

## History 385B: Women and Gender in Modern America

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Office Hours: M 10-11 / W 4-5 / F 2-3 (or by appointment)

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### Overview:

From the fight for suffrage to the struggle for equality, the history of women in modern America has featured change and continuity, conflict and consensus. Great expectations and extraordinary courage have led to substantial progress – but also to bitter disappointment and unintended consequences. This seminar will examine how, for more than a century, American women have sought personal fulfillment and professional advancement despite political, economic, racial, social, cultural, and individual obstacles.

### Texts:

- Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements\*
- Nancy Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism\*
- Elaine May, Homeward Bound\*
- Ruth Rosen, The World Split Open\*
- Farrell, Svoboda, and Sterba, Does Feminism Discriminate Against Men?\*
- Danielle Crittenden, What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us\*
- Wendy Wasserstein, The Heidi Chronicles\*
- Katie Roiphe, The Morning After\*

*All texts are available at the bookstore. The \* indicates that the text is also on reserve in the library. All ERes readings are available through the OWU Library homepage.*

### Requirements:

- Lead two **class discussions** for readings I assign (with your input). Use the Internet to offer information about the author (s). Use reviews (if appropriate) to develop ideas and insights about the text (s). Use the questions I have provided as well as your own to guide the discussion. Prepare an outline for the class and bring a copy for me.
- Prepare three **reading essays** (700-800 words) on the texts of your choice. The essays are due in class the day we discuss the reading and should analyze – not summarize – an issue, theme, or idea that is central to the work and that you find interesting or controversial. Offer a thesis with which a reasonable person could disagree. Support personal opinions with specific references. *You may not submit an essay for, and lead a discussion of, the same reading.* The first essay is due by week four. I will drop the lowest of the three grades that you receive. I will not accept late essays.
- Submit a **final paper** (2000-2500 words). Analyze one of the recurring themes or issues of the course that you find interesting or controversial. Make explicit reference to **at least three**

of the texts. Double space with standard margins. Include page numbers and a title page. Use footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical citations (e.g. Cott, p. 439) for specific facts and direct quotations. Please get advance approval for your topic by **November 5**. The paper (required) is due on **November 19**. The rewrite (optional) is due on **December 8**. It may enable you to raise your original grade by one letter (from a B- to an A- for example) or to a B-, whichever is higher. See me if you need assistance or wish to do a rewrite. Failure to submit the final paper will result in an “F” for the course.

- Deliver an **oral presentation** (six to eight minutes) based on your final paper. You may use note cards, but do not read to the class – extra credit if you employ PowerPoint.

*Late papers will receive substantial penalties (one full letter grade per day). Any act of plagiarism (see the OWU Catalog and The History Handbook) will lead to an “F” for the assignment and a report to the dean of academic affairs, with additional penalties possible.*

### **Grading:**

- Class participation 50 percent
- Reading essays 25 percent
- Final paper 25 percent

*Regular attendance is required. More than two excused absences will lead to a reduction of at least one letter in the class participation grade. Any unexcused absences will result in an “F” for the class participation grade. The oral introductions and presentations will count as part of class participation. Significant progress will receive appropriate recognition.*

### **Topics and Assignments** (due that day unless otherwise announced):

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| Week One (August 25-29): <b>Course Introduction</b> |
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- M: Course Overview  
W: Lecture: *The Progressive Era: Work and Reform*

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| Week Two (September 1-5): <b>Gender and Leisure</b> |
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- M: Discussion: Peiss, Cheap Amusements  
W: Video: “One Woman, One Vote”

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| Week Three (September 8-12): <b>The Birth of Feminism</b> |
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- M: Discussion: Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, introduction, chapters 1-4  
W: Lecture: *The “New Woman”*  
Reading: “Margaret Sanger Recalls Her Fight for Birth Control” (packet)

Week Four (September 15-19): **The Fight for Feminism**

- M: Discussion: Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, chapters 5-8, epilogue  
W: Lecture: “*The Greatest Generation*”  
Reading: “Women in the Breadlines” (packet)

Week Five (September 22-26): **The Great Depression and the Home Front**

- M: Discussion: May, Homeward Bound, chapters 2-3; “Harder Times” and “War Jobs” (ERes)  
W: Video: “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter”

