Course Description

This seminar will explore the significance of patriarchy and gender relations for understanding the social dynamics of power, including color-class power, in Mexican history and civilization. Our purpose is to analyze, debate, and otherwise come to terms with the basic feminist argument that the analysis of gender and patriarchal power transforms the interpretation of society as a whole. This we will attempt to do in an interdisciplinary manner and over a long sweep of time, from the Aztecs (Mexica) of Tenochtitlán to women workers in the 1980s.

Our method will be two-fold: (1) we will share intensive reading and discussion in common, and (2) we will establish coordinated research and a collective division of labor enabling us to learn from one another's research. In the first section of the course, readings and discussion in common will establish a shared empirical and theoretical base, and help us develop our identity and dynamics as a group. We will also, in this first section, make commitments to various work teams and research topics. In the second section of the course, work teams and individuals will engage in their research while meeting weekly to share results, problems, and suggestions. In the third section of the course, we will have presentations of research by the work teams. Because it is important always to be intellectually broad rather than narrow, and because some students have strong research interests in Latin American countries and culture areas other than Mexico, one of the work teams will present findings and analysis from Latin American or Caribbean areas other than Mexico.

This is your seminar. Its success depends on the active engagement of all of us. I expect everyone to participate actively and thoughtfully in discussion as well as research, and to master the art of combining sharp debate on points of disagreement with a collaborative atmosphere encouraging us all to learn from one another and to develop lines of analysis as a group.

Course assignments and grading are discussed after the schedule listed below.
Schedule (tentative)

   Students should begin next week's reading and begin making decisions about research topics and work teams.

   NOTE: For those who need general orientation or stronger background in Mexican history, a convenient starting point is to consult the relevant chapters in The Cambridge History of Latin America, Leslie Bethell, ed. (several vols., 1984--). Citations in the assigned and recommended readings below will also orient you.

UNIT I. READINGS, FORMATION OF WORK TEAMS.

   The Search for Mexican Female Voice.

   Rdng.: Joan Wallach Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York, 1988), Chapters 2-4 (esp. 2).

   Jean Franco, Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico (New York, 1989).


   Christine Ward Gailey, Kinship to Kingship: Gender Hierarchy and State Formation in the Tongan Islands (Austin, 1987).


   Carmen Ramos et al., Presencia y transparencia: La mujer en la historia de México (Mexico City, 1987).


   Rdng.: Inga Clendinnen, Aztecs: An Interpretation (New York, 1991): read all of it, but concentrate esp. on Chaps. 5-8.


Rdng.: Ramón A. Gutiérrez, When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846 (Stanford, 1991).


5. Feb. 20. The Church, Female "Deviance," and the Agony of Sor Juana.


Margaret Sayers Peden, ed. and trans., A Woman of Genius: The Intellectual Autobiography of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (Salisbury, Ct., 1982).

Mary Elizabeth Perry, Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville (Princeton, 1990).

Recomm.: Fernando Benítez, Los demonios en el convento: Sexo y religión en la Nueva España (Mexico City, 1985).

Lavrin, ed., Sexuality and Marriage (remaining chapters).

Seminario de Historia de las Mentalidades, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Mexico), El placer de pecar y el afán de normar (Mexico City, 1987).

PLEASE NOTE THAT BY THIS WEEK, ALL STUDENTS WILL HAVE SELECTED WORK TEAMS AND RESEARCH TOPICS. RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHIES SHOULD BE WELL ADVANCED.

6. Feb. 27. Gender Struggles and Female Crossfires (I): Late Colonial Times.

Rdng.: Steve J. Stern, draft manuscript chapters from "The Secret History of Gender: Power, Patriarchy, and the Color-Class
Order in Mexico.


William B. Taylor, Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages (Stanford, 1979), esp. homicide and rebellion chapters.

Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918," Signs, 7:3 (Spring, 1982), 545-566.


7. March 5. The Mexican Revolution and the Construction of National Culture.


Anna Macias, Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940 (Westport, Ct., 1982). Recommended to those who have read O'Malley, or who wish to supplement it.

Maria Antonieta Rascon, "Women and the Social Struggle in Mexico" (orig. 1972; translated and republished by Women's International Resource Exchange; SJS has both versions).

Roger Bartra, La jaula de la melancolía: Identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano (Mexico City, 1987).

[March 12 = Spring Break. During this time, people should both read the assignment for Week 8, and make the transition toward intensive research.]


