Sociology 131b

BIOGRAPHY, GENDER & SOCIETY

Brandeis University
Fall 2013
Tuesdays 9 - 12
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Professor Karen V. Hansen
Pearlman 209
Office Hours: Tue. 1-2, 3:30-4:30
and by appointment
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Course Description

“Neither the life of an individual, nor the history of a society, can be understood without understanding both.” C. Wright Mills (The Sociological Imagination, p.3)

This course investigates the relationship between individual lives, historical period, and the sex/gender system. Through an examination of people famous and unknown, political radicals and artists, working-class and middle-class men and women, it poses questions regarding methodology, epistemology, sociological conceptions of gender and sexuality, social structure, and everyday life.

The course uses biographical portraits, case studies, and biographies to examine gender identity and practice across racial-ethnic groups and class lines. It does so through the lenses of sociological theory and history. The readings consistently prompt questions about sources of evidence: whose voice is recorded and preserved? How do we authenticate the claims? And how can twenty-first century scholars can interpret those accounts of the past and a particular self? How does the relationship of an author to his/her subject shape a portrait? As readers, what do we make of that? As biographers, how do we work with the constraints that inevitably exist? The methodological limitations of certain sources and the implications of their use will be part and parcel of our semester’s discussions.

Although social scientists study patterns of behavior, the individual variation that falls within those patterns often challenges generalizations. The quest to observe, understand, and analyze human behavior--its meanings and its unpredictability--prompts scholars to search for multiple methods that capture pieces of the human whole. At one level, the biographical method seems antithetical to sociology. At another, it engages the insight offered by C. Wright Mills that our social world is a product of individual action.

The course is structured as a seminar and incorporates Experiential Learning. It is cross-listed with Women’s and Gender Studies.

This course has a LATTE page: http://www.brandeis.edu/latte/
Course Requirements

The class will be run as a seminar in order to create an environment that is conducive to an in-depth exploration of the historical variation in the lives of North American women and men. It demands a great deal from the student through extensive reading, class participation, and a major research project. The seminar will be successful only if its participants make a serious commitment to it and their fellow students. The commitment involves being prepared for the weekly meeting by reading the required texts prior to class, preparing discussion questions on the readings, insightfully engaging the complexities of individual lives, and exploring how they reflect and reject the sex/gender system and racial-ethnic structures of their time.

The grade for the course will be determined as follows:

1) **Class Participation**  15%
   The grade includes attendance and active engagement that reflects careful reading of the texts. Students will make three presentations over the course of the semester, two in collaboration with other students on the week’s readings, and one on research work-in-progress. Students will be expected to help each other with the challenges of biographical research throughout the semester, including commenting on another student’s draft paper.

2) **Biographical Portrait**  50%
   The major project of the semester is to write a 15-20 page biographical portrait of a man or woman based on original sources. The component steps of the process include submitting:
   - a proposal (due October 8);
   - a human subjects proposal, including a list of interview questions (due October 15);
   - an outline with a bibliography (due October 29);
   - 8-10 page draft (due November 19); and
   - the final paper (due the last day of class, December 3).

3) **Portraits**  20%
   Students will write two brief (2-3 page) portraits, worth 10% each, capturing an aspect of the subject that illuminates something important about him/her. The first will be of a friend or family member. The second will be of the student’s biographical subject.

4) **Take Home Final**  15%
   The final will consist of an essay on the challenges and dilemmas of the biographical method. Due Tuesday, December 10, at noon.

Late assignments will be graded down one-third of a letter grade for each day they are late.
Learning Goals for the Semester:

1. Critically read texts and distinguish between the author’s point of view, the evidence presented, and how those might confirm or disconfirm understandings in the field;
2. Identify and evaluate sources of evidence used by the author;
3. Communicate (orally and through writing) the central argument and point of view of a biographer;
4. Conduct original research (in archives or through interviews) in order to write a biographical portrait; and
5. Triangulate conflicting accounts of an event or a person and develop an independent interpretation.

