

Feminist Perspectives on the Family

Course Description: Recent years have seen a resurgence of claims about the importance of “traditional family values”. In the name of the family, we hear about the natural and God-given institution of heterosexual and cisgender monogamous marriage, about the “leadership” role of men over the family, and about the women’s role in caring for the home and for children. In this context, it is well-worth revisiting the long history of feminist critiques of the family. In this course, we will attempt to provide some answers to the following kinds of questions: When, why, and to what extent did the patriarchal, nuclear family become a dominant form of organizing kinship in Europe and the United States? How has racism changed the nature of familial relationships? Are political values such as justice, equality, and freedom relevant to critiques of the “traditional” family? Does the classical public/private distinction insulate the family from political critiques? What is the relationship between the family and the labor market? Is marriage a fundamentally flawed way of organizing our romantic lives? How should we understand the reactionary conceptions of the family found in the content of “trad-wife” and “manosphere” influencers? Finally, and most broadly, what, if anything, is left for the family when we reject “traditional family values”?

Assignments and Grade Composition:

Participation & Attendance 10%

All students are expected to regularly attend and participate in class. Your participation grade is, in part, determined by *respectfully* navigating any disagreements that arise in class.

Discussion Questions 10%

During the first class, students will sign up to submit discussion questions for three weeks of class. These questions should be well-motivated and refer to specific claims or arguments made in the reading for that class. The questions will be available to all enrolled students one day before class.

Midterm Paper 20%

All enrolled students will write a 4-5 page exegetical paper explaining *one* specific argument, claim, or idea in *one* text.

Paper Presentations 10%

All enrolled students will give a 5-10 minute presentation during the final week of class describing the central claims and arguments that they plan on pursuing in their final papers. Each presentation will be followed by a short question and answer period in which other students will offer suggestions and raise possible concerns about the presenter’s proposed paper.

Final Paper 30%

All enrolled students will write a 9-12 page argumentative paper that defends a specific claim that engages with the text(s) covered in the course. Students are encouraged, but not required, to incorporate material from midterm papers with appropriate revisions. All students must meet with me to discuss topics for their final papers and their strategies for effectively defending their central claim.

Schedule of Readings:

Part I. Family History

Week 1:

G.F.W Hegel: *Philosophy of Right* (“The Family”)

Mary Jo Maynes & Ann Waltner *The Family: A World History* (Chapter 5 “Families in Global Markets (1600-1850); Chapter 6 “Families in Revolutionary Times (1750-1920)”; Chapter 7 “Powers of Life and Death: Families in the Era of State Population Management (1880-Present)”)

Week 2:

Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks: “Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe” (Chapter 3: Women’s Economic Role”)

Daniel Scott Smith: “The Curious of Theorizing about the History of the Western Nuclear Family”

Stephen Ruggles: “The Transformation of the American Family Structure”

Week 3:

Harriet A. Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Preface-Chapter 10)

Harriet A. Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chapters 10-18)

Week 4:

Harriet A. Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (19-31)

Harriet A. Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chapter 32-Appendix)

Part II: Family Problems

Week 5:

Susan Moler Otkin: *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (Chapter 1: “Introduction: Justice and Gender”; Chapter 2: “The Family: Beyond Justice?”)

Mary Wollstonecraft: *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Chapter X “Parental Affection”)

J.S. Mill: *The Subjection of Women* (Chapter 2: “The Laws Governing Marriage”; Chapter 3: “Occupations for Women Outside Marriage”)

Week 6:

Ruth Lister: “Women, Economic Dependency, and Citizenship”

Nancy Fraser: “After the Family Wage: Gender Equity and the Welfare State”

Week 7:

Silvia Federici: *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Part 1 “Theorizing and Politicizing Housework”—“Wages Against Housework”; “Why Sexuality is Work”; “Counterplanning from the Kitchen”)

Silvia Federici: *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Part 1 “Theorizing and Politicizing Housework”— “The Restructuring of Housework and Reproduction in the United States in the 1970’s”; “Putting Feminism Back on Its Feet”)

Week 8:

Judith Butler: “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?”

Lisa Duggan: “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism”

Week 9:

MIDTERM PAPERS DUE

Clare Chambers: *Against Marriage* (“Introduction”; Chapter 1: “Marriage as a Violation of Equality”)

Week 10:

Clare Chambers: *Against Marriage* (Chapter 2: “Marriage as a Violation of Liberty”)

Clare Chambers: *Against Marriage* (Chapter 3: “A Liberal Defence of Marriage?”)

Part III: Reactionary Families

Week 11:

Nellie Bowles: “Jordan Peterson: Custodian of the Patriarchy”

Dan Demetriou: “Virgin vs. Chad: On Enforced Monogamy as a Solution to the Incel Problem”

Week 12:

Caroline Kline: “Behind the Bread: What Trad-Wives are Actually Selling”

Meaghan Furlano: “Tradwives want to ‘make patriarchy great again.’ A sociologist explains what they’re all about”; “Tradwives, its not (leftist) feminism you dislike, it’s capitalism!”

Part IV: Alternate Families and Alternatives to the Family

Week 13:

Sophie Lewis: *Abolish the Family* (Introduction; Chapter 1: “But I Love My Family!”; Chapter 2: “Abolish Which Family?”)

Sophie Lewis: *Abolish the Family* (Chapter 3: “A Potted History of Family Abolition”; Chapter 4: “Comrades Against Kinship”)

Week 14:

William Eskridge: “Beyond Lesbian and Gay ‘Families We Choose’”

bell hooks: *Feminist Theory from Margins to Center*. (Chapter 10: “Revolutionary Parenting”)

Week 15:

PAPER PRESENTATIONS