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SW 323.01: Women and Social Action in the Americas

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Social Work 323: Women and Social Action in the Americas
Fall Semester 2003

Instructor: Janet Finn, Social Work, 112 Rankin Hall

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Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00 –4:00 pm

Course Meeting Time: Tuesday 6:10- 9:00 pm

"I have a conviction about life. It is that change comes from the side of women."

Pobladora, Santiago, Chile, *Una Historia Necesaria*

Course Description: This seminar focuses on women's experiences of and contributions to social change in the Americas. Our concept of "America(s)" for this course is an inclusive one, encompassing South and Central America, Mexico, USA, Canada, Caribbean nations and the Insular Areas of the Pacific. This course moves women's stories to the center of discussion. We will examine social constructions of gender; explore the struggles and successes of women's social action in diverse cultural, political, and geographic contexts; and reflect on the lessons for social work and social action learned from women's experiences throughout the Americas. Forces that facilitate and limit women's community participation will be addressed. This seminar is geared to prepare participants for the increasingly important challenges of building local-global ties.

Course content: Existing theory of community organization and social action will be addressed, with particular attention given to critical feminist and cultural perspectives. Questions of meaning, power, history, context, and possibility will be central to the discussion. Some of the themes to be addressed in the course include: the concept of social action; histories of women's social action; the concept of difference and differences among women (class, race, sexual identity, citizenship, age, etc.) feminist perspectives and critiques of feminism; women, poverty, and grassroots organizing; women, the state and violence; women's rights and human rights; women's voices – telling the stories of struggle and action; gender, labor and organizing strategies; the parallels of welfare reform and structural adjustment; and organizing for social and environmental justice and the tensions therein.

Through readings, discussion, and class exercises we will address the following questions: Under what circumstance do women mobilize and act collectively as women? What is at stake? How do historical circumstances shape and constrain women's action? What moral imperatives inform women's action? Can we speak of forms of social action as gendered? How are images of womanhood variably deployed, embraced, and contested? By what pathways to women come to activism? What strategies and skills do they draw on? How is leadership defined and developed? What is the relationship among women, collective action, and the state? What are the implications of transnationalism, and globalization for women's lives and collective action? Is there a need for cross-border organizing? What are the challenges and the possibilities of working across borders? What threads of commonality are woven through accounts of women's social action? What are the notable differences? Along what axes are women divided? Where do we find possibilities for bridging the divides?

The course will be participatory in nature with a focus on the development of skills for practice. Members will learn and practice basic skills of group facilitation and organizing in the context of the course. We will explore models for empowering social action and consider possibilities for both building alliances and respecting differences among women. Class members will engage with community activists to learn from first hand accounts of women's experiences.

"We women have changed the course of history in our country."

Bruni, member of the *Agrupacion de Familiares de Calama*

Course Objectives: This course is designed to enable students to:

1. Broaden critical understanding of the geographic and political terrain that constitutes the "Americas."
2. Discuss and critique concept of gender as a social construction, and the implications for social action.

3. Describe basic premises of "discourse" "neo-liberalism," "structural adjustment," and "globalization" and their relationship to study of women and social action.
4. Discuss the political, historical, and cultural context of a particular case of women's social action
5. Identify diverse models of social change, such as mass mobilization, popular education, social action, and local resource development, and their variations across cultural, political and geographic boundaries, as demonstrated in women's social action.
6. Describe criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of particular social change efforts in promoting the empowerment of women.
7. Discuss the question of women's rights versus human rights.
8. Critically analyze models of social action from a feminist perspective.
9. Discuss challenges to feminism in the literature on women and social action
10. Identify key issues to consider in organizing for social change across cultural, ethnic, class, religious, racial, and national boundaries.
11. Apply a framework for social justice-oriented social work practice that attends to questions of power, meaning, history, context, and possibility to assess a case example of women's social action.
12. Identify lessons learned for social action that promotes the empowerment of women.
13. Contribute to women's community building through participation in a collaborative project with other class members.
14. Develop an action plan for organizing a community-based event.

"But we learned the hard way that even though we had all the law and the righteousness on our side – that white man is not going to give up his power to us. We have to build our own power."

Fannie Lou Hamer, *Witnessing and Testifying*

Required Course Texts:

Guzman Bouvard, M. (1995). *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. Wilmington, DE: SR Press.