Accommodations for disabilities:

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay at Undergraduate Academic Affairs (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu) or the appropriate person in the Graduate School office. Letters of accommodations should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

A Note on Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person – be it a world-class philosopher or your lab partner – without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs or ideas found in published volumes, on the internet, or created by another student.

Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section 3 of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

Required Readings

Falk, Candace, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman*
Goldman, Emma, *Living My Life*, v. 1
Lee, Mary Paik, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America.*
Martinez, David, *Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought*
Philipson, Ilene, *Ethel Rosenberg: Beyond the Myths*

**In addition, the articles designated by an asterisk (*) are available on LATTE.**

**Recommended:**
Alpern, Sara, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Ingrid Winther Scobie, eds., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography*
Gluck, Sherna and Daphne Patai, eds. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*
Goldman, Emma, *Living My Life*, v.2
Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara and Jessica Hoffmann Davis, *The Art and Science of Portraiture*
Turabian, Kate, *A Manual for Writers*

**Course Outline**

**Week 1: September 3—INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION OF COURSE**


**Recommended:**

**Week 2: September 10—AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND AUDIENCE**

*Introduction to Biographical Resources, Goldfarb Library—Gina Bastone (10:45-11:50)*


**Recommended:**
Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, v.2

**Week 3: September 17—BRANDEIS THURSDAY—NO CLASS**
Week 4: September 24—POINT OF VIEW: BALANCING FACT AND FICTION

***Portrait #1 due

Guest speaker: Professor Joyce Antler, American Studies Program (11-12)

*Antler, Joyce, “Having It All, Almost: Confronting the Legacy of Lucy Sprague Mitchell,” in *Challenge of Feminist Biography*, pp. 97-115

Week 5: October 1—SEARCHING FOR SOURCES & “TRUTHS”

Tour of Farber University Archives and Special Collections


Recommended:

Week 6: October 8—CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS & ASKING QUESTIONS

***Biography proposals due

*Guberman, Jayne K., ed., *In Our Own Voices*, Part I, pp. 11-31
*Anderson and Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses" (*Women’s Words*, pp.11-26)
*Stacey, Judith, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" (*Women’s Words*, pp.111-120)
*Olson and Shopes, "Crossing Boundaries, Building Bridges: Doing Oral History
among Working-Class Women and Men” (*Women’s Words*, pp.189-204)

**Week 7: October 15—CROSSING BOUNDARIES**

***Human subjects proposals due in class

Martinez, David, *Dakota Philosopher*

Recommended:


**Week 8: October 22—AUTHORSHIP, VOICE, & GENDER**

***Outline and bibliography due

Guest speaker: *Professor Margaret Anderson, Assistant Provost, University of Delaware (9-10:30)*


Lee, Mary Paik, *Quiet Odyssey* Chan, “Afterward,” in *Quiet Odyssey*

Recommended:

*Chan, “Introduction” in *Quiet Odyssey*


**Week 9: October 29—LOCATING GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY**

***Portrait #2 due in class


*Garfinkel, Harold, “Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an Intersexed Person, Part I,” and “Appendix to Chapter 5,” in *Studies in*

Recommended:

Week 10: November 5—INTERPRETING EVIDENCE

Student Presentations on Work-in-Progress


Recommended:

Week 11: November 12—THE UNDOCUMENTED: MYTH-MAKING AND HISTORY

Student Presentations on Work-in-Progress

Philipson, Ilene, Ethel Rosenberg, pp.1-195

Movie: "Seeing Red"
Week 12: November 19—THE UNDOCUMENTED WOMAN (continued)

Student Presentations on Work-in-Progress

***8-10 page drafts of biography due in class (bring 3 copies)

Philipson, *Ethel Rosenberg*, pp. 196-356

Week 13: November 26—WRITING WORKSHOP

Discuss 8-10 page drafts in class – in small writing groups

Read drafts of two other students, and
*“Suggestions for Giving Feedback to Colleagues”

Week 14: December 3—SOCIOLOGY AND THE DILEMMAS OF BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

***Final Biographies due in class


***Take home final due Tuesday, December 10, NOON***