Professor Nina Silber
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-5:00 pm; Thursdays 9:00-10:30 am
(Email works best for contacting me)

Course website (copy and paste the link below):
https://learn.bu.edu/webapps/blackboard/execute/modulepage/view?course_id=_59270_1&cmp_tab_id=_191126_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 fulfills the BU Hub requirements for one unit each in Historical Consciousness and Critical Thinking.

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/](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 1-2
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 during office hours or even sending brief email reflections on course readings that you find compelling or interesting.

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 (https://bwht.org) for example, includes a range of sites devoted to the history of women in Boston. Just beyond Boston, in Concord, you will find Louis May Alcott’s Orchard House (https://louisamayalcott.org), 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. BU’s Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program maintains a calendar of events indicating many of these offerings. Students will receive extra credit for attending/participating in one of these extra-curricular activities or events and providing a 250-500 word summary (due no later than December 12), explaining how the site/event/film/etc. relates to themes we have discussed in class and how it may have raised new questions. Feel free to pick something not listed in any of the above locations: just let me know ahead of time.

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.

ACADEMIC 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. In case of illness, family issues, or unavoidable complications, please let
me know ASAP. Extensive absence will result in a significant reduction of the final
grade, and could prevent a student from passing the course.

**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. Finally, it’s certainly possible that we will stray a bit from
the schedule, especially if our conversations on some topics become more expansive. I
will keep you informed of schedule changes throughout the semester.

**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* (8th edition;
Oxford University Press) (Indicated as *WA* on the syllabus.)
Please note that the bookstore has ordered the 8th 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 — 6th or 7th — you could work with that and then make adjustments on
the pages. There will be some essays that only appear in the 8th 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 8th edition so you can copy the relevant essays.

Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (Dover)
Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (Persea Books)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Dover)

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 3: Introduction; Where Does US Women’s History Begin?

September 5: European Women in Early America; Witchcraft in Colonial New England


Week 2

September 10: Women in the American Revolution

September 12: Women of the South: Slaves and Mistresses


Week 3

September 17: Separate Spheres in Antebellum America

September 19: 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 24: Urban, Southern, Western Women

September 26: Women and Reform: Church, Benevolence, Abolition


Week 5

October 1: Women’s Rights and Seneca Falls

*Blackboard posting on the Seneca Falls debate due Wednesday October 2 by midnight*

October 3: Debating Women’s Rights

**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 7 BY MIDNIGHT*

Week 6

October 8: Women and the Civil War; Discuss *Incidents in the Life*

October 10: Aftermath of the Civil War

**READING:** Stephanie McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed,” in *WA*, 267-276; Alcott, *Hospital Sketches*. Read all of Alcott’s text.

Week 7

*NO CLASS ON OCTOBER 15 (BU follows Monday schedule)*
October 17: Discuss Hospital Sketches; 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 22: Women in the West

October 24: MIDTERM

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

**Week 9**

October 29: “New Women” at Work and at Play

October 31: Women & Progressive Reform

*Blackboard response on Bread Givers due by Friday November 1 by midnight*

**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 5: Gender, Jim Crow, Suffrage; Discuss *Bread Givers*

November 7: NO CLASS: INSTRUCTOR OUT OF TOWN

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

**Week 11**

November 12: Politics of Reproduction and Birth Control
November 14: Feminism in the Early 20th Century


Week 12

November 19: Women in the 1920s and 1930s; Discuss *Herland*

November 21: World War II & Aftermath


SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD ON SUNDAY NOVEMBER 24 BY MIDNIGHT

Week 13

November 26: Women & Civil Rights

November 28: THANKSGIVING BREAK: NO CLASS


Week 14

December 3: Second Wave Feminism

December 5: Radical Feminism & Consciousness Raising

*Blackboard response on Pat Mainardi’s article due on Wednesday December 4 by midnight*

Week 15

December 10: Backlash and the Future of Feminism

FINAL EXAM: TUESDAY DECEMBER 17, 3-5 PM