

Rachel Wilson is the Teaching Fellow for HI 301. Over the course of the semester she will hold several discussion sessions where students can ask questions about the readings and assignments. She will also offer guidance on how to prepare for the exams and how to prepare the short papers. Except for the September 27 meeting (see syllabus), these sessions are optional. Students are, however, *strongly advised to attend* as they can certainly make a difference in comprehending the material and improving your grade.

Aside from our classroom activities, the Boston area (and BU more generally) offers many opportunities for learning more about women, women’s history and the history of gender. The Boston Women’s Heritage trail, for example, includes a range of sites devoted to the history of women in Boston (<https://bwht.org/>). Just beyond Boston, in Concord, stands Louis May Alcott’s Orchard House (<http://www.louisamayalcott.org/index.htm>), home to one of the authors we will be studying. And, there is a constantly changing slate of offerings in terms of lectures, film showings and special exhibits. On the Blackboard website, under “Course Documents”, you will find a “Beyond the Classroom” list which will be updated during the semester as we learn about new events. Hopefully, you’ll find some things on the list that pique your interest! Students will receive extra credit for attending/participating in one and providing a one-page summary (due no later than December 11), explaining how the site/event/film/etc. relates to themes we have discussed in class and how it may have raised new questions.

It will be possible to submit papers and summaries electronically, but you must be sure to follow these instructions: you must compose and submit your paper as a WORD document and you must submit the paper, by the due date and time, to BOTH the blackboard site and to my email address. All correspondence regarding these papers must be done using your BU email address. It is also your responsibility to *check your BU email after submitting your paper to make sure there has been no problem with the submission of your paper.*

**Late papers will be reduced by a partial grade (i.e., a B+ to a B) for each late day.**

**ACADMIC CONDUCT:** Cheating – plagiarism included – is absolutely forbidden. Plagiarism means presenting somebody else’s work as if it is your own, *even if you do so unintentionally*. It is the responsibility of all students to know and understand the BU

Academic Conduct Code that deals with plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. This code is posted at: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

**POLICY ON TECHNOLOGY:** Studies show that students do not benefit from multi-tasking and that some students' tendency to shop or use social media during class time can be a distraction for everyone. Evidence also suggests that students really don't learn better by taking notes on electronic devices. So, unless there is a demonstrated need, laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices are NOT PERMITTED in class. The only exception to this rule will be when students must access a reading assignment from the web or from Blackboard that is being discussed in class.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Students are allowed a TOTAL OF TWO UNEXCUSED ABSENCES. More than two absences will require a conversation with the instructor. A student with more than three absences will need to do extra work. More than four absences will result in a significant reduction of the final grade.

#### *INSTRUCTIONAL FORMAT:*

Our class will consist of lectures, discussions, and some inter-active and collaborative work. My class lectures offer an opportunity for understanding many of the broad themes of the course, but also more specific stories. I use this time, as well, to review images from different periods of history and also to engage students in discussion. Unless you receive different instructions from me, please *complete the assigned reading by Thursday's class* as there will likely be some discussion of that material, especially the shorter essays and documents. The syllabus indicates dates when we will discuss the books. Additionally, I have set aside certain times on the schedule when we will have more focused discussions about readings in the course. Finally, there are also times for more structured discussions and debates about specific historical events.

#### *READINGS:*

The books below are available in the bookstore. Whenever possible, it's best to have a hard copy of the reading material so that you can mark passages and write notes in the margins. If it doesn't break the bank, try to print out at least some of the shorter reading assignments that are posted on Blackboard or are on the web.

#### **BOOKS:**

Linda Kerber and Jane De Hart, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (8<sup>th</sup> edition; Oxford University Press) (Indicated as *WA* on the syllabus.)

Please note that the bookstore has ordered the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of this book and the page numbers on the syllabus correspond to that edition; however, if you can find an earlier and cheaper edition – 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> – you could work with that and then make adjustments on

the pages. There will be some essays that only appear in the 8<sup>th</sup> edition (those marked with \*\*) so if you end up with an earlier edition, you should also get to know someone in the class who has the 8<sup>th</sup> edition so you can copy the relevant essays.

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Penguin/Random House)

Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (Dover)

Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (Persea Books)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Dover)

Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are* (Penguin/Random House)

Recommended text: Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (Simon & Schuster)

From time to time, I will also post, on the course website, additional documents, illustrations, and external links that we will consider in class.

You can also find copies of the syllabus, the on-line version of reading materials, study guides for the midterm and final (when available), and instructions for the short papers (when available) at the course website.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

### Week 1

September 4: Introduction; Where Does US Women's History Begin?

September 6: European Women in Early America; Witchcraft in Colonial New England

**READING:** \*\*Kathleen M. Brown, "The Anglo-Indian Gender Frontier" in *WA*, 12-23; Carol Karlsen, "The Devil in the Shape of a Woman" in *WA*, 53-66.