Ross, R. (2003). *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Stephen, L. (1997). *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below*. Austin: U. Texas Press.

Course Pack at UC Bookstore.

Additional readings on reserve at Mansfield Library

Optional Course Texts (Choose only one)

Barrios de Cungara, D. (1978) *Let Me Speak: Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Crow Dog, M. (1990) *Lakota Woman*. New York: Harper Collins.

Kingsolver, B. (1989) *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Reugue Paillalef, Rosa Isolde (2002). *When a Flower is Reborn: The Life and Times of a Mapuche Feminist*. Duke University Press.

"One of the things that I simply will not do now is shut up. The women of my generation in Latin America have been taught that the man is always in charge and the woman is silent even in the face of injustice. Outside of the house, she couldn't speak of this. Now I know that we have to speak out about the injustices publicly. If not, we are accomplices. I am going to denounce them publicly without fear. This is what I learned. This is the form the struggle takes."

Maria del Rosario de Cerruti, mother of the Plaza de Mayo, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*

Assignments and Grading: All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced and submitted in hard copy.

Attendance and Participation: This course is conducted as a seminar, and it requires preparation, attendance, and participation among the members. Attendance and participation in course activities and discussions counts for **10% of course grade**.

Reflections on Readings: Class members will write **four 2-page reflection essays** addressing a particular theme or issue in the readings. For example, these essays may examine common themes or differences among two or more readings, develop a question raised in class as it relates to a reading, or utilize a theoretical concept or framework introduced in class to critique a particular reading. The essays should not be a summary of the reading, and they should go beyond personal reaction to the reading. **Essays are due on Sept. 16; Sept 30; Oct. 14; and Oct. 28.** Each essay should draw from readings for the two weeks prior to the due date. **Each essay counts for 5% of the course grade.**

Co-facilitation of Class discussion: Class members will work in teams to plan and facilitate one 45-minute class discussion around assigned readings. The teams are responsible for preparing questions and a group facilitation plan in advance, facilitating the discussion, and assessing their performance. The facilitation plan may include a group teaching-learning exercise related to the reading. The co-facilitation counts for **10% of course grade**.

In-class exam: Class members will write one in-class essay exam responding to two questions related to course readings and discussions. The one-hour exam is scheduled for **November 4**. **The exam counts for 15% of the course grade.**

Review Essay: Class members select **one** of the four optional texts for the course. Read and critically review the book, drawing on issues raised in class discussion and in other course readings to inform your discussion. The paper should include a brief summary of the context of women's experience in the book; relevant personal, political, cultural and historical factors that may have shaped women's experience and action; consideration of key themes of the text and

their relevance to themes of the course; and at least three lessons learned from the book that might inform future social action efforts. I encourage you to use material from course readings and discussions in your review and critique. You will have an opportunity to meet during class with other class members who are reading the same book for a “Book Club” discussion that will help stimulate your thinking. **Papers should be no longer than 8 pages. Due December 2. The Paper counts for 20% of the course grade.**

Small Group Teaching-learning Projects on Women and Social Action: Beginning October 7, class members will be forming small groups to plan and develop a collaborative, hands-on learning experience related to women’s social action. Groups may get involved with a local issue affecting women; they may choose to participate in an international solidarity effort with women in Central and South America; they may choose to conduct interviews with local women activists to learn from their experiences, draw on archival collections of oral history, organize a campus-based consciousness-raising activity; or conduct long-distance research via the Internet. We will conduct an in-class brainstorming activity to facilitate small group formation. Groups are encouraged to be creative in their endeavors. Each group will offer an in-class presentation or exercise to teach other class members about what they learned from their experience. Feel free to be creative in your plans and presentations. **Small group teaching learning projects and presentations will count for 25% of the grade. Groups will sign up for presentation times during the weeks of 12/9 and 12/16.**

Schedule of Classes, Themes, and Readings:

Week One 9/2: Mapping the Terrain – Course Overview

Rationale for course. Introduction to course themes. Patterns that connect, struggles that continue.

