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ABSTRACT

This paper is a report on a course to be offered by the author at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill entitled "Woman's History in the West." The author describes the difficulties she had in procuring information to present to her class. The course is outlined as follows: (1) the problems of studying woman's history; (2) the medieval woman; (3) early modern woman; (4) industrialization and its effects on women; and (5) the woman's liberation movement since 1850. An extensive bibliography is included. (HS)

Barbara Schnorrenberg

Paper for colloquium on "Teaching of Woman's History"

Southