

Women in Politics, Media, and the Contemporary United States

Fall 2011
Wednesday 3:30-6:00

Course Goals and Objectives

This course is an introduction to the various roles and experiences of women in contemporary American politics, media, and society. We will explore changing definitions of womanhood and women's identity during the late 20th and early 21st century. We will discuss women who hold positions of leadership and relative privilege and women who find themselves in the most powerless and difficult circumstances in contemporary America. We will explore crosscutting issues of class, race, sexuality and gender identity to help understand the many experiences of women in America.

Course Description

This course explores the foundational concepts of 20th century feminism and uses these concepts to understand the many roles of women in contemporary media and politics.

This course relies on four primary tools for learning. First, students are expected to complete a significant amount of reading each week. The reading assignments average 200 pages per week. Second, students will be expected to take notes from lectures that will supplement and expand on concepts raised in the readings. Third, students will complete several assignments that require engagement with current media sources to look for links between current news coverage and themes of gender and politics raised in the readings. Finally, students will engage with issues of gender and politics beyond the classroom by attending lectures and events of engaging online resources that supplement classroom themes.

To meet these goals students will be assessed using the following assignments.

Assessment

Two Short Response Papers (15% each. Total 30%)

Students choose two weeks from the assigned readings and write a short (3-4 page) response to the readings, which links a main idea in the week's readings to a contemporary news story. Attach the news story (print or broadcast).

Annotated Bibliography for class (20%)

Students will develop an annotated bibliography of 10 sources that will be shared with classmates. It can be related to any of the ideas presented in class or addressed in the assigned readings. Annotations should be 5-7 sentences, provide a summary of the source and explain how it's related to the organizing theme of the bibliography.

Class Participation in Class (10%)

Students are expected to regularly participate in class discussions.

Final Project (30%)

Students will complete a field study of a woman political leader, woman media leader, or a women’s political organization. A field study simply means that you will need to identify an organization or a woman and conduct a research project that includes several components outlined below. Students will produce an 10-12 page report on the field study.

This must be a contemporary person or organization currently working in an area of social, political or institutional leadership in the United States. The leader/organization can be here in New Orleans, back home in your local area, or on the national stage.

Beyond the Classroom Experiences (10%)

All students must complete three (3) experiences associated with class that move beyond the classroom. Opportunities will be made available throughout the semester.

Learning Outcomes and Instruments of Assessment

Learning Outcome	Assessment Instrument
Knowledge of underlying themes of modern feminism, facts about current contributions of women in American politics, and modes of women’s engagement in politics and media.	Class presentations on weekly readings, short papers
Integration of classroom lessons with contemporary politics and media events.	Short papers and Beyond the Classroom Experiences.
Exposure to broader academic literature on gender and politics.	Annotated bibliography.
Critical reasoning and research skills.	Annotated Bibliography and Field Project.

Required Texts

Dorothy Roberts. *Killing the Black Body*

Kate Bornstein. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*

Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism by Daisy Hernandez, Ed.S. Bushra Rehman, and Cherrie Moraga

Nancy Cott. *Grounding of Modern Feminism*

Gloria Anzaldua. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

Lilly Goren. *You've Come a Long Way, Baby: Women, Politics and Popular Culture*.

Susan J Douglas. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*.

Melissa Harris-Perry. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America*.

Jennifer Pozner. *Reality Bites Back*.

Rebecca Traister. *Big Girls Don't Cry*

Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox. *It takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*.

INTRODUCTION/ FRAMING

Week 1, August 31

Women, media and politics: an introduction.

No assigned reading this week. But come to class prepared to share one recent (past 6 months or so) news item about a woman in the public sphere. The woman can be from an area of politics, media or even celebrity culture. Choose a story about which you had a strong reaction –pride, loathing, anger, or excitement. We will talk a bit about the kind of representations of women we encounter in public life.

Week 2, September 7

. What is the current state of women as political leaders?

Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox. It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office.

FEMINISMS

Week 3, September 14

First and Second Wave

Feminism is not synonymous with women's politics, but many aspects of contemporary women's politics are framed as a continuation of or response to first wave feminism. It is important to have general historical understanding of it.

