

HIST 553
Graduate Readings in Modern U.S. Women's and Gender History
Western Kentucky University
Spring 2022
Web Course

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Course Description:

This graduate seminar will serve as an introduction to important classic and recent works in the history of women and gender in the modern United States. We will pay particular attention to the role of work, paid and unpaid; race and racialization; relations of power; formal and informal political activities; sexuality and reproductive rights; and the gendered construction of citizenship. We will explore how women have shaped the circumstances of their own and others' lives, and how differences among women are constructed and contested. Aware that the ways we study and write history are shaped by our own historical moment, this course focuses particularly on women's political activism.

Course Objectives

Skills:

- Writing short and mid-length analyses of historical scholarship
- Placing works of historical scholarship in conversation, comparing their arguments, use of evidence, and contribution to our overall understanding
- Raising discussion questions that expand our historical understanding
- Drawing on current scholarship to raise new questions for future research
- Making effective historical arguments based on evidence,

Content/Themes

- women's social change efforts
- relationships between dominant gender norms and lived experiences
- intersections between race, class, nationality origins, and gender
- complications in the standard periodization in U.S. history

You must be ready to take good notes, draw out an author's main arguments, examine the use of evidence, and consider relationships between several authors' arguments. This course is reading-intensive and demands in-depth engagement and frequent writing assignments. The goal is to gain an understanding of important developments in the field, although we can barely scratch the surface of this exciting and complex field in one semester.

Required Texts

(in the approximate order in which we will read them)

**first two weeks of class will be articles and book chapters available digitally through WKU Libraries. The class books that are not available digitally (and those as are, if you prefer hard copy books) are available from The WKU Store and from online retailers such as bookshop.org. The Jones and McGuire are not yet available digitally at WKU but may soon be.

Martha Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (Basic Books, 2020).

Cathleen Cahill, [*Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement*](#) (UNC, 2020) **available digitally through WKU libraries**

Vicki Ruiz, [*From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America*](#) (Oxford U. Press, 2008) (ACLS Humanities E-Books) **available digitally through WKU libraries**

Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, [*Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy*](#) (Oxford, 2018) **available digitally through WKU libraries**

Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (Vintage, 2010)

Brianna Theobald, [*Reproduction on the Reservation : Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century*](#) (UNC Press, 2019)

Amanda Izzo, [*Liberal Christianity and Women's Global Activism: The YWCA of the USA and the Maryknoll Sisters*](#) (Rutgers University Press, 2018) **available digitally through WKU libraries**

Jessica Wilkerson, [*To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice*](#) (U. of Illinois Press, 2019) **available digitally through WKU libraries**

We also will be reading essays from compilations including:

Nancy Hewitt, ed. [*No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*](#) (Rutgers, 2010) **available digitally through WKU libraries**

Brown, Casteldine, Valk, eds., [*U.S. Women's History: Untangling the Threads of Sisterhood*](#) (Rutgers, 2017) **available digitally through WKU libraries**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Discussion

Discussion is the heart of any graduate seminar. You are expected to participate actively on the discussion board, not only posting responses to questions I pose, but also a) raising questions yourself to further discussion, b) thoughtfully responding to classmates, and c) responding in ways that further discussion and exploration, rather than simply showing what you know (though posts should also demonstrate a strong familiarity with the readings). Post that essentially just say “I agree, good point” do not count (though ones that further support the original point with evidence, and extend that point, do.)

You are encouraged to briefly quote the reading to support your points, and to cite page numbers for quotes and examples, so that fellow discussants can find the passages you are referring to. Be mindful—are you dominating discussion? Can you draw someone out? Remember: the purpose of discussion is not simply to show your professor that you have read and are engaging in the materials (though yes, that should be evident); it is ultimately to grow intellectually, to explore materials collectively, and to learn from one another and practice being in an intellectual and scholarly community. What practices support that end?

Basic discussion mechanics

During the first week of class, we will have briefer readings, and discussion starts Thursday and ends Saturday. Thenceforth, discussion guidance appears by Monday, initial posts are expected by Wednesday, and responses are due by Friday; Saturday at latest.

Post an initial post of at least 300 words that either responds to a question or raises a new issue, and that ends with a question to prompt further discussion. Also respond to at least two classmates, for a total of at least 600 words. Responses that essentially say “I agree, good point” are accepted but do not count toward the word total, though ones that agree and then amplify, further explore, and/or provide more evidence do. Remember, use concrete examples from the readings and cite their location. In weeks with multiple readings, engage with all readings at some point in your participation.

Practicing leadership

One week during the semester, you and a partner will coordinate to create two discussion questions for the week’s readings. You can choose a week through a sign-up sheet on Blackboard, available by week 2.

“Get out of discussion free” pass

You may opt out of one week of discussion with no penalty. Life happens.

Other written work

Written assignments include two critical reviews on weekly readings, a mid-semester essay, and a final essay.

- 1) **Critical Reviews on course readings:** Two weeks of your choosing, submit a critical review of the week's reading(s), about one full page (single-spaced). These submissions are due by Friday midnight end of the week the readings are due, though you may submit one as late as Sunday night if the need arises. Besides assuring you are prepared for thoughtful discussion, these reviews will give you practice in more formal writing than you may be using on the discussion board, and help you build effective reading and note-taking habits to support you throughout your graduate study and when you reach your comprehensive exams. As they are due toward the end of the week, they can also help you solidify insights that happen through discussion.

You may submit additional critical reviews to replace a low grade on an earlier one

Critical reviews should do the following

- Summarize the author's thesis in a sentence or two or a short paragraph.
 - Elaborate on the main argument with some examples (citing page numbers). If the week includes multiple readings, provide a thesis for each.
 - Assess argument(s) and significance. For instance: What does it contribute to our understanding of the history of women and gender? to other fields? Does it say something new about questions we have discussed? Does it use previously overlooked or underused evidence? Does it analyze well-known evidence in new ways? Does it omit or overlook something important? Conflict with another interpretation? Into what broader questions does it offer new insights? What are its strengths and weaknesses? (all things to raise in discussion, too.)
 - If the week you choose has multiple readings, put them in conversation.
 - Include your name, the course, my name, bibliographic information (author(s) and titles(s), and the date, in the upper left hand corner. No cover page needed.
- 2) Mid-semester essay due March 4. Options will be posted by the end of the fourth week
 - 3) Final essay. Due the last day of class. Options posted at least three weeks ahead.