History 982

Feminism and Feminist Movements in Latin America

Course Description

In the past decade, a new and excitingly innovative form of feminism has begun to take shape in Latin America. This feminism has 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 the United States and Europe; 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 is the subject of fierce debate. So is their relationship to the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, to the world feminist movement, and to leftist movements in their own countries. Both in its own right, then, and as a particularly vital variant of Third World feminism, Latin American feminism's theory and practice raises important questions for feminists throughout the world.

The purpose of this seminar is to study, and engage in, these debates. Thus we will take on the challenge of contemporary history in its purest form; and since everything we read will be, by definition, a primary document, our course will be a research seminar in every sense of the word.

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, even if only with a question or doubt. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized, since the entire focus and success of the course depends on your participation.

2) Presentation of research findings or of rough draft of your research paper to the class in the week decided, as a stimulant for further discussion of general issues as well as those specific to your project.

3) A research paper of ca. 10-20 pages (depending on topic and available sources), either an intellectual history of one of the broad issues or debates related to Latin American feminism, or a study of a particular country's movement. Remember: all sources will be contemporary, but they must be treated as primary sources (put in historical context, checked against other sources, assumed to be subjective even...
if they are supposedly "scholarly" treatments, etc.). At the same time, the paper is not a major research paper in terms of length or comprehensiveness.

4) A 1-2 page definition of research topic and available sources, due the fifth week of class.

5) Grading: Papers, 45%; Presentations, 15%; Class participation, 40%.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

(*Means available at Room of One's Own and on reserve at Helen C. White; #Means part of a xerox packet from Bob's Copy Shop).

UNIT I- The Material Context

Week 1 - Introduction

Week 2 - Urban Working Class Women


Week 3 - Indian and Peasant Women


Week 4 - Women and Repression


***DEFINITIONS OF RESEARCH TOPIC AND AVAILABLE SOURCES DUE BY WEDNESDAY OF WEEK FIVE***

(Note: Anyone wishing to add urban middle class women to the list of material conditions and able to read Spanish can consult Maruja Barrig, Cinturón de castidad. La mujer de clase media en el Perú (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1980).
UNIT II- Women and Revolution

Week 5- The Personal Experience of Revolution


Week 6- Women in Central America


Week 7- Women and State Policy (I): Cuba


Week 8- Women and State Policy (II): Nicaragua


Week 9- Revolution and Sexuality


Week 10- Women and Revolution, Take Two (OR: What is all the arguing about, anyway, and where do we begin?)


UNIT III - Repression and Survival: The New Latin American Feminism

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WEEKS 11 - 13: PAPER PRESENTATIONS: Additional meetings scheduled as needed.
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Week 14 - The New Latin American Feminism: Brazil and Peru


Week 15 - The New Latin American Feminism: Chile

We will view and discuss a video on the Chilean women's movement.