

HIST 346/GEND 380-002: Women in America: The Western Experience

Tuesday and Thursday, 12:15 to 1:30 p.m., 211 Multipurpose Classroom Facility

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Course website: <http://womenwest.doinghistory.com>



Introduction

What does it mean to engage with women's history? What happens, historiographically speaking, when we begin our research and writing with women's experiences and concerns? (And with which women should we begin?) What kinds of sources will we have to use, and why? How do historians interpret non-textual sources like photographs and artifacts? Whose perspectives should we be taking into account, and why? If we practice women's history well, what do we learn about the advantages and liabilities of mainstream historical practice?

Questions such as these will drive our inquiry into the history of women in the western United States. This course is about the experiences of those women, but it is also about methods, controversies, ideas and ideologies, and the ways women's history gets deployed in academic circles, K-12 history lessons, and everyday life in the United States.

A different kind of class

While we will read and discuss fiction and nonfiction texts similar to those you may have read in other undergraduate history courses, students in History 346 can expect to perform different kinds of work in this course. In a typical upper-division history seminar, each individual student undertakes independent research with the end goal of producing a 15-page research paper. This paper usually is read only by the student and the course instructor; the knowledge is not shared beyond the course. In this traditional paradigm, not only does the student's research not help future researchers, but students also do not benefit from the advantages inherent in "crowdsourcing" research—that is, they don't have a system whereby they can share primary sources, recommend new leads to pursue, and engage in communal considerations of the secondary literature.



I am replacing this traditional history coursework with a collaborative, project-driven approach that still emphasizes research, writing, and revision, but outside the scope of an individually authored essay. A major part of this course involves collaboration. We will select from local collections of artifacts and texts and share via digital multimedia the history of Idaho women's amateur arts and crafts. Thanks to new technologies and students' creativity, I anticipate this project will go far beyond an "online exhibit" format that largely mimics traditional museum exhibits. In addition to providing a narrative

about the women under consideration, the project will emphasize user engagement with the artifacts and texts and will assume users will interact with the content on a multiplicity of devices, but the “exhibit” will be optimized for a screen the size of an iPad.

All students enrolled in the course after the tenth day of class will be loaned an iPad 2 by the university. These tablet computers will allow students to collaborate during class on research, text and photo annotation, writing, multimedia production, and user interface design for the project. The camera in the iPad may prove useful to students in photographing objects and texts, or in filming interviews with curators, archivists, and others with expertise in the project’s subject matter.

In addition to this group project, students can expect to write numerous short pieces in response to course readings.

What this means for you, the student

You will be asked to collaborate extensively throughout the semester. If you are the kind of student who (a) tends not to show up for or contribute to group work or (b) tends to do the bulk of work in a group project, this is not the course for you. Students who do accept this mission to collaborate on what is essentially a 40-person group project—albeit one broken down into sub-groups—should emerge from the semester with a new set of technical skills, a new way of looking at history, and a good deal of skill in researching artifacts and everyday life in the past. Successful students will demonstrate critical and creative thinking, a dedication to detail, and an ability to think both broadly and deeply about the history of diverse women in the American West.



It also means you will need to choose your sub-group members carefully. Use the first part of the semester to get to know the personalities and work habits of your fellow students. I will remind you of this during class time, but I also want to put it in writing and emphasize it here: do not form a group with the people who happen to be sitting near you. It’s a terrible way to form a successful group.

Learning goals

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- consider the relative value of biography, memoir, academic texts, and fiction to understanding women’s history;
- write and talk thoughtfully about key “islands” in the archipelago of women’s experiences in the western U.S.;
- address the necessity of considering identity politics in academic and public history;
- identify and use some key technological tools for pursuing digital history projects;
- articulate the importance of “stuff” to understanding history;
- make an argument about the utility of the content of, and approaches to, women’s history to the fields of academic and public history.

Course materials (available at the campus bookstore and at online booksellers)

Required:

- Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar*. (Any complete edition is fine.)
- Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *The squatter and the don: a novel descriptive of contemporary occurrences in California*. (Any complete edition is fine. You can get a digital edition of this book, in multiple formats, for free at <http://www.archive.org/details/squatteranddona00burtgoog>)
- Catherine S. Ramírez. *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Lisa See. *On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of my Chinese-American Family*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Linda Gordon. *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

Optional:

- Devon Abbott Mihesuah. *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

Participation

The day-to-day requirements of this class are simple: **do the required reading, reflect on it, and come to class prepared to engage in thoughtful discussion.** (I promise to do the same.)