Rdng.: Lourdes Benería and Martha Roldán, The Crossroads and Class & Gender: Industrial Homework, Subcontracting, and Household Dynamics in Mexico City (Chicago, 1987).


Gabayet et al., eds., Mujeres y sociedad (remaining chapters).


UNIT II. INTENSIVE RESEARCH.

During this phase of the course, we will focus our full energies on research. Instead of meeting weekly as a whole, the class will break into work teams. The work teams will meet weekly at the customary class time; I will rotate among the work teams. Work team members should share results, problems, findings, suggestions, bibliography, etc., and may, if appropriate, devise ways to coordinate more closely individual research topics.

During this phase, the teams will also read short family life histories by Oscar Lewis as background and food for thought during the research process.

Suggested work teams and topics:

Team 1: The Legacies of Empire and Colonialism:
Gender and Order in the Aztec and Spanish Eras.

Ideas for possible topics:

Gender and State Formation: Aztec Ideology and Praxis
Colonized Women: Work, Sex, and Honor among the Colonial Poor
The Ordeal of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz
Gender and Power: Honor and the Sex-Gender System in Elite Society
Rebel Women: The Problem of "Deviance" in a Colonial Order
Team 2: The Ethnography and Politics of Mexican Gender:
From the Revolution to the Reconstruction of Nationality.

Ideas for possible topics:

Mexican Feminisms: Ideology and Social Movements
The Revolution as Masculine Emancipation? Male and Female in Popular
Corridos and Testimonios
Three Women [select several women's lives for close study]
Rural Women in Central Mexico: Oscar Lewis and Beyond
Rural Women of the South: The Myth and Mystique of Zapotec Women
The Urban-Industrial Context: Women's Labor, Women's Lives

Team 3: Mexico in Comparative Latin American Perspective.

Topics to be determined.

Calendar for Unit II:

   Objective: present 1-paragraph statements for circulation
   outlining topic, approach, central hypothesis or issue
   to be researched, implications of topic. Attach 1-2
   page bibliography of key sources and journals.
   Background Rdng.: Oscar Lewis, Five Families (New York, 1959),
   Introduction/first family.

10. April 2. Work team meeting.
    Objective: share research experiences, findings, problems.

11. April 9. Work team meeting.
    Objective: share major results and findings. Present central
    hypotheses, ideas emerging. Highlight problem areas.

    Objectives: individuals present outlines of paper and argument;
    oral "trial run" of paper; get feedback, advice;
    AND
    the team collectively drafts a 1-page statement
    indicating how the individual topics together create
    a "whole" larger than the sum of its parts; the
    statement points to the larger implications of
    your team's coordinated research.
UNIT III. RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSION/DEBATE.


TEAM 1: The Legacies of Empire and Colonialism: Gender and Order in the Aztec and Spanish Eras.


TEAM 2: The Ethnography and Politics of Mexican Gender: From the Revolution to the Reconstruction of Nationality.


TEAM 3: Mexico in Comparative Latin American Perspective.

Course Assignments and Grading

There are two assignments: active and thoughtful oral participation in class and work teams; and the writing of a research paper in conjunction with collaboration on one of three work teams.

Suggested topics for work teams and coordinated research topics are given above. These are suggestions, not rigidly set demands, but they convey a sense for the grand sweep, interdisciplinary possibilities, and sense of sequence to which I would like us to aspire in our collective work.

Research papers will be of medium scale: 20-30 pages of text, based on an intelligently selective (not comprehensive or exhaustive) body of source material including primary sources. The syllabus, your peers, and I will help you get started in tracking down sources, and I expect you to consult with me early and as actively as warranted while you develop your topic and bibliography. The paper should be accompanied by an annotated bibliography.

All papers circulated must be in dark and legible print. I will return poor quality dot matrix or xerox copies unread. Be courteous to our eyes, please.

Students may choose to call the drafts submitted for research presentations "first drafts" and to submit revised drafts that take into account comments received on the first draft. Those who choose this option must turn in the final draft, together with the first draft and a 1-page statement outlining the principal changes made as a result of written and oral comments received, no later than Thursday, May 14.

We will conduct the research discussions in Unit III on the assumption that all seminar members have recently read the drafts of papers. Student commentators will open our discussion, and we will dispense with summaries of the papers by the authors. After the initial commentary, the floor will be open to discussion by all.

Grades will be weighted roughly as follows: one-half research essay, and one-half discussion.