Readings for 9/9: Stephen, *Women and Social Movements in Latin America*, “Introduction;” **Fac Pack 1-3:** Barrig, “Latin American Feminism: Gains, Losses, and Hard Times.” Cameron, “Gee, You don’t seem like an Indian from the reservation;” Carrillo, “And when you leave, take your pictures with you.”

Readings on Reserve at Mansfield Library: Finn (2002), “Borders and Bridges: New Directions for the Women’s Movement.” Ch.16 in Figueira-McDonough & Sarri *Women at the Margins*; Townsend et al. “Empowerment Matters: Understanding Power.” Ch. 2 in Townsend et al. *Women and Power*

Week Two 9/9: Feminisms in the Americas – Gender and Power, Connections and Differences

Frameworks, concepts, and tensions. Questions that will guide our inquiry. The “Just Practice” perspective.

Readings for 9/16. Stephen, Chapter 7, “Sweet and Sour Grapes and Interview with Antonia Gomez;” **Fac Pack 4:** Gutierrez de Soldatenko, “ILGWU Labor Organizers: Chicana and Latina leadership in the Los Angeles garment industry.”

Reading on reserve at Mansfield Library: Finn (1998) “Crafting the Everyday,” Ch. In *Tracing the Veins*.

Recommended reading on reserve: Cobble, D. (1990) “Rethinking Troubled Relations Between Women and Unions; Craft Unionism and Female Activism,” *Feminist Studies* 16(3); Vosko & Witwer, “Not a man’s union’: women teamsters in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. *Journal of Women’s History* 13(3) on reserve.

Week Three 9/16: Women’s Work – Contradictions of Gender and labor and the implications for organizing

Tensions of paid and unpaid labor; gender and labor organizing. Historical perspectives and contemporary struggles. Film (Salt of the Earth). Reflection paper due.

Reading for 9/23: Ross (2003) *Witnessing and testifying* Ch 1-4.

Week Four: 9/23 Race, Gender, and Rights: *Witnessing and Testifying*

African American Women and pathways to social justice activism. The role of faith in the process of social change.

Reading for 9/30: *Witnessing and Testifying*, Ch. 5-6. **Fac Pack 5-7:** Jewish Women's Archive, "Newton Girl Jailed in Mississippi with Eight Freedom Riders;" Schultz, "Our unsung civil rights movement heroines;" Blee, "Reading racism: Women in the modern hate movement."

Recommended reading on reserve: Wrigley, "From housewives to activists: women and the Division of political labor in the Boston anti-busing movement," in Blee (1988) "*No Middle Ground*."

Week Five: 9/30 Race, Gender and Rights, continued.

Contradictions and difference among women; white women and racism; the power and possibility of solidarity. Teaching/learning groups formed. Reflection paper due.

Readings for 10/7: Stephen, Ch 2, 3, Interview with Morena Herrera, Ch 4, Interview with Irene Soto. **Fac Pack 8-11:** Geske and Bourque, "Grassroots Organizations and Women's Human Rights: Meeting the Challenge of the Local-Global Link. Reichert (1998) "Women's Rights are Human Rights: Platform for Action;" *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*; Schild (2000). "Gender equity without social justice: women's rights in the neoliberal age. **Begin reading Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood***

Week Six: 10/7 Women's Rights, Human Rights – Tensions of Gender, Citizenship, and Globalization

Gender, citizenship and the right to have rights. Neoliberalism, structural adjustment, and the gendered implications. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Introduction to *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. Brainstorming session to form teaching/learning groups.

Reading for 10/14: Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, Ch. 1-7; **Fac Pack 12:** Power, "Introduction," *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle Against Allende, 1964-1973*.

Week Seven: 10/14 *Revolutionizing Motherhood*

Moving beyond fear: Women's collective action in response to repressive regimes. The meaning and power of motherhood. Film: *The Dance of Hope*. Reflection paper due. Book Club selections.

Readings for 10/21: Guzman Bouvard, Ch. 8-10. Stephen, Ch. 5 and interview with Dona Kata Moreno and Aurora Cruz. Fac Pack 13-18: Naples, "Activist mothering;" Guzman Bouvard, "Juana Beatrice Gutierrez and the Mothers of East Los Angeles;" Finn et al, "Working for Equality and Economic Liberation: Advocacy and Education for Welfare Reform;" Stevens, "Welfare organizing saved my life;" Criquillon, "The Nicaraguan women's movement: Feminist reflections from within;" Udel, "Revision and resistance: The politics of native women's motherwork." (We will divide these reading among the group).

