Feminism and Feminist Movements in Latin America

Course Description

Since the 1970s, new and innovative forms of feminism have begun to take shape in Latin America. These feminisms have been influenced by events and tendencies as diverse as the debates over the Cuban Family Code (mid-1970s); the experience of Latin American women in exile in Mexico, the United States, and Europe (1970s and '80s); the international feminist movement; the Nicaraguan revolution and guerrilla movements in Central America; and the rise of strong women's movements in response to scarcity and repression throughout Latin America. Given widespread poverty and the intensity of class and race oppression in Latin America, Latin American feminists have, from the very start, been forced to confront head on the many conditions and factors that divide them from their sisters.

Whether or not Latin American feminists have been successful in meeting the many challenges they face continues to be the subject of fierce debate. The same can be said of their relationship to the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, to the world feminist movement, and to leftist movements in their own countries. In their own right, and as vital examples of "Third World" feminisms, the theory and practice of Latin American feminists raises important questions for feminists throughout the world.

The purpose of this seminar is to study, and engage in, some of these debates. We will begin by examining the history of feminism and feminist movements in Latin America, from the "first wave" of feminist mobilization in the 1900-1940 period, to the emergency of "revolutionary" feminisms in Cuba and Central America in the 1970s and 1980s. We will then examine the rise of contemporary feminisms in the struggles against authoritarianism and in the movements for redemocratization.

Course Requirements

1) Active participation in discussion. This does not mean saying "brilliant" things all the time (who knows what they are anyway, and even if we knew, who could say them all the time?), but taking the time and energy to contribute to class discussion, whether with a comment, question, doubt, or criticism. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasized, since the entire focus and success of the course depends on your participation.

2) Two short papers, ca. 10 pages each. The first will be an analysis of a life history, or other work based on oral sources, that has to do with Latin American women. The second will be an analysis of a primary source from one of the Latin American feminist movements (such as a
periodical, or a book by a Latin American feminist), or an overview of the contemporary feminist movement in a specific Latin American country. Though I will be happy to provide some guidelines as to what might be appropriate sources, there is a great deal of flexibility as long as the project is discussed with me ahead of time. Methodologies for analyzing different kinds of texts will be part of our weekly discussion; please feel free to bring up any questions or problems with your research in class or in office hours.

3) Grading: Papers, 25% each; Class participation, 50%.

LIST OF ASSIGNED BOOKS

(Please note: Books are listed in the order in which they are assigned, and will be available only at Room of One's Own; articles will be provided on a week-by-week basis for photocopying).


SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

UNIT I- Personal Experiences, Life History, and Oral History

Week 1- Introduction
Week 2- The Struggle over the Narrative

Reading: Barrios de Chungara, Let Me Speak!


Week 3- Inside/Outside and the "Other"

Reading: Menchú, I...Rigoberta Menchú.


Week 4- Constructing or Reading a Life

Reading: Patai, Brazilian Women Speak, pp. 1-35; 63-228; 273-347.


UNIT II- "First-Wave" Feminisms

Week 5- Cuba

Reading: Stoner, From the House to the Streets.

Week 6- Brazil

Reading: Hahner, Emancipating the Female Sex

Week 7- Some Comparative Perspectives


Alicia Moreau de Justo, "Women in Democracy," in Women's


**History 982/Fall 1992/Mallon/page 4**

Writing, pp. 254-62.


---

***PAPER ON ORAL HISTORY/LIFE HISTORY DUE FRIDAY, OCT. 16TH, AT 5:00 P.M.***

---

**UNIT III- Revolutionary Feminisms**

**Week 8- Cuba**

Reading: Randall, *Women in Cuba*.


**Week 9- Nicaragua**

Reading: Randall, *Sandino's Daughters*.


**Week 10- More on Feminism and Revolution**


Lois Wessel, "Reproductive Rights in Nicaragua: From the San-

**UNIT IV- Contemporary Feminisms**

**Week 11- The Andes**

**Reading:** Andreas, *When Women Rebel.*


**Week 12- Brazil**

**Reading:** Sonia Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy.*


**Week 13- Comparative Perspectives**


María del Carmen Feijoó, "The Challenge of Constructing


**Week 14- Feminism, Sexuality, and Sexual Preference**

**Reading:** Daphne Patai, *Brazilian Women Speak*, pp. 248-69.


**Week 15- Feminisms, Latin America, and the "Third World" (Concluding Discussion and Reflections).**


**SECOND PAPER ON PRIMARY SOURCE DUE FRIDAY, DEC. 18TH, AT 5:00 P.M.***