

**HIS551 Gender and History: U.S. Women's Labor History**  
TR 3:30-4:45  
MHRA 2208

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Office hours MHRA 2114, TR 11-12 and by appointment

### **Course Description and Objectives**

This course places women and their labor at the center of U.S. history from the colonial period to the late twentieth century. We will study gender as both a construction, with spatial and temporal dimensions, and a relationship of power, with a particular focus on the social, legal, and economic aspects of women's status. We will closely examine how race, ethnicity, and class in American society further shaped women's labor experiences. We will consider the tensions between women's historical roles as laborers and earners and the discourses and ideologies that informed and reflected expectations of women over time. We will also examine ideas about masculinity in the work place, especially how the "breadwinner" ideology has influenced labor policies and opportunities for women.

We will spend generous time reading and analyzing historical sources written by and about women and their labor in U.S. history. Approximately half of our class time each week will be dedicated to discussions and activities related to the reading material. Through active participation in this course, students will develop skills in historical inquiry so that they may

- investigate varying perspectives that complicate and enrich the traditional U.S. history narrative
- use evidence from historical documents to critically evaluate the differences that gender, race, class, and ethnicity have made on the American experience
- analyze and synthesize course materials to develop arguments for classroom discussions and written assignments
- conduct original research on a topic in women's labor history of special interest to them

### **Course Materials**

Reading assignments will be posted to Blackboard, so log on and familiarize yourself with the Blackboard page for this course right away. Many of these materials will be loaded onto Blackboard, but you will locate some of them on your own to enhance your research skills. You will find details for each assignment on Blackboard under the Assignments tab.

The following books are assigned in the course and are available through the University Bookstore and online through several retailers. I will also place these books on reserve in Jackson Library.

#### Required texts:

Hunter, Tera. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997. ISBN 0674893085

Jones, Lu Ann. *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. ISBN 0807853844

Miller, Marla. *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006. ISBN 1558495452

#### Recommended text:

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1991. ISBN 0394568443 (Portions of this title have been digitized and are available online which serves us well for this class, but students who prefer reading a traditional text, and especially those students who are interested in doing their research projects on midwives or other women's health professionals, will want the book.)

### **Assignments and Assessment**

**Reading Assignments and Participation (25%)** Detailed reading assignments are listed under Assignments on Blackboard. They consist primarily of historical journal articles and average 75 to 100 pages each week. You will also need to allow yourself additional time to read the three books as assigned. Read the assigned sources prior to each class meeting and be ready to discuss them in class. Print out and bring the readings, your notes, and questions to class. We will routinely engage in small group and whole class discussions, and you will occasionally have activities and writing assignments in class based on the

reading as well. Students who come to class unprepared and who do not routinely contribute insightful comments and questions informed by the assigned reading cannot expect to receive an A for the participation portion of the grade.

**Research Exercises (25%)** You will complete three (3) research exercises in which you will independently locate sources related to unit topics and materials. The objective is to explore the topic through other historical sources, literature, material culture, online resources, etc., to bring depth and breadth to the topic. You will produce an annotated bibliography for each topic and share your sources with the class for all three of the research exercises. In addition, you will provide a brief presentation to the class for one of the topics. I will provide detailed instructions before the first research exercise is due. You may build upon the work you do for a research exercise for your final paper.

**Papers (first two combine for 25%, third is 25%)** You will write three (3) papers based on both assigned reading for the class and sources you will find independently. The final paper will be a more traditional research paper for which you will locate sources on a topic in women's labor history of particular interest to you. The final paper may be either completely original or an extension of one of your first two papers and/or a research exercise. You are encouraged to use sources assigned in this course for your final paper, but you are not required to do so. You will submit your final paper topic and a preliminary bibliography at midterm for approval. I will provide style guides and additional instructions before the first paper is due.

*A Note on Plagiarism:* Plagiarism is the act of representing the work of someone else as your own. It is an extremely serious offense that can result in expulsion from school. You may effectively avoid this offense by paraphrasing rather than copying from sources and using proper citations in your written work, which we will discuss before your first paper is due. Review and understand the UNCG [Academic Integrity Policy](#) in the student handbook as its provisions cover all your written work.

#### **Attendance, Communication, and Miscellaneous**

You are allowed three (3) absences without penalty, and you are not expected to contact me about these three absences unless you wish them to be excused. Any additional absences will require a doctor's note or some other official notification (e.g., jury duty) in order to be excused. I will subtract ten (10) points off your participation grade for each unexcused absence up to 5, after which you will receive a zero for that portion of your grade.

Email is the best way to contact me outside of class. (Please enter HIS551 in the subject line.) I will make every effort to respond to emails within 24 hours and confirm any information you have communicated to me regarding your attendance and assignments. It is your responsibility to follow up with me if you do not get a confirmation email from me.

This is an interactive class in which each student plays an important role, and you are to turn off all personal electronic items, including laptops, when class begins. I may ask you to leave class, resulting in an unexcused absence, if you violate this policy.

Please do not bring food to class.

#### **Schedule**

*Details on reading assignments are listed under Assignments on Blackboard. Any changes to the schedule will be posted under Assignments and also to Announcements on Blackboard.*

#### **UNIT ONE 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Women's Labor in Early America**

Week One 8/23 and 8/25 *The Social, Economic, and Legal Status of Women*

Hewitt, "From Wollstonecraft to Mill: What British and European Ideas and Social Movements Influenced the Emergence of Feminism in the Atlantic World, 1792-1869?," *Introduction*  
Sign up for presentations

Week Two 8/30 and 9/1 *Gendered Economies*

Matson, "Women's Economies in North America before 1820;" Simler, "She Came to Work: The Female Labor Force in Chester County, 1750-1820;" Zabin, "Women's Trading Networks and Dangerous Economies in Eighteenth-Century New York"; begin reading Miller, *The Needle's Eye*

Week Three 9/6 and 9/8 *“Free” Household Labor*

Hartigan-O’Connor, “‘She Said She did not Know Money’: Urban Women and Atlantic Markets in the Revolutionary Era;” Izard, “The Ward Family and Their ‘Helps’: Domestic Work, Workers, and Relationships on a New England Farm, 1787-1866;” Jensen, “Butter Making and Economic Development in Mid-Atlantic America from 1750 to 1850”

**Research exercise due**

Week Four 9/13 and 9/15 *Enslaved Household Labor*

Fawver, “Gender and the Structure of Planter Households in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake;” Shammas, “Black Women’s Work and the Evolution of Plantation Society in Virginia;” Morgan, “‘Women’s Sweat’: Gender and Agricultural Labor in the Atlantic World”

Week Five 9/20 and 9/22 *Making Domesticity Pay*

Miller, *The Needle’s Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution*; Ulrich, selections from *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (digital source)

**PAPER ONE DUE**

**UNIT TWO 19<sup>th</sup> Century: “Women’s Work,” *Separate Spheres***

Week Six 9/27 and 9/29 *Lowell Mills*

Cook, “‘Ideal Mill Girls’: The *Lowell Offering* and Female Aspiration;” Murphy and Dublin, “How Did Sarah Bagley Contribute to the Ten-Hour Movement in Lowell and How Did Her Labor Activism Flow into Other Reform Movements, 1836-1870?”

Week Seven 10/4 and 10/6 *The “Public” and the “Private”*

Gamber, “Tarnished Labor: The Home, the Market, and the Boardinghouse in Antebellum America;” McWilliams, “Good Women Bake Good Biscuits: Cookery and Identity in Antebellum American Fiction;” Bremer, “Mothers of Commerce: Antebellum Missouri Women and the Family Farm;” begin reading Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom*

**Research exercise due**

Week Eight 10/11 FALL BREAK and 10/13 *Striking Women*

Blewett, “How Did Gender and Family Divisions Among Shoeworkers Shape the 1860 New England Strike?”

Week Nine 10/18 and 10/20 *Civil War*

*Binding Wounds, Pushing Boundaries: African Americans in Civil War Medicine* Online Exhibition

**Research paper topic and preliminary bibliography due**

Week Ten 10/25 and 10/27 *A Crisis in Gender*

Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War*; Glymph, “‘A Makeshift Kind of Life’: Free Women and Free Homes;” Alexander, “Unsexed by Labor: Middle-Class Women and the Need to Work;” begin reading Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work*

**PAPER TWO DUE**

**UNIT THREE 20<sup>th</sup> Century: *Reforming Women’s Labor***

Week Eleven 11/1 and 11/3 *Immigrant Laborers and Reform*

Burt, “Working Women and the Triangle Fire: Press Coverage of a Tragedy;” Dublin, Sklar, and Doherty, “How Did the Perceived Threat of Socialism Shape the Relationship between Workers and their Allies in the New York City Shirtwaist Strike, 1909-1910?;” McGuire, “From the courts to the state legislatures: social justice feminism, labor legislation, and the 1920s;” Martens, “Working Women or Women Workers? The Women’s Trade Union League and the Transformation of the American Constitutional Order”

Week Twelve 11/8 and 11/10 *Shifting Boundaries*

Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South*;" Bennett, "Manning the Fields: Remaking Women's Work in the Tobacco South in the Twentieth Century;" Merithew, "We Were Not Ladies: Gender, Class, and a Women's Auxiliary's Battle for Mining Unionism;" Walker, "'Independent Livings' or 'No Bed of Roses'? How Race and Class Shaped Beauty Culture as an Occupation for African American Women from the 1920s to the 1960s"

**Research exercise due**

Week Thirteen 11/15 and 11/17 *A Watershed?*

Standlee, "Shifting Spheres: Gender, Labor and the Construction of National Identity in U.S. Propaganda during the Second World War;" Meyer, "Creating G.I. Jane: The Regulation of Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in the Women's Army;" Green, "'Where Would the Negro Women Apply for Work?' Gender, Race, and Labor in Wartime Memphis"

Week Fourteen 11/22 *Labor Feminisms* and 11/24 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Cobble, selection from *The Other Women's Movement*; Mayeri, "How and Why Was Feminist Legal Strategy Transformed, 1960-1973?"

Week Fifteen 11/29 and 12/1 *New Landscapes*

Ludwig, "Closing in on the 'Plantation': Coalition Building and the Role of Black Women's Grievances in Duke University Labor Disputes, 1965-1968;" Jepson, "Spaces of Labor Activism: Mexican-American Women and the Farm Worker Movement in South Texas Since 1966;" Bao, "How Did Chinese Women Garment Workers in New York City Forge a Successful Class-Based Coalition during the 1982 Contract Dispute?;" Garcia, "Silvia Tlaseca and the Kaolin Mushroom Workers Union: Women's Leadership in the Mexican Diaspora;" Seif, "Wearing Union T-Shirts: Undocumented Women Farm Workers and Gendered Circuits of Political Power"

**PAPER THREE DUE**