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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 2001

Instructor: Janet Finn, Social Work, Rankin Hall 108, 243-5583

Meeting Time: Tues., 6:10-9:00 pm.

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. For example, we will explore common ground and important differences between the actions of Argentine women of the *Plaza de Mayo* who revolutionized the meaning and power of motherhood, and the mobilization of "grassroots warriors," activist mothers who joined the war on poverty in the U.S. Forces that facilitate and limit women's community participation will be addressed. We will draw from research and practice in the field to inform and critique theoretical perspectives and develop guidelines for action.

This seminar is geared to prepare participants for the increasingly important challenges of building local-global ties. Participants will use internet resources as one means for learning about and promoting women's social participation. Students will be introduced to the "Women Building community" website, developed in conjunction with this course, which reports on six studies of women and social action in Chile and the U.S. The course will include a workshop component where members will practice the skills of organizing. As part of the course, class members will organize an event bringing women activists together to share their experiences and the lessons learned. Seminar discussion will link the richness of particular histories and actions to the broader context of the Americas.

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 and 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; gender, labor and transnational organizing strategies; and the parallels of welfare reform and structural adjustment.

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. As we build community in the classroom, we will confront questions of power and difference and explore strategies for conflict resolution. We will explore models for empowering social action and consider possibilities for both building alliances and respecting differences among women.

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

Pobladora, Santiago, Chile, *Una Historia Necesaria*

"They were like my mother and me relatives who had really shaped me. [It] was my mother and her sister sitting around the coffee table. That's how I organize, sitting around tables like this, having coffee. And I like that. Somehow I felt that I had found a place, a family."

Sandra Cole, Organizer, Grassroots Warriors

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

Bruni, member of the Agrupacion de Familiares de Calama, "A Penny for Your Thoughts"

"Cherrie, you asked me to write about internationalism, and at first it made sense... I'm a Latin woman in the United States, closely involved with Latin American movements in the rest of the continent. I should write about connection. But when I tried, all I could think was: No, write about the separation."

Aurora Levins Morales, "...And even Fidel can't change that!" *This Bridge Called My Back*

"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*

"I'd ask myself what I'd have to change in us, because if we are not sure of what we want – see, things can change, because they actually have changed you know – but if I don't take responsibility for what I want, there won't be any power, we won't get any power, even if things do change."

Peasant Leader, rural Mexico, *Women and Power*

"It was so important. It was really a beautiful thing, women coming together to work together. We started small and we learned everything. We learned we were capable, we could do this. We talked and laughed and it was so special. It was a road to a new life of learning. It was a beautiful experience, working and learning together, block by block, helping each other."

Marina, Villa Paula Jaraquemada, Chile

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 analysis," "neo-liberalism," "structural adjustment," "global integration," and "transnationalism" 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. Identify evaluation criteria and evaluate the effectiveness of particular social change efforts in promoting the empowerment of women at the personal, organizational, community and societal levels.
7. Demonstrate competence in accessing Internet resources relevant to course.
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. Use 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 promote the empowerment of women.
13. Contribute to women's community building through participation in collaborative project with other class members.
14. Develop an action plan for organizing a community-based event.
15. Utilize Internet resources as tools for organization and action.

Required Texts:

Nancy A. Naples (1998) *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work, and the War on Poverty* New York: Routledge

Guzman Bouvard, Marguerite, Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Wilmington: SR Press, 1995 (RM)

Janet Townsend, Emma Zapata, Jo Rowlands, Pilar Alberti, & Marta Mercado (1999) *Women and Power: Fighting Patriarchies and Poverty*. London: Zed Books.

Faculty Pack available at UC Bookstore

Course Assignments:

Commentaries and Participation: Completion of course readings and participation in the seminar are essential for the success of the course. At the second course meeting, we will be introduced to the Internet. We will set up an Internet discussion group for the course through which we will exchange responses to readings, updates on issues and resources related to women and social action, and ideas for project planning. Class members are expected to contribute to both classroom and Internet discussions. In addition, during the first ten weeks of the semester, class members will write **five** 2-3 pages commentaries on the assigned weekly readings. Members decide which weeks' reading they wish to address (between September 11 and November 13). The commentaries will provide a resource for class discussion. Individual commentaries should focus on the readings for a particular week and are to be turned in at the end of the class period when those readings are discussed. Class members are invited to submit the commentaries electronically to the class listserve as well. **Weekly commentaries on the readings and class participation count for 30% of grade.**

Paper: Read and critically review one **book** that documents a case study of women's social action. The paper should include a brief summary of the context and course of action; assessment of relevant personal, political, cultural and/or historical factors that may have shaped the action; critique of the process and outcome; and at least three lessons learned from this case that might inform future efforts. I encourage you to use material from course readings and discussions in your review and critique. You may use one of the optional course texts for this assignment. A list of books on reserve will also be handed out in class. If you wish to review a book that is not on the list, please see me for approval. **Papers should be no longer than 8 pages. Due October 23. 25% of grade.**

Collaborative Project on Women Building Community Beginning in late September, class members will be working in organizing teams to plan an event related to women and social action in conjunction with the course. A portion of class time each week will be devoted to project development. Participants will also be expected to devote time outside of class to the

project. Each team will keep a portfolio documenting their planning and organizing activities. Each team will prepare a final report, documenting their efforts and assessing the process and outcome. **Final Report due December 11. 25% of grade.**