Your presence in class is very important. Participation in course discussions and in-class small group work constitutes a significant portion of your grade (20%). To receive an A for your participation, you must participate meaningfully in class just about every day. Merely attending class will earn you a C- for participation.



A note about digital devices: We will be using iPads during class time. I know from personal experience that mobile digital devices can be incredibly fun and can add to the learning experience. I encourage you to find creative uses of the iPad related to the course, and to share them with me and your fellow students. However, these technologies can easily divide our attention during class time if we're not focused on the task and topic at hand. (Should you need a laptop or alternative digital device as an accommodation for a disability, I'm happy to let you use it—just come see me to discuss your needs.)

Writing

The quality of your writing—both its clarity and the depth of thought expressed in it—contributes significantly to your final grade in this course. It is imperative, then, that you schedule sufficient time to do the reading required for each assignment, write a solid first draft, and revise it. For our final group project, I expect you to undertake several revisions. I recommend you form a writing group with students outside your group to swap assignments and get their feedback on your group's work.

Because of the number of students in my courses, I can't review entire drafts of your assignments. That said, I'm happy to look over your proposed thesis statement, an outline, and a paragraph or two that you're finding troublesome. Please do come see me for help with your assignments, as there won't be opportunities to rewrite them for better grades.

Late assignment policy

In the historical professions, deadlines matter. Exhibitions must open on time. Grant proposal deadlines aren't negotiable. Collaborative public history endeavors—like building digital tools and organizing festivals—require everyone to contribute in a timely manner so that work may proceed on schedule. The same holds true for this class. **Assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due.** Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g. a B becomes a B-) after the beginning of class, and I will deduct an additional 1/3 grade for each 24 hours that pass before you turn in the paper.

That said, I'm not heartless. If you have an emergency or anticipate not being able to turn in your paper on time, come see me and we'll see if we can work something out.

Please note: **Technological failure does not constitute an emergency.** Hard drives fail, servers go down, file transfers time out, and files get corrupted. You must plan for such contingencies: keep backups of your files, have extra ink cartridges handy, know where the local wifi hotspots are in case your home internet connection goes down. Technological issues are not excuses for late work. Please protect yourself (and your grades) by managing your time and backing up your work.

Extra credit opportunities

There will be opportunities for extra credit this semester:

- Participate in the research Dr. Madsen-Brooks is doing on student use of technology in this course or write a 5-page double-spaced essay on a topic determined by the instructor.
- Participate in the "book club" discussions on *Indigenous American Women*.

Each opportunity will allow you to raise your course grade by as much as 5%. You will receive more details on these opportunities later in the course.

Grade distribution

- Six reading reflections, at 5% each: 30%
- Participation: 20%
- Reflection on technology: 10%
- Final project (including presentation during the final exam period): 40%

Plagiarism

A student commits plagiarism not only if she turns in someone else's work as her own, but also if she borrows others' ideas or phrases without giving them credit. We can discuss this in class if anyone has any questions. Any student who plagiarizes or cheats on any assignment may receive an F on the assignment or in the course and may be subject to academic discipline by the university.

I am interested in *your* thoughts and *your* creative and analytical work. Please share them with me!

Accommodations

I need to hear from anyone who has a disability that may require some modification of seating, assignments, or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Please see me after class or during my office hours.

Talk to me

I will be available during my office hours to address your concerns with the class and assignments. I encourage you to come see me if you feel you have not been offered a chance to participate in class discussion, you are troubled by a particular assignment, you would like to talk more with me about an issue raised in class, or you have concerns about your performance in the course.

Image credits:

- Dorothea Lange, Resettlement Administration photographer, in California. Detail. February 1936. Office of War Information. Overseas Picture Division. Library of Congress. LC-DIG-fsa-8b27245 DLC.
- Dressmaking class, Manzanar Relocation Center, California. Ansel Adams. 1943. Manzanar War Relocation Center photographs. Library of Congress. LC-DIG-ppprs-00126 DLC.
- "Mexicans at the U.S. immigration station. El Paso, Texas." Detail. Dorothea Lange. June 1938. Photograph. Farm Security Administration Collection. Prints and Photographs Division. Library of Congress. LC-USF34-018215-E.
- María André and Maria Sophine, Pueblo of Isleta, N.,M. c. 1902. Detroit Publishing Company Collection. Library of Congress. cph.3c37219.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please complete each set of readings before class on the date shown.

January 17: Introductions. Course qualities. Why should we study women's history?

January 19: Varieties of historical sources. Material culture. **Bring an object to class.** (If you identify as a woman, bring an object you own. If you identify as a man, bring an object owned by a friend or family member who identifies as a woman.) No reading.

January 24: *Farewell to Manzanar*, Part I (~90 pages)

January 26: *Farewell to Manzanar*, Part II (~90 pages)

January 31: *Farewell to Manzanar*, Part III (~20 pages) and *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (xiii-41). **Manzanar reflection due (2 pages single-spaced):** How useful do you think personal memoir can be to women's historians? How might a memoir focused on family and childhood provide particular insights? What are the advantages and liabilities for women's historians using memoirs as sources?

February 2: *Dorothea Lange* (42-120)

February 7: *Dorothea Lange* (121-187)

February 9: *Dorothea Lange* (189-234). **Working group sign-up.**

February 14: *Dorothea Lange* (235-300). **Dorothea Lange reflection #1 due (1 page single-spaced):** Photography allows historians to get a glimpse of women whose lives might not be otherwise documented. Select from our book one of Lange's documentary photographs of girls or women. Describe it. List three questions it raises for you about the women's lives or cultural context. How might you go about answering these questions? Be very specific!

February 16: *Dorothea Lange* (301-339)

February 21: *Dorothea Lange* (341-400)

February 23: *Dorothea Lange* (401-430) **Dorothea Lange reflection #2 due (2 pages single-spaced)**: Pick a theme or subject (e.g. poverty, African Americans, childhood, labor) that runs throughout Lange's work. Explore that theme, answering the question: When we look at these photos collectively, what argument might Lange be making about this theme? Use specific photos to support your assertion.

February 28: Digital interlude

March 1: No reading. **Working group calendar and work plan due.**

March 6: *On Gold Mountain* (xvii-132)

March 8: *On Gold Mountain* (133-230)

March 13: *On Gold Mountain* (231-291)

March 15: *On Gold Mountain* (292-340)

March 20: *On Gold Mountain* (340-381)

March 22: No reading. ***On Gold Mountain* reflection due (2 pages single-spaced)**: One theme of this book is cultural assimilation vs. cultural preservation. Consider how the women in this book, including the author, negotiate this dichotomy. Select two women from the book and compare their choices in the face of the opportunities available to them. Why do you think they made the choices they did? To what extent were their choices influenced by the decades in which they made them?

March 27-29: Spring break; class does not meet. Read *The Squatter and the Don*.

April 3: *The Squatter and the Don* (through chapter 19)

April 5: *The Squatter and the Don* (chapters 20-31)

April 10: *The Squatter and the Don* (chapter 32 to end) ***Squatter and the Don* reflection due (2 pages single-spaced)**: This novel evokes a time and place often overlooked by high school history textbooks and even college history courses. Furthermore, it tells the story from the perspective of the victims rather than the victors. One could argue it provides a counternarrative to the traditional narrative of civilization sweeping westward in the name of manifest destiny. Imagine you are responsible for publishing a U.S. history textbook that begins on the west coast with Hispanic explorers and moved east—and that maintained a focus on the western U.S. instead of using events in Philadelphia, New York, Washington D.C., and Chicago as its major cultural touchstones. How would you recommend the textbook's authors approach the second half of the nineteenth century? What themes and/or events would you suggest are most important for them to cover, and why? Address specifically how your themes and events allow for greater visibility of diverse women.

April 12: No reading. Informal presentations from working groups on work to date and challenges.

April 17: *The Woman in the Zoot Suit* (ix-54)

April 19: *The Woman in the Zoot Suit* (55-107)

April 24: *The Woman in the Zoot Suit* (109-148)

April 26: No reading. ***Woman in the Zoot Suit* reflection due (2 pages single-spaced)**: Clothing, hairstyles, and slang do not typically make their way into high school and college history textbooks. In what ways does Catherine Ramírez's exploration of these and similar cultural artifacts enrich your understanding of Mexican-American women's history during the era under consideration? What aspects of her approach to history—in terms of topics, sources, or anything else—do you see coming into play in our project on Idaho women's amateur arts and crafts? Which of her approaches, if any, should we have incorporated into our project that you don't yet see there, and why?

May 1: No reading. Focus on project.

May 3: No reading. Focus on project. Course evaluations, in class, on the iPad. **Reflection on technology due.**

Final exam: Tuesday, May 8 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.