### Week 2

September 11: Women in the American Revolution

September 13: Women of the South: Slaves and Mistresses

**READING:** \*\*Linda Kerber, "Why Diamonds Really Are a Girl's Best Friend: The Republican Mother and the Woman Citizen" in *WA*, 117-125; Slave laws in *WA*, 106-108.

### Week 3

September 18: Separate Spheres in Antebellum America

September 20: Beyond the Separate Spheres

**READING:** Jeanne Boydston, “The Pastoralization of Housework,” in *WA*, 128-139; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual” in *WA*, 189-201; Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life*, read intro material up to “A Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl’s Life”.

### Week 4

September 25: Urban, Southern, Western Women

September 27: Special Session with Teaching Fellow

**READING:** Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life*, read from “A Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl’s Life” up to “The Loophole of Retreat”; John Mack Faragher, “The Separate Worlds of Men and Women on the Overland Trail” (website); “The Grimke Sisters, Sarah and Angelina, Talk Truth to Power”, in *WA*, 238-242; excerpt from Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 1-27 and 38-51 (website).

### Week 5

October 2: Women and Reform: Church, Benevolence, Abolition

*Blackboard posting on the Seneca Falls debate due Wednesday October 3 by 10 pm*

October 4: Women’s Rights and Seneca Falls: Structured Debate

**READING:** Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life*, read from “The Loophole of Retreat” through the end; “Declaration of Sentiments” in *WA*, 247-250.

*FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD ON MONDAY  
OCTOBER 8 BY 10 PM*

Week 6

*NO CLASS ON OCTOBER 9 (BU ON MONDAY SCHEDULE)*

October 11: Women and the Civil War; Discuss *Incidents in the Life*

**READING:** Drew Faust, “Enemies in our Households” (website); Alcott, *Hospital Sketches*. Read all of Alcott’s text.

Week 7

October 16: Aftermath of War; Discuss *Hospital Sketches*

*Special Session (Midterm prep) with Teaching Fellow: Wednesday October 17 at 7 PM  
in Room 504 at 226 Bay State Road*

October 18: Political Motherhood in the Gilded Age

**READING:** Tera Hunter, “Reconstruction and the Meanings of Freedom” in *WA*, 276-286; Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, v-88

Week 8

October 23: MIDTERM

October 25: Women in the West

**READING:** Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, 89-184

Week 9

October 30: “New Women” at Work and at Play

November 1: Women & Progressive Reform

*Blackboard response on Bread Givers due by Friday November 2 at 10 pm*

**READING:** Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Florence Kelley and Women’s Activism in the Progressive Era” in *WA*, 350-360; Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, 185-297

### Week 10

November 6: Gender, Jim Crow, Suffrage; Discuss *Bread Givers*

November 8: Politics of Reproduction and Birth Control

**READING:** Glenda Gilmore, “Forging Interracial Links in the Jim Crow South” in *WA*, 300-310; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, 1-81

### Week 11

November 13: Feminism in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

November 15: Women in the 1920s and 1930s; Discuss *Herland*

*Special Session with Teaching Fellow (Preparing the second paper): Thursday November 15 at 7 PM in Room 504 at 226 Bay State Road*

**READING:** Margaret Sanger, “I Resolved that Women...” in *WA*, 457-464; Nancy Cott, “Equal Rights and Economic Roles” in *WA*, 503-512; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, 82-124. Meridel LeSueur, “Women on the Breadlines” (1932), find at: <http://historymuse.net/readings/womenonbreadline.html>

### Week 12

November 20: World War II & Aftermath

November 22: NO CLASS/THANKSGIVING BREAK

**READING:** Ruth Milkman, “Gender at Work: The Sexual Division of Labor During World War II” in *WA*, 536-548; Betty Friedan, “The Problem That Has No Name” in *WA*, 606-610; Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 3-60.

*SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD ON TUESDAY  
NOVEMBER 20 BY 10 PM*

### Week 13

November 27: Women & Civil Rights



November 29: Second Wave Feminism

**READING:** \*\*Danielle McGuire, “Sexual Violence and the Long Civil Rights Movement,” in *WA*, 591-605; Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 61-191.

Week 14

December 4: Radical Feminism & Consciousness Raising

*Blackboard response on Pat Mainardi’s article due on Monday December 3 at 10 pm*

December 6: Women & Media

**READING:** Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 192-307; Pat Mainardi, “The Politics of Housework” (1970) at <https://www.cwluherstory.org/classic-feminist-writings-articles/the-politics-of-housework>; “The Redstockings Manifesto (1969) at <https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/rs-manifesto>

Week 15

December 11: Backlash and the Future of Feminism

*Special session with Teaching Fellow (Final Exam prep): Friday December 14 at 12 noon in Room 504 at 226 Bay State Road*

**FINAL EXAM: TUESDAY DECEMBER 18, 3-5 PM**