Lessons for Practice: Based on your understanding of the course readings and discussion and experience in the group project, write an essay on lessons for practice that you have learned through engagement with the possibilities of women's social action. What are some key lessons that will promote effective social action efforts by and for women? Use examples from course materials to make your case. Cite your sources. **Due Dec. 11. 20% of grade.**

Schedule of Classes

September 4: Introduction and Overview: Mapping the Terrain

Readings: FP 1, 2; Naples, Ch. 1; Townsend, Ch. 1

September 11: Frameworks for Understanding and Action: Making Connections, Acknowledging Difference. Readings: FP 3-9

September 18: Constructing Gender, Constructing Rights

Readings: FP 10-14, *Grassroots Warriors*, Parts I and II

September 25: Historical Contexts, Constraints, and Possibilities

Readings: *Grassroots Warriors*, Parts III and IV, FP 20, 21, "WEEL"

October 2: Poverty, Activist Mothering and Community Work

Readings: Townsend et al. Ch. 2-7.

October 9: Confronting Power

Readings: Townsend et al, Ch. 8-9; FP 15, 16

October 16: Creating Possibilities and Connecting the Struggles

Readings: Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*

October 23: Women, the State, and Violence; Revolutionizing Motherhood

Readings: *Revolutionizing Motherhood*. Film: "The Dance of Hope"

October 30: Activist Mothering: Possibilities, Constraints, and Contradictions

Readings: FP 15, 16, 17

November 6: Women and Grassroots Development: Possibilities and Limits of the Local

Readings: FP 18, 19, 22

November 13: Claiming Voice, Agency, Knowledge

Readings: FP 21, 23, WBC website, FP 26

November 20: Women Building Community: Grassroots organizing for family, community and

environmental survival. Readings: To be announced
November 27: Gender, Labor, and Transnational Organizing
Readings: FP 24, 25

December 4: Accompanying the Process: Revisiting Struggles and Successes, Building Solidarity.

December 11: Women, Scholarship and Activism: Where do we go from here? Reflection and Celebration.

Course Pack Readings

1. J. Finn, "Borders and Bridges: Building New Directions for the Women's Movement," Chapter in R. Sarri and J. Figueira-McDonough, Eds., *Women on the Margins: Neglect, Violence and Resistance*, forthcoming, 2001.
2. E. Paul, "The Women's Movement and the Movement of Women," *Social Policy*, Summer 1993.
3. J. Lorber, "Night to His Day: The Social Construction of Gender," in M. Adams et al, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, New York: Routledge, 2000.
4. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
5. E. Reichert, "Women's rights are Human Rights: Platform for Action," *International Social Work* 41, 1998.
6. D. Green, *Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America*. London: Cassell, 1995, excerpt.
7. The View from the Janitors at the World Bank
8. Corporate Freedom in Guatemala/ Quality, Industriousness and Reliability
9. N. Saporta et al, "Feminisms in Latin America: From Bogota to San Bernardo," *Signs*, 17(21) 1992.
10. Excerpts from *This Bridge Called My Back*, ed. C. Moraga and G. Anzaldúa, Kitchen Table Press, 1984
11. S. Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" in Adams et al, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, New York: Routledge, 2000
12. M. B. Tonn, "Militant Motherhood: Labor's Mary Harris "Mother" Jones," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 82(1) 1996.
13. D. Schultz, "Our Unsung Civil Right Movement Heroines," *Lilith* 24(3) 1999.
14. C. Lehmann, "Bread and Roses: Women Who Live Poverty," in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, Ed. Gertrude Yeager, Wilmington: SRI Books 1994.
15. E. Cagan, "Women and Grassroots Democracy in El Salvador," in J. Bystydzienski and J. Sekhon, Eds., *Democratization and Women's Grassroots Movements*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
16. Moser, C. "Mobilization is Women's Work," in C. Moser and L. Peake, eds., *Women, Human Settlements, and Housing*. London: Tavistock, 1987.
17. Finn, J. "Crafting the Everyday," Ch. 5 in *Tracing the Veins*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

18. C. Warkentin and E. Daly, "Claiming Agency," Ch. 7 in R. Teske and M. Tetreault, eds., *Feminist Approaches to Social Movements, Community and Power*. U. South Carolina Press, 2000.
19. E. Young and M. Padilla, "Mujeres Unidas en Accion: A Popular Education Process," *Harvard Educational Review* 60(1), 1990.
20. D. Stevens, "Welfare Rights Organizing Saved My Life," in D. Dujon and A. Withorn, eds., *For Crying Out Loud, Women's Poverty in the United States*. Boston: South End Press, 1996.
21. J. Finn et al., "Working for Equality and Economic Liberation: Advocacy and Education for Welfare Reform," *Affilia*, 15(2), 2000.
22. M. Pardo, "Becoming and Activist in Eastside Los Angeles," Ch. 5 in *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities*. Philadelphia: Temple, 1998.
23. J. Finn, "The Women of Villa Paula Jaraquemada," *Community Development Journal*, forthcoming, 2001.
24. E. Whitmore and M. Wilson, "Accompanying the Process: Social Work and International Development Practice," *International Social Work*, 40, 1997.
25. D. Gamble and S. Varma, "International Women Doing Development Work Define Needed Skills for Sustainable Development," *Social Development Issues*, 21(1) 1999.
26. C. Eber, "Seeking Justice, Valuing Community: Two Women's Paths in the Wake of the Zapatista Rebellion. Women in International Development Working papers, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 1998.