Week Six (September 29-October 3): **The Culture of Conformity**

- M: Discussion: May, Homeward Bound, introduction, chapters 1 and 4-9; “Beyond the Feminine Mystique” (ERes)  
W: Lecture: *The Feminist Movement and the Politics of Gender*  
Reading: “NOW Statement” and “No More Miss America” (packet)

Week Seven (October 6-10): **Authenticity and Activism**

- M: Discussion: Rosen, The World Split Open, Parts I-III  
W: Lecture: *The Anti-Feminist Movement and the Politics of Motherhood*  
Reading: “30 Years after Abortion Ruling” (packet)

Week Eight (October 13-17): **Reverse Discrimination**

- M: Discussion: Farrell, Svoboda, and Sterba, Does Feminism Discriminate Against Men?  
W: **Mid-Semester Break**

Week Nine (October 20-24): **Contemporary Perspectives (I)**

- M: Lecture: *Courtship and Dating in Modern America* (Part I)  
Reading: *Petting and the Campus* (packet)  
W: Discussion: Rosen, The World Split Open, Part IV; “Black Women” and “Sisterhood” (ERes)

Week Ten (October 27-31): **Contemporary Perspectives (II)**

- M: Lecture: *Courtship and Dating in Modern America* (Part II)  
Reading: “New Christian Take” and “Manolo Moochers” (packet)  
W: Video: “Mary Tyler Moore” and “Sex in the City”  
Reading: “What Carrie Could Learn from Mary” (packet)

Week Eleven (November 3-7): **Contemporary Perspectives (III)**

- M: Discussion: Crittenden, What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us  
W: Discussion: "The Opt-Out Revolution" (packet); "New Feminist Mystique" and "Enough About Feminism" (packet); topic brainstorm

Week Twelve (November 10-14): **University Holiday**

Week Thirteen (November 17-21): **Cinematic Perspectives**

- M: Discussion: Wasserstein, "Uncommon Women" and "The Heidi Chronicles"  
W: Video: "Uncommon Women" or "The Heidi Chronicles"  
Due: **Final papers**

Week Fourteen (November 24-28): **Individual Conferences**

Week Fifteen (December 1-5): **Contemporary Perspectives (IV)**

- M: Discussion: Roiphe, The Morning After; OWU Policies (packet)  
W: Lecture: *Historical Perspectives*  
Reading: "Now a Majority" (packet)

Week Sixteen (December 8-12): **Personal Perspectives**

- M: Oral presentations  
Due: **Optional rewrites**  
W: Oral presentations and course evaluation (handout)  
Reading: "Of Divas and Ditzes" and "Baby Bust" (packet)

*For changes and updates, please consult the ERes course page.*

## Discussion Questions for History 385B

### *Cheap Amusements*

1. How were leisure patterns different between middle-class and working-class women, between married and unmarried women?
2. How did leisure patterns demonstrate both the liberation and oppression of women?
3. Why did working-class women often gamble and emphasize sociability?
4. How could women in search of respectability also trade sexual favors for dinner, drinks, clothes, etc?
5. Is the distinction between “charity girls” and prostitutes real or illusory? (110)
6. Was the emphasis on reform and respectability class-based? Was it resented?
7. Do you find Peiss’s use of evidence – and her argument as a whole – persuasive?
8. To what extent do we see similar trends and practices today?

### *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*

1. What was the “doubleness” that feminism had to face? Alternatively, what was the “feminist paradox” according to Cott?
2. How and why was feminism different from suffragism?
3. How was birth control perceived as an issue by Paul, Sanger, and others?
4. How was “free love” perceived as an issue by feminists and others?
5. What was the impact of suffrage? Why? Was it a positive achievement or pyrrhic victory for women? Was it good for the movement in the short- or long-term?
6. Do you admire Paul? Why or why not?
7. Was the ERA a good idea then or now? Why or why not?
8. Why did “protective legislation” cause a split within the women’s movement?
9. How does Cott define feminism? Do you agree with her definition? Why did it emerge when it did?
10. What was the impact of advertising on women in the 1920s? Do we see a similar impact today? Why or why not?
11. How and why did “labor-saving” technology actually increase women’s workloads?
12. Why did professional women encounter more obstacles to advancement in the 1920s? Were the obstacles similar or different to those we see today?
13. Does this book help us understand the challenges the feminist or women’s movement faces today? Why or why not?
14. Consider and discuss the following pages: 159; 174; 207; 239; 272; 275; 277; 283

### *Homeward Bound*

1. Why, despite the changes and challenges of World War II, did a renewed emphasis on domesticity emerge?
2. How and why was “sexual containment” promoted during the Cold War?
3. Why was there such an emphasis on large families?
4. Why was scientific procreation (birth control) promoted at home and overseas?

5. Did the “pronatal norm” represent a retreat from the public sphere for women?
6. Why was there great concern over the birthrates of college-educated women?
7. Why were men encouraged to take a larger role within the private sphere?
8. Why did the divorce rate fall in the 1950s?
9. How and why were words and images important?
10. How and why did the “family consensus” emerge when it did?
11. May contends that it was not inevitable. Do you agree? How would you evaluate her logical reasoning and factual evidence?
12. What is the “ambiguous legacy” of domestic containment according to May?

### *The World Split Open*

#### Chapter One:

1. Was Betty Friedan a radical? Was *The Feminine Mystique* a feminist work?
2. What was the impact of the Cold War on gender relations in the 1950s?
3. What was the “big lie”?
4. Why were working women portrayed as unhealthy and unpatriotic?
5. Should we emphasize the change or continuity between the Old Left and the New Left in terms of women?
6. Did the feminine mystique of the 1950s help or hinder the birth of the women’s movement of the 1960s?

#### Chapter Two:

1. How were the experiences and perspectives of the “war babies” different from that of the baby boomers?
2. What were some of the factors that fueled the female generation gap?
3. What were the mixed messages that mothers gave their daughters?
4. How was the path to freedom different for men and women?
5. Was the birth control pill a revolutionary development?
6. Who was more influential, Helen Gurley Brown or Simone de Beauvoir?

#### Chapter Three:

1. What were the “limits of liberalism”?
2. How significant was Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?
3. Was NOW a liberal or radical organization?
4. Was the emergence of NOW inevitable?
5. What was the most significant rift or division within NOW?
6. Was the women’s movement a success by the mid-1970s?

#### Chapter Four:

1. Why were so many activist women alienated by their experiences in the New Left and the civil rights movement?
2. Who is Mary King and why does a “Kind of Memo” matter?
3. Why was the “Freedom Summer” of 1964 such a tense time?
4. How were women activists treated in SDS? Was the split inevitable?

5. How would the counterculture leave an “ambiguous legacy” for young feminists?
6. Why were women of color often hostile to feminism?

#### Chapter Five:

1. What were the “new freedoms” and “new dangers” of the Sexual Revolution?
2. Did the Sexual Revolution, on balance, promote liberation or exploitation?
3. What were the “politics of orgasm” and do they remain influential today?
4. Was *Roe v. Wade* a landmark decision?
5. How would the feminist movement alienate older, non-white women who were not middle class or college educated?
6. What were some of the tensions between lesbian and straight women?
7. How would feminism contribute to the popular understanding of marital rape, date rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence?
8. What was the relationship of feminists to prostitution and pornography?
9. What was the significance of the discovery of the “hidden injuries of sex”?

#### Chapter Six:

1. What does the phrase “the personal is political” mean?
2. What were some of the dilemmas faced by heterosexual feminists?
3. Why was *Ms.* magazine celebrated by some and vilified by others?
4. Do we all, at some level, want a wife?
5. How significant was the creation of a woman’s culture?

#### Chapter Seven:

1. What was the “Tyranny of Structurelessness”?
2. How would the fear of leadership and hierarchy affect the feminist movement?
3. Who was Gloria Steinem and how was she affected by “trashing”?
4. What was the ultimate impact of FBI surveillance of the women’s movement?

#### Chapter Eight:

1. Where was the impact of feminism the greatest?
2. What happened as a result of the “proliferation of feminism”?
3. Who were the “post feminists”?
4. What was “third-wave feminism”?
5. What was the main source of tension between feminism and women of color?
6. What happened in Houston in 1975?

#### Chapter Nine:

1. What happened to feminism in the 1980s and 1990s?
2. What was the image of the “superwoman” and why was it important?
3. Was the media a help or hindrance to feminism?
4. Do the fundamental choices for women remain marriage and motherhood v. career and consumption?
5. What was “consumer feminism”?
6. What was “therapeutic feminism”?

7. Was feminism a quest for individual identity or collective achievement?
8. How would television and films contribute to the backlash against feminism?
9. What was the historical significance of the feminist backlash? (330)

#### Epilogue:

1. Was the backlash a sign of feminism's success or failure?
2. Who was Phyllis Schlafly and why was she important?
3. Who were the "progressives" and the "neo-traditionalists"?
4. What does the polling data suggest about the successes and failures of feminism?
5. What are main issues facing global feminism?
6. Do you agree that "a revolution is underway and there is no end in sight"? (344)

#### *What Our Mothers Never Told Us*

1. What should we tell our sons and daughters?
2. Does Crittenden use evidence effectively and fairly? Why or why not?
3. What parts of her critique are persuasive? What parts are not?
4. How do we reconcile old and new values (183)?
5. How can we elevate the status of women who remain at home with small children?
6. Is Crittenden's plan to marry young and have children immediately a viable option? Why or why not?
7. Do you agree with her arguments against waiting to get married? Why or why not?
8. Why do some women resist marriage (fear of divorce; lack of choice; fear of dependence)?
9. Has work liberated or oppressed women? Has it become too central to their identity?
10. Crittenden seems to argue that the government and society cannot or will not provide better accommodations for working women. Do you agree?

#### *The Heidi Chronicles*

1. Is this work dated or does it still speak to you?
2. Is Wasserstein a feminist or anti-feminist? How would you characterize her?
3. Are these plays sad or humorous? Why?
4. Do these works have universal appeal or are they too personal and too political?
5. Are these plays ultimately about choices – and their consequences?
6. Are the characters idealists or realists, optimists or pessimists?
7. How do these plays reflect their times, the 1970s and 1980s?
8. Which (if any) characters in *Uncommon Women* speak to you? Why?
9. Do you agree with Rita's assessment of marriage and career? (65-66)
10. In *The Heidi Chronicles*, how does Wasserstein address the issue confidence v. insecurity? (174, 182)
11. What character in the play (Heidi, Susan, Lisa, Denise) most appeals to you? Why?
12. What do you think of Scoop's explanation of why he's marrying Lisa? (201)
13. What do you think of Scoop's suggestion to Heidi about settling? (202, 247)
14. Is it what makes you a person that keeps you from becoming a person? (224)

15. “And I thought the whole point was that we wouldn’t feel stranded. I thought the point was that we were all in this together.” (232)
16. Is Heidi’s sadness a luxury, as Peter says? (237)
17. What do you think of Heidi’s choice – and her hopes for her daughter? (247)

*The Morning After*

1. Does the “rise in rules” inevitably mean a “decline in responsibility”? (xiv)
2. How does the “intolerance of dissent” that Roiphe describes compare to the “backlash” that Faludi describes? Are they similar? Are feminists and conservatives actually allies?
3. Does feminism truly promote the idea that all men are rapists (potential) and all women are victims (potential)?
4. What is the relationship between sexual freedom and sexual disease? Is unsafe sex a sin?(14)
5. Is the “wall of shame” a legitimate response to sexual harassment and date rape? (19)
6. Is concern about date rape really a concern about sexual relations? (26)
7. Do you agree with her description of “Take Back The Night” as “march as therapy”? (37)
8. Are those accused of rape often treated as though they were guilty until proven innocent? (41)
9. How do you react to the assertion that one in four college women is a victim of rape or attempted rape? (51) Do you agree with Roiphe’s counter-assertion? (54)
10. How do the conservatives and feminists find common cause according to Roiphe? (64)
11. Are diversity and multiculturalism at the heart of the campus gender wars? (76-77)
12. Do you agree with her description of how feminists define sexual relations? (80)
13. Is “unwanted sexual attention” a part of nature – and necessary? (87)
14. Does the definition of a “hostile work environment” depend on a “universal code of conduct” that society does not have? (91)
15. Do harassment policies create “an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust between faculty and students”? Will they harm students, male and female, in the long-term? (92-95, 104)
16. Does Roiphe imply that all feminists are women of privilege? (120)
17. Do you agree with Roiphe’s assessment of “fashionable feminists”? (124-125)
18. Do you agree with Catherine MacKinnon? Should pornography be banned?
19. Does sex have to be dangerous to be romantic, exciting, or satisfying? (169, 171)
20. Does Roiphe blame the victims and the rescuers rather than the victimizers and society?
21. What does she mean by “sometimes it is your friends you have to fight”? (174)