TRANSFORMATIONS OF FAMILIES

Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies
Spring 2002

Faculty:

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Overview:

In this class we will explore historical, contemporary and cross-cultural transformations of families. We use an interdisciplinary perspective to explore the intersections of gender, kinship and the economy. The core questions in this course are: who/what counts as family, socially, legally, economically? How are families organized? And, what are the social and economic consequences of belonging to a family? From dowry to polygamy, the politics of egg donation to the integration of work and family, this course is structured to focus on the complex relationships between families, gender and the wider socio-political economic context in which families reproduce themselves.

The course syllabus is organized around three main themes: the nature of kinship (including marriage alliance, kinship systems, and domestic violence); reproduction and children (the role of new reproductive technologies, the historical decline in family size, the 'value' of children and child rearing); and, the intersection of family and work (the gendered division of both domestic and non-domestic labor, the value of women's work, the changing nature of women's production). Our interdisciplinary approach is refracted through this tripartite lens of family as a social system, the locus of reproduction, and a fundamental unit within a global economy. Each discipline's methodology produces specific notions of gender and families – as experienced historically, as lived social structure, as an organizing principle of contemporary individual lives. Taken as a complex whole, this course reveals how the transformations of families can be used to analyze larger socio-political economic changes.
**Format of the Course:**

This course will be taught in conjunction with the spring Voices of Public Intellectuals lecture series, “Feminisms, Family, and the State in Transition.” On the evenings for which a talk is being given, the first half of class will take place as usual, and the second half of class, beginning at 6:30, will be the public lecture held in the Cronkhite Living Room.

**Course Requirements:**

This course has two formal assignments, in addition to the expectation that all students will participate regularly in seminar discussions and attend lectures in the “Voices of Public Intellectuals” series.

1. Student groups will be expected to lead our discussion of the reading so that each student leads at least once during the semester. Students should not prepare to speak for an extended period, but rather be able to start the discussion, and if necessary, keep it focused. A key component of this assignment will be the preparation of a (no more than one page) written handout of either (a) questions which the reading has inspired which are suitable for class discussion, or (b) general list of themes which the student groups want to explore with the larger seminar. These handouts are to be distributed at the beginning of the class session in which they will be discussed. Questions prepared in advance and circulated electronically would be welcome as well.

2. Students are required to write a research paper, on a topic of their own choosing, in consultation with a faculty member. These papers should be article length (not longer than 25 pages) and can be organized in a variety of ways. Three such possibilities include: 1.) Papers devoted to the working out of theoretical issues in a given historical or cultural context; 2.) The analysis of primary data sources (either historical or contemporary); or 3.) The development of a literature review relevant to themes raised in the course. Students in the early stages of thesis work may use this as an opportunity to do a preparatory literature review for that larger project.

A working bibliography and a 2-3 page outline of the paper are due in the eighth week of class (March 25) during which time the faculty will schedule individual consultation appointments with each student. Students will read each other’s drafts within the context of small groups to be assigned later in the term. Distribution of drafts to other students will take place in the 12th week (April 22) with discussion of those drafts to take place in class during the 13th week (April 29). Final papers will be due May 17.
Required Readings:

Articles that are designated by an asterisk (*) can be downloaded from the web page for the class.


Stone, Linda (ed.) *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2001)


Recommended books:


**********Before class begins, we recommend that students READ:**********


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Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

1. February 4 – Introductions


REPRODUCTION AND CHILDREN

Overarching questions include: How do we understand the transformations of families over time and across cultures? How do you define families/kinship within different cultures and different economies? What are the consequences of class and race stratification for families? In what ways do families shape structural change?


3. February 18 – Reproduction Controversies and the “Value” of Children


Recommended:


KINSHIP

Overarching questions include: What is the role of women in melding together kinship systems? How is kinship practice the product of daily living within a particular culture and social structure? How is marriage understood to be both a transaction and an alliance?

5. March 4 – Theorizing Kinship


7. March 18 – Kinship, Domestic Networks, and the State


A working bibliography and a 2-3 page outline of the students’ paper are due.


Recommended:


9. April 1 — Students meet individually with professors for consultation on paper proposals

STRUCTURES OF WORK AND THE WORLD ECONOMY

Overarching questions include: What is the impact of women’s paid employment on kin work in contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies? How have families managed to rear children while mothers and fathers engage in "productive" labor?


Recommended:

11. **April 15 – Women’s Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives**


Recommended:


*Distribution of paper drafts to other students*


Recommended:
13. April 29 – The Cost of Doing the Work of Care

Discussion of students’ paper drafts


Recommended:


14. May 6 – Gender in the Global Economy


*Final papers due May 17*
13. April 29 – The Cost of Doing the Work of Care

Discussion of students’ paper drafts


Recommended:


14. May 6 – Gender in the Global Economy


*Final papers due May 17*