Gender, Race, and the Construction of the American West
Graduate Consortium in Women’s Studies
Fall 2014
WGS. 640

Mondays, 5:00-8:00
MIT Building 56 Room 154

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Instructor availability: Each of the faculty is reachable by email and by phone. We will make ourselves available to students for the hour before class and by appointment.

Overview

The North American West of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides a fascinating case study of the shifting meanings of gender, race, citizenship, and power in border societies. As the site of migration, settlement, and displacement, it spawned contests over land, labor disputes, inter-ethnic conflicts and peaceful relations, and many kinds of cultural productions.

This course explores how gender shapes the historical experiences and cultural productions in the North American West during the time it was being explored, settled, and imagined. Challenging the myths of western expansion as an exclusively male endeavor, and the formation of western myth and enterprise as exclusively male domains, the course pays particular attention to the roles of women in promoting, resisting, transforming, and constructing the trans-Mississippi West as reality and imaginary.

The course uses primary sources (diaries, letters, novels, photographs) and secondary source readings to examine gender identity and practice across racial-ethnic groups, geographic region, local economies, and class lines. It does so through the lenses of social and cultural theory, history, sociology, film, literature, craft, and art. The readings consistently prompt questions about the sources of evidence -- whose voice is recorded, whose image is captured, whose art is preserved -- and how the twenty-first century scholar can interpret them. The methodological limitations of certain sources and the
implications of their use will be part and parcel of our quest to understand this multifaceted history.

Course Requirements

Course requirements include ongoing participation (40%) and a research paper (60%). Participation consists of: attendance, active and thoughtful contributions, and circulation of discussion questions 24 hours in advance of the class (two separate weeks), in collaboration with other presenters. The research paper, expected to be 15 to 20 pages, will be related to the themes of the course, on a topic of the student’s choosing. It can be a secondary literature review or an analysis of primary source materials.

Required Readings

Calof, Rachel, *Rachel Calof’s Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains* (Indiana University Press, 1995; repr. 1936)

**Articles below designated by an asterisk will be available via the MIT website constructed for the course.**

Course Outline

Week 1—September 8: Introduction and Overview of the Course


**Week 2—Theoretical Overview: Constructing Gender, Race-Ethnicity and “the West”**

*Anzaldua, Gloria “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness,” Borderlands/La Frontera (aunt lute books, 1987), pp. 77-91
*Pratt, Mary Louise, “Introduction,” Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-11

**Week 3—September 22: The Great Plains and the Farm Frontier**

Calof, Rachel, Rachel Calof’s Story
Hansen, Karen V., Encounter on the Great Plains, Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 7, and 8

**Week 4—September 29: The Farm Frontier—Literary Perspectives**

Cather, Willa, My Antonia

**Week 5—October 6: The Borderlands**

*Jacobs, Margaret, “Breaking and Remaking Families: The Fostering and Adoption of Native American Children in Non-Native Families in the American West, 1880-

**Week 6—October 13 (Columbus Day): NO CLASS**

**Week 7—October 29: Challenges to Gender and Sexuality**

***Prospectus and Short Bibliography for final paper due***

*Boag, Peter, “Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman: Searching for the Trans in Western Gender History,” Western Historical Quarterly 36:4 (Winter 2005): 477-498


**Week 8—October 27: Immigration, Migration, and Farm Labor on the West Coast**

Lee, Mary Paik, Quiet Odyssey


**Week 9—November 3: Women, Politics, and the Radical West**


*Baker, Ellen, “The Woman's Picket,” Chs. 5 and 6, in On Strike and On Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America (University of North Carolina Press, 2007)

*FILM: “Salt of the Earth” (1954--90 minutes)—screen in class.

**Week 10—November 10 (Veteran’s Day): Cultural Brokers and Moral Reform**

***First 7-9 pages of final paper due***
*Cabeza de Baca, Fabiola, *We Fed Them Cactus* (University of New Mexico Press, 1950; 1994), selections
*Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonin), *American Indian Stories* (University of Nebraska Press, 1921; 2003), “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” pp. 7-47

**Week 11—November 17: Cultural Brokers via the “Empire of the Lens”**

Bernandin, Susan, et al., *Trading Gazes*

**Week 12—November 24: The Great Depression and World War II**

Babb, Sanora, *Whose Names Are Unknown*

**FILM:** “*Wartime Richmond*” National Park Service, 2013 (screen in class)

**Week 13—December 1: Representations of the West: Writers, Artists & Mythmakers**

Silko, Leslie, *Ceremony*

**Week 14—December 9: Student Presentations on Term Projects & Professor Rudnick’s Slide show on O’Keeffe**
Student Presentations on Final Papers
Professor Rudnick Lecture & Slide Show on Georgia O’Keeffe’s West

*FINAL PAPER DUE – December 12*