Nancy Cott, Grounding of Modern Feminism

Week 4, September 21

Third Wave Feminism

Feminism is contested terrain. We will explore how feminist politics is always crosscut by multiple identities.

Selections from Colonize This!

Week 5, September 28

Can girls grow up feminist in American culture?

This week we pick up on a different question about feminism by looking at the theme of women's representations in popular culture. We focus on the socialization of girls within that culture and ask about the implications for the future of women's politics.

Susan J Douglas. Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media

Week 6, October 5

Feminist Actions

Films: “Union Maids” and “At the Edge of Each Other’s Battles” and “Hozho of Native Women”

Professor Harris-Perry will be out of town. However we will have class. The class will view films together. No assigned readings for this week. You will be asked to write a short reaction to the films.

*****FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE*****

RACE AND EMBODIMENT

Week 7, October 12 Politics of Black Women’s Bodies

Continuing with a theme of racial politics at the intersection of feminist politics, this week we will shift our focus to embodiment and ask how different women’s bodies are understood, expressed, represented and policed in the public sphere.

Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*

Week 8, October 19

Politics of Latina Bodies

This week’s readings continue to investigate women’s identities at the intersection of other identities and the work that embodiment does to complicate these identities.

Gloria Anzaldua. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Week 9, October 26

Politics of Queer Women’s Bodies

Up until this point we have worked with assumption that “woman” is a clear biological category and a meaningful political identity. This week challenges those assumptions.

Kate Bornstein. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*

Week 10, November 2

Politics and Reproduction

No issue involving women’s bodies has occupied more political attention than reproduction. This week we look at the complicated politics of birth control, abortion and eugenics.

Selections from Roberts *Killing the Black Body*

The Politics of Reproduction Author(s): Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp Source: Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 20 (1991), pp. 311-343

Beyond Pro-Choice versus Pro-Life: Women of Color and Reproductive Justice Author(s): Andrea Smith Source: NWSA Journal, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), pp. 119-140

ELECTIONS

Week 11, November 9

Extraordinary 2008 Election

This week we reflect extraordinary events around issues of women and politics that emerged in the 2008 election.

Traister. Big Girls Don't Cry

Week 12, November 16

Women in local and appointed offices

National elections draw our collective attention, but women continue to be best represented in local elected office and appointed offices. This week's readings allow us to focus on this important aspect of women's politics.

Readings linked on Blackboard site.

Women Candidates and Support for Feminist Concerns: The Closet Feminist Syndrome
Susan J. Carroll. The Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jun., 1984), pp. 307-323

The Disempowerment of the Gender Gap: Soccer Moms and the 1996 Elections
Susan J. Carroll. PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Mar., 1999), pp. 7-11

Poised to Run, Women's Path to State Legislatures
Kira Sanbonmatsu Susan J. Carroll Debbie Walsh, Center for American Women in Politics
Research Paper

Gender-Related Political Knowledge and Descriptive Representation of Women
Kira Sanbonmatsu. Political Behavior, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Dec., 2003), pp. 367-388

She's the Candidate: A Woman for President
Eds. Barbara Kellerman and Deborah L. Rhode Jossey-Bass

****SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE****

****NO CLASS NOVEMBER 23. THANKSIGIVING HOLIDAY***

Contemporary Media/ Popular Culture

Week 13, November 30

Popular Culture

Gender, politics and popular culture are closely linked. This week we explore those links and challenge our assumptions about women's progress.

Lilly Goren. You've Come a Long Way, Baby: Women, Politics and Popular Culture.
Jennifer Pozner, Reality Bites Back

Week 14, December 7

Gender Matters?

Does it still make sense to think of women as a separate, meaningful political category?

Readings linked on Blackboard site.

The Myth of Postfeminism Author(s): Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez Source: Gender and Society, Vol. 17, No. 6 (Dec., 2003), pp. 878-902

Feminists or "Postfeminists"?: Young Women's Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations Author(s): Pamela Aronson Source: Gender and Society, Vol. 17, No. 6 (Dec., 2003), pp. 903-922

****FINAL PROJECT and ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE ****