

History 4490 and English 3300: Women's Work in the 19th Century

Instructors: Drs. Ann Pullen and Sarah Robbins, Kennesaw State University

Description of the course:

This interdisciplinary, team-taught course will explore the culture of women's work from the period just before the 19th century to the dawn of the 20th, with special emphasis on race and class as key influences on these social practices. Students may enroll for either History or English credit. Focusing on women from various ethnic/racial groups, the course will make innovative use of current instructional technologies to help students understand some of the major cultural values and practices that have contributed to the gendering of labor in the United States. Students will participate in such activities as a computer listserv, they will use the internet as a resource for active research, and they will practice creating/critiquing visual imagery through various technologies to study the history of women's culture. Students do not need to have past experience with computers for humanities study.

We have modeled our class on the nineteenth-century *conversazione* as described by Frances Harper in her novel, *Iola Leroy*. For us, "conversazione" is more than a hearkening-back to the Americanized version of an Italian word used in the nineteenth century to describe a particular informal-yet-challenging site of collaborative teaching and learning; it is also a metaphor for the organizing principles and goals of our course. In a letter to Sophia Ripley, Margaret Fuller formulated what became the guiding principles of the *conversazione* in their day. Fuller said she wished to assemble a circle of "well-educated and thinking women" so as to collaboratively explore the questions: "What were we born to do; and how shall we do it?" (Chevigny, 211). By returning in the late twentieth-century to Fuller's earlier formulation of questions about women's proper work, we hope to collaborate across disciplines and encourage students to become involved in the reevaluation processes leading to new understandings of women's (and men's) culture. At the same time, our course will create a learning experience that—as the nineteenth-century *conversazione* did during its day—challenges the traditional boundaries of learning content and methodologies. In other words, we hope that by drawing upon an array of technologies to help us think about women's work in earlier eras, we can better critique the various ways that technologies are shaping our gendered ways of working today.

The nineteenth-century *conversazione* broke traditional boundaries limiting women's shared communication and learning, since it moved participating learners outside the constraints of the domestic sphere into a more public, yet supportive, learning site. Similarly, our twentieth-century *conversazione* will break down familiar barriers to cross-disciplinary learning. Through that process, we will help our students reconsider how, in the words of novelist Frances Harper, *conversazione* can move learning and the technologies supporting it beyond "amusements and recreations" to serious and constructive reformation of thought and social practices (*Iola Leroy*, 243).

The design of the course will foster a constructive *conversazione* by inviting critique of multiple artifacts for studying gender and culture. For instance, we have assembled a range of visual artifacts—e.g., photographs of Native American women attending government-sponsored schools, illustrations of kitchen utensils and child-rearing aids, examples of the kinds of primers used in home literacy instruction—related to our course focus on women’s work. We have also identified an array of websites displaying related images and providing commentary. We will gather such artifacts to interpret material culture (e.g., objects, images) in ways both similar to and different from how, in more traditional classes, we use printed text to study past cultural practices. Drawing upon this expanded array of resources, we hope to establish imaginative yet informed “conversations” with women from earlier times. In addition to the regularly scheduled class meetings, all of us will participate in our listserv. There, we will maintain an informal, ongoing discussion group in an open (but guided) “computer *conversazione* site.”

Breakdown of Elements in Students’ Grade for the Course

Type of Task	Percentage of Grade
participation (attendance; discussion during meetings and on the class listserv)	20%
Essay on settlement and domesticity	10%
Essay critiquing historic preservation site as compared/contrasted with a related website	20%
Short written exercises—average grade (website critique; powerpoint summary of a secondary source; response to image “museum” visit; brief essay on women’s education)	20%
Major project (individual or group)	20%
final exam	10%

Clarification of participation grade:

You may miss one class without penalty. After one absence, unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your participation grade. The quantity and quality of your classroom discussion involvement will also be evaluated. In addition, you should make at least six substantive contributions to the course listserv, two before the mid-term point in the course, with each of these contributions being at least a short paragraph in length. Specific suggestions for how to make your entries “substantive” (e.g., by demonstrating understanding of a key reading, by responding thoughtfully to another’s comments, by raising a provocative question that spurs others to think) will be outlined in class.

Tentative Schedule of Readings, Discussions and Major Assignments

[C= a meeting in the computer classroom]

August 24: Course Introduction

Topics: description of course content (What is “women’s work?”), the role of technologies in the course, expectations for class members; introductions of class members; examples of major projects from past offering of the class; small-group discussion of short articles—from the *Ladies Magazine* (later *Godey’s*)—on women’s roles and learning

August 26: Women’s Spaces in Settlements as Seen in Cyberspace {C}

Topics: patterns of geographic settlement, American women’s movement west, psychic spaces and physical spaces in women’s settlements

Assigned readings due: Ulrich, “The Ways of Her Household” (frontier section)

Class activity: visiting websites from the course bibliography; preparing comments on those sites (by working in pairs)

August 31: Immigration and Migration West

Assigned reading: first half of *My Antonia*

Discussion topics to include: contrasts between new immigrants and “longtime” Americans in the west

September 2: Migration versus Forced Removal: The Case of the Cherokee {C}

Assigned readings: Sarah Hill, “Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and their Basketry,” excerpt from *Pushing the Bear* (Glancy)

Class exercise: Introducing and trying out the course computer bulletin board by writing guided responses to the readings and responding to other students’ comments

September 7: Social Class on the Frontier

Assigned readings: Complete *My Antonia*

Discussion topics to include: How ethnicity and class shape women’s work experiences in the west; shifting concepts of class, race and ethnicity in the late nineteenth century; *Antonia* vs./and her biographical source

September 9: Website Critique—A Collaborative Exercise {C}

Working with a partner, you will “visit” a website focused on women’s culture, prepare a summary of the site’s key features and a critique of its strengths and weaknesses to share with other members of the class.

September 14: “Domesticity” Considered by Authors from Different Ethnic Groups

Assigned readings due:

Diner: excerpt from *Erin’s Daughters*

Boydston, “The Pastoralization of Housework”

Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom* (excerpt)

Harper, “Enlightened Motherhood”

Demonstration: a powerpoint presentation outlining a supplementary reading related to the day's topic (e.g., Stowe's "Trials of a Housekeeper")

Students will meet in small groups, with each group preparing a draft outline of key points from one reading and questions for class discussion. Students will make plans for elements to highlight in a powerpoint display.

September 16: Managing Domesticity in Various Sociocultural Settings {C}

Students will work in small groups to prepare powerpoint presentations based on their readings from September 14.

Suggested resource for reading: *Burning Down the House* by Rosemary George

September 21: Women and Public History

Guest lecturer—methodologies for studying public history and for presenting history to the public

Discussion of approaches for choosing a public history site to visit and critique; outline of requirements for assignment comparing and contrasting a website and a public history site.

Additional class discussion: expectations for the major project

September 23: Making Our Own "Readings" Public {C}

Powerpoint presentations

Turn in essay on settlement/domesticity

September 28: Work by African-American Women to Claim Freedom

Assigned reading: Discussion of *Incidents* begins; discussion of "Chloe" poems by Frances Harper

Additional topics of discussion: Oratory and periodical work by "Doers of the Word" such as Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, and Maria Stewart and Mary Ann Shadd Cary [resource for suggested additional reading—"Doers of the Word": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830–1880)* by Carla Peterson

September 30: No class meeting [a good time to do your historic site visit]

October 5: Representing Slavery in the Literary Marketplace

Assigned reading: complete *Incidents*

Discussion topics to include: writing about slavery for white 19th-century readers (the work of the literary marketplace for African American women)

October 7: Interplay of Text & Image to Study of 19th-Century Women's Work {C}

Students will “tour” a computer “museum” of images related to various aspects of “domestic” work by 19th-century women. Images will have interpretive questions attached to guide “visitors” interpretations. Students will write brief responses based on the questions connected to several of the images. Discussion.

[Topics to be explored via visual documents and related questions: the “work” of self-display; the “work” of leisure and sport; the “work” of aesthetic production]

October 12: Women as Educators in the Domestic Setting

Assigned reading due: Excerpts from Sigourney's *Letters to Mothers* (on white, middle-class New England motherhood), Zitkala Sa's “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” (on growing up in tribal culture with maternal guidance) and “La Tules” (on a Santa Fe woman barkeeper)

Class discussion: Besides drawing on the assigned print texts, we will analyze a collection of images of southern plantation “mammies” (e.g., the opening scene of *Scarlett* and her mammy in *Gone With the Wind*)

October 14: Presenting Key Aspects of Your Comparative Analysis Paper {C}

The class will divide in half. Members of one group will have selected a key computer screen image associated with their description and comparative analysis of a website and a public history site. (For instance, students might select a key page from the website or a scanned image from a photo of the historic site they visited.) The other half of the class will “tour” these images and hear about their implications from the presenters. Halfway through the class period, the groups will switch off.

Note: Your paper comparing/contrasting a public history site with a website is due at the beginning of class today.

October 19: Developments in Middle-Class Women's Education

Excerpt from Stephanie Shaw's *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do* (on African American professional women); the example of women in medical school (as portrayed in images for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*)

October 21: Web Page Design {C}

Introduction and practice using texts/images from the class topic for October 23

Assigned readings due: “School Days of an Indian Girl,” “An Indian Teacher”

October 23: Education of “Others”

Discussion of Sui Sin Far's “The Wisdom of the New”; Zitkala Sa's “School Days of an Indian Girl” and “An Indian Teacher”; excerpt from Takaki's *A Distant Mirror*

October 26: African American Uplift Movement

Assigned readings due: Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice*; excerpts from *Trial and Triumph* (also by Harper); sample pages from the *Women's Era* (a periodical sponsored by African American clubwomen)

October 28: Work Day for Major Projects

November 2: Apprenticeships in Women's Trades (e.g., hat-making)

Excerpt from Wendy Gamber's *The Female Economy*

Discussion of the career of Elizabeth Keckly, an African-American tailor

November 4: Education: A Photographic Museum "Tour" {C}

Students will tour a virtual museum display of photographs related to the work of women's education and women educators in the nineteenth century. Students will select two or three images to reference in their papers on education and will plan their approaches to interpretation.

November 9: Diverse Viewpoints on the Work of Benevolence with Immigrants

Assigned reading due: Anzia Yezierska, *Arrogant Beggar* (Begin discussion, focusing on the ethnic "recipient's" experience who "benefits" from upper-class benevolence.)

Additional Class work: Status check on major projects

November 11: The Temperance Movement and Benevolence {C}

Essay due: Two-page analysis of connections linking three texts on women's education (a primary print text, a secondary print source, a visual text)

Presentation: Clips from the temperance films of Oscar Micheaux

Class activity: Creating elements for a webpage on temperance (small-group interpretation of photos, brainstorming strategies for presentation) based on instructor-provided images and outlines of excerpts from Ginzberg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence*

Bring to class for reference: Harper's *Sowing and Reaping*

November 16: The Work of Protest

Discussion texts: More on *Arrogant Beggar*; Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice* (excerpt); Jane Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (excerpt)

November 18: Factory Work: The Case of the Lowell Mills {C}

Class activities: Critique of Lowell Mills website; presentation and analysis of an instructor-made powerpoint on Lowell; discussion of Katharine Paterson's young adult novel on the Lowell Mill girls (*Lyddie*)

Reading assignment due: Excerpt from *Lyddie*

November 23: Sweatshops and Labor Legislation

Powerpoint overview, lecture and discussion

November 25: Thanksgiving—Class will not meet.

November 30: Guest Speaker—Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, Emory University

Topics to include: Recovering a tradition of African-American doll-making, representations of childcare work by nannies and "mammies," the history of Aunt Jemima as icon

December 2: Major Project Presentations

December 7: Major Project Presentations

December 9: Major Project Presentations

December 16: Exam (objective test)

Tentative Descriptions of Major Writing Assignments

I. Expectations for Essay on Settlement/Domesticity

Whether you choose A or B below, to support your thesis, draw from at least one “literary” text, at least one historical print source (primary or secondary), and at least one visual text or material culture artifact.

A. Write an essay addressing this argument:

Despite the fact that a powerful ideology imagined women’s work in the domestic setting as uniformly _____ (choose a word or phrase or series), differences in various groups’ experiences of the role and in individual women’s choices about how to carry it out indicate that this key aspect of nineteenth-century women’s work should not be overgeneralized.

OR

B. Generate a complex (and perhaps a problematic) generalization about women’s work in the nineteenth century to establish and maintain homes in various American settings. Use references to multiple sources to support and/or complicate your generalization.

II. Site Visit Assignment

Do A and B below.

A. Follow this format to create draft materials for your paper comparing and contrasting a public history site with a related web site. The sites may be related in that they are produced by the same organization (i.e., connected in terms of authorship), in that they treat the same or similar topics, or in that they are aimed at connected audiences or purposes. To produce a “starter” analysis to help plan your paper, address these questions for both the public history and the web site you choose:

1. Why did you select your site? What were the goals of your investigation? What did you expect to learn relevant to women’s 19th-century work, and how?
2. In a descriptive narrative, briefly record what happened during your visit.
 - a) For your web site, please print out at least one page from the site. You may make margin notes of observations and/or critique on that page. You may also refer to specifics about the page in your description.
 - b) For your report on visiting an historical site “in person” (versus on the internet), you should complement your writing with audio and/or visual materials. Here are some elements that could be used: photographs, video, drawing, cassette tape of oral history, artifacts collected at the site, printed materials
3. What did you learn from your site visit?
 - a) How do your findings connect to what we’ve been studying in the class?
 - b) What did you learn about using this method to study women’s culture?
 - c) What strengths and weaknesses did you perceive in the site you visited, in terms of it serving as an accessible and useful source of information about women’s work? Specifically, if you were to become “manager” of this site (e.g., as a web page master or as a docent), what changes might you make in the site to make it “work” better as a source of knowledge about women’s labor? Why?
4. Assuming you were to build upon this project with additional research and analysis, what would you do next, and why?

B. Write an essay comparing and/or contrasting the historic preservation site you visited with the website you chose to “tour.” Be sure to provide details/examples from your observation of the sites to support your generalizations about them and about the relationships between them that you decide to analyze.