Week Eight: 10/21 *Revolutionizing Motherhood* continued, variations on a theme

Exploration of examples how women have resisted, embraced, politicized, and transformed constructions of womanhood and motherhood in struggles for women's rights, human rights and social justice. Women and welfare activism. The power and possibilities of "motherwork." Time for teaching-learning groups to meet.

Reading for 10/28: Each class member will come prepared to share poetry, music, and narratives that speak to women's critical consciousness and action.

Recommended reading: Sanford, V. (2000). "The silencing of Maya women from Mama Maqui to Rigoberta Menchu," *Social Justice* 27(1) 128-151.

Week Nine: 10/28 Many Voices, Many Stories: Testimonies of women's lives.

In-class readings and activities engaging with women's testimonies. Reflection on the ways women speak to oppression, struggle, consciousness, and action. Creating a collective representation of women's voices. Testimony by local activists. Reflection paper due. Identify Book Clubs.

Readings for 11/4: Fac Pack 19-20 Vasquez Sotelo, "Promoting the Inter American Convention for the Promotion and Protection of Sexual and Reproductive Rights;" Baumgardner, "Roe in rough waters: thirty years later, abortion's political terrain is more complicated than ever."

Recommended reading on reserve: Lawrence, J. (2000). "The Indian health Service and the sterilization of native American women," *American Indian Quarterly* 24(3), 400-419.

Week Ten: 11/4 Women, health, and reproduction

Struggles over reproductive freedom; women, bodies, and rights. The concept of voluntary motherhood. Racism and reproduction. Film: "La Operacion." In-class essay exam.

Readings for Week Twelve 11/18: FP 21-23 Finn, "The women of Villa Paula Jaraquemada;" Paul & Perkinson, "Interview with Winona LaDuke;" *Multinational Monitor*, "Fighting for environmental justice: An Interview with Lois Gibbs."

Recommended Reading on Reserve: Finn, J. (2002). "Raíces: Gender conscious community building in Santiago, Chile," *Affilia* 17(4), 448-470.

Week Eleven: Veteran's Day No Class

Week Twelve: 11/18 Women Building Community: Organizing for Social and Environmental Justice

Case studies of women's community-based action from cross-national participatory project – lessons from the Andes to the Rockies; Women linking environmental and social justice. Building community from the ground up: La Victoria presentation. Book Clubs meet for one hour.

Readings for Week Thirteen 11/25: Stephen, Ch. 6 and Interview with Gessi Bones and Marlene Pasquale. Fac Pack 24-27: Finn, "Fuerza Unida," Navarro, "Las Mujeres Invisibles/The Invisible Women;" Frisch, "STITCHing across borders;" Nieves, "To work and die in Juarez."

Recommended Reading on Reserve: Whitmore & Wilson (1997) "Accompanying the Process: Social work and international development practice." *International Social Work* 40, 57-74.

Bickham Mendez, J. (2002). "Creating alternatives from a gender perspective: Transnational organizing for maquila workers' rights in Central America," In N. Naples and M. Desai (Eds.). *Women's Activism and Globalization* New York: Routledge.

Week Thirteen 11/25: Women, Resistance, and Connection: Talking Back, Taking Action

Women, the state and resistance; taking a stand, joining together; cross-border organizing; the process of accompaniment. Linking the local and global. Possibilities for solidarity and collective action. Reflection on approaches to social action. Guest Speaker. Teaching/learning groups meet. No readings for 12/2: Preparation of final projects/presentations

Week Fourteen 12/2: Challenging Representations and Creating New Visions and Possibilities for Reflection and Action

Film "Gringo in Mañanaland." Critical reflection on representations of difference (race, gender, class, nationality), questions of meaning and power, and lessons learned from women's struggles.

Review essay due. No Readings for 12/9: Preparation of final projects and presentations.
Teaching/learning groups meet.

Week Fifteen 12/9: Critical Reflection, Evaluation, and Celebration

Reflections on the journey, lessons learned, presentation of final projects.

Week Sixteen 12/16: Final Week Meeting time: 7:40-9:40 pm

Presentation of Final projects, continued.