

## **TRAIL BLAZING WOMEN: WOMEN WHO CHANGED AMERICA**

**Coordinators:** Sydney Babush, Harvey Schmelter-Davis

This spring, the Center for the Study of Women's History opened at the New York Historical Society. And this fall, we may witness the election of the first woman president in our history. These events have inspired us to ask the following questions. Who were the women who helped shape the political, social and economic landscape in America? Who and what were the key influences on their ideas and work? What obstacles did they have to overcome? In this study group, we link the histories and work of women like the Grimke sisters, Emma Willard, Madame C.J. Walker and others to the issues facing women in American life today. Together we share an understanding of women as equal participants in the growth of our nation.

### **Readings and other Materials/Online Services:**

*Women and the American Experience* by Nancy Woloch, {4th edition, McGraw Hill Inc., New York, ISBN 0-07-293284-8}.

This book can be purchased used on Amazon for \$5.99.

Additional readings will be available through a web site or will be sent by email attachments or links.

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**\* \* \* \* \* Syllabus - A Work in Progress \* \* \* \* \***

**Week 1:** Studying women's' history: a new approach

### **Readings:**

1. Lerner, A New Approach to Women's Studies
2. Other readings to be selected

### **Questions:**

1. What are your favorite periods and/or events in history? Why?
2. What did Lerner mean by the “Woman’s Sphere”? How does this concept affect the study of Women’s History?
3. Taking Lerner's views, how might one approach studying your favorite periods and/or events differently?
4. What are the strengths and/or limitations to this approach?

## **Week 2:** Women as political commentators

### **Readings:**

1. Warren, Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State
2. Child, An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans
3. Woloch, Chapter 4 and pp.159- 186.
4. Roberts, Founding Mothers: Mercy Otis Warren.

### **Questions:**

1. What contributions did each woman make to her time period? How were these contributions received?
2. What were the key influences on each woman?
3. What obstacles did each woman have to overcome in pursuit of their goals?

## **Week 3:** Women as political activists

### **Readings**

1. Woloch, Chapter 7 “The Grimke Sisters Assail Slavery: The 1830's”
2. Lerner, Selected readings
3. Winnemucca, Selected readings from her autobiography, Life Among the Piutes.
4. Grimke sisters, Selected writings/speeches

### **Questions:**

1. How does the life of the Grimke sisters remind you of other people in history who have taken unusual positions that were antithetical to the values of their class?
2. Why do you think the Grimke sisters veered away so much from their traditional family’s outlook on the world.
3. What factors enabled Sarah Wonnemucca to become a leader of the Piutes?

## **Week 4:** Women in education

**Readings:**

1. Woloch, Chapter 6, Promoting Women's Sphere - 1800-1860
- Willard, A Plan For Improving Female Education

**Questions:**

1. How did the "Woman's Sphere" concept affect the lives of men and women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century? How did Emma Willard use the "Woman's Sphere" ideals to gain support for educating women?
2. What were the influences in the United States that enabled increasing numbers of women to become teachers?
3. How did Emma Willard help to develop feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?
4. What education priorities should there be to educate females in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Week 5: The economic woman****Readings:**

1. Woloch, pp. 51-63, 70-71, 386-393.
2. Gates, Mme. C.J. Walker

**Questions:**

1. What are the characteristics of a great entrepreneur? Did Eliza Pinckney and Mme. C.J. Walker fit this profile?
2. In what areas did each woman prosper? How did their times inform their success?
3. What obstacles did each woman have to overcome? To what degree have women today moved beyond these obstacles?

**Week 6: Women in publishing****Readings:**

1. Woloch – Chapter 5, "Sarah Hale and the Ladies Magazine"
2. YouTube Video Interview – Katherine Graham
3. Ephron, Review of "Personal History"

**Questions**

1. How did the Woman's Sphere concept affect the lives of men and women in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What were key influences in the lives of Hale and Graham that affected their development and professional growth?
3. What are some of the Woman's Sphere values Hale promoted that are still influencing women today? How are they being resolved today?

## **Week 7: Women in the arts**

### **Readings:**

1. Woloch – Chapter 3 and pp. 526-528.
2. Phyllis Wheatley - selected poems
3. Sylvia Plath – excerpts from The Bell Jar

### **Questions:**

1. How did each woman's poetry reflect the struggles of the group she is paired with? In which ways were they atypical?
2. Did Wheatley's and Plath's poetry show the influence of the "Woman's Sphere" concept?

## **Week 8: Women in religion**

### **READINGS:**

1. Woloch, Chapter 12, "The Rise of the New Woman, 1860-1920"
2. Lindley, "You have stepped out of your place"

### **QUESTIONS**

1. How did women overcome barriers to becoming religious leaders?
2. Did women add something new to the interpretation and promulgation of various religious beliefs?
3. How did women clergy influence other movements?
4. What kind of personality did these women have in order to work for change in a society that set up barriers to become ordained clergy?

## **Week 9: Women in sports**

### **Readings:**

1. Bell, A History of Women in Sports Prior to Title IX
2. Borish, History of Women in Sports
3. Cardaele, History of Women in Baseball
4. Franz, Timeline: Women in Sports".

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. What roles have sports played in American Society?
2. What obstacles did women athletes face before Title IX? To what extent has Title IX facilitated women's' sports?
3. Has increased participation in sports by women had a "spillover" effect on other areas of society?

## **Week 10: Women in science**

### **Readings:**

1. Richards, Eugenics: Readings from The Science of Controllable Environment: A Plea for Better Living conditions as a First Step Toward Higher Human Efficiency
2. Dickason, Remembering Grace Hopper
3. YouTube – Grace Hopper

**Questions:**

1. Why were Richards and Hopper so successful in a field dominated by men?
2. What are current barriers to women succeeding in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects?

**Week 11:** Women in government

**Readings:**

1. Woloch, 347- 352; 425-438
2. Others to be announced

**QUESTIONS:**

1. How did the women in the Woloch reading become involved in government?
2. Did their routes to government differ from their male colleagues in any significant way?
3. What were each woman's individual contribution to the political process and to American in general?

**Week 12:** Class will meet at the New York Historical Society Center for Study of Women's History at the New York Historical Society.

**Week 13:** Where do we go from here?