Gender and Labor in Early America

Description
During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, three peoples and their cultures were brought in close proximity with one another. Indigenous Americans, Africans, and Europeans were not on an equal footing, for by conquering America and importing African slaves, Europeans represented the dominant culture. Nevertheless, in early American societies, the histories of the three major groups of people became intertwined. And in the New World as in the Old, a clear sexual hierarchy placed women below men. The goal of this course is to examine how various rules of femininity came to govern different women’s roles in the Americas.

Using case studies, films, and paintings, we will investigate how Iberian and English women, and African and Native American women, participated in domestic, reproductive, and agricultural labor. We will study women working in homes, agricultural fields, convents, and in the marketplace. We will also investigate how these women maneuvered to establish or to extend their place in colonial America.

Honor Code: All student work is governed by the Oberlin College Honor Code. If you have a question about how the Code applies to a particular assignment, you should raise that question with the professor in advance of the due date.

Readings
The following required books have been ordered for purchase at the Oberlin College Bookstore:

Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*
Susan Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America*
Ramon Guiterrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846*
Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789*

Additional readings are available on Blackboard. PowerPoint presentations will also be posted on Blackboard after the class meeting in question.

**Museum Trips**
Laboring Bodies I: (2/6)
Laboring Bodies II: (4/16)

**Museum Guidelines**
1. All personal belongings such as bags, backpacks, briefcases, coats, and umbrellas must be left on the hooks by the back door of the museum. When coming to the Print Study Room, only pencils and paper or notebooks may be brought in.
2. Please do not touch the works of art.
3. No food or drink allowed.
4. Pencils only are permitted in the galleries and Print Study Room; pens and writing instruments using inks may not be used.
5. Shoes and shirts are required at all times.

**Films**
Family across the Sea
A Midwife’s Tale
Pocahontas

**Evaluation**

*Class Participation (30%)*

Attend all classes. Remain engaged in the texts and in the class.

You must write a discussion paper for each class. Use the papers to identify and briefly explain issues in the readings. These papers are for your benefit. Their sole purpose is to facilitate discussion. Consequently, late discussion papers will not be accepted, for any reason. Discussion papers may not be submitted electronically. Each discussion paper will receive a “grade” of √+, √, or √-. The cumulative performance on these papers may be used at the margin to shape a student’s final grade. Comments will not be written on the papers themselves but
you are welcome to come talk to me about them if you have concerns or questions.

**Written Assignments (70%)**

Response Papers (5% each): Write a 1-page response to the first and second museum visits. Use the following questions as a guide: What do these drawings tell us about the place of women’s labor? What do they leave out?

Take-home essays (15% each): Write two five-page essays that compare at least two sets of readings. The first one is due on March 19th and the second one is due on May 7th. These are “think piece” essays rather than research papers and do not require bibliographies or footnotes.

Final Paper (20%): An 8-10 page paper that suggests a model for understanding the spectrum/meaning of women’s work in colonial America. Use the class texts as evidence. Due May 17, by 7 p.m.

Peer Evaluation (10%): You will write two critiques (1-2 pages) that will address the following questions:

- What do you think the paper is really about? Summarize the thesis in your own words.
- Does the author use ample and relevant evidence to demonstrate the thesis? In other words, are you convinced?
- Can you suggest contradictory examples that would refute the thesis?
- What is your assessment of the mechanics (quality, precision, and organization) of the paper?
- Give two specific suggestions that will substantially improve the author’s next paper. (Due April 2)

**Note:** Late papers will be penalized 5% each day until submission.

**Schedule of Classes**

**Week 1**, February 6

Introduction

**Museum Trip:** Laboring Bodies

**Week 2**, February 13

**Gender and Labor Paradigms**

Kathleen Brown, “Brave New Worlds: Women’s and Gender History”

Jane Sherron de Hart and Linda K. Kerber, “Gender and the New Women’s History”

Carol R. Berkin, “What an Alarming Crisis Is This?: Early American Women And Their Histories”

Carol Berkin, “The Sisters of Pocahontas: Native American Women in the Centuries of Colonization”
Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, “The Family and Society” from Colonial Latin America
Due: Two-page museum response

Week 3, February 20
Women in Colonial America: An Overview
Lowell S. Gustafson, “Mother/Father Kings”
Joan M. Jensen, “Native American Women and Agriculture: A Seneca Case Study”
Cythia Kierner, “Women Work and Sensibility” from Women’s Place in the Early South, 1700-1835
Leith Mullings, “Uneven Development: Class, Race and Gender in the United States before 1900”
Gwendolyn M. Hall, “African Women in French and Spanish Louisiana”

Week 4, February 27
African Women in the Americas I
Judith A. Carney, Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas
Film: Family across the Sea

Week 5, March 5
African Women in the Americas II
Jennifer L. Morgan, Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery

Week 6, March 12
Women in Spanish America I
Susan Socolow, The Women of Colonial Latin America

Week 7, March 19
No Class
Due: First Essay (send via email)

Mid-Break

Week 8, April 2
Women in Spanish America II
Ramon Guiterrez, When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846
Due: Peer Evaluations

Week 9, April 9
Women in English America I
Joyce E. Chaplin, “Race” in The British Atlantic World, ed. Armitage
Sarah M. S. Pearsall, “Gender” The British Atlantic World, ed. Armitage
Laura Thatcher Ulrich, “Martha Ballard and her Girls: Women’s Work in Eighteenth Century Maine”
**Film:** A Midwife’s Tale

**Week 10,** April 16
Museum Trip (3 p.m.)

**Week 11,** April 23
**Women in English America II**
Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789*

**Week 12,** April 30
**Comparing Women’s Worlds**
Cecily Jones, *Engendering Whiteness: White Women and Colonialism in Barbados and North Carolina, 1627-1865*
**Due:** Two-page museum response

**Week 13,** May 7
**Women as Cultural Mediators**
Cordelia Candelaria, “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype”
Kathleen Brown, “In Search of Pocahontas”

Assessing the course
Potluck dinner
**Due:** Second Essay (hardcopy)

**Film:** Pocahontas

**Due May 17, by 7 p.m.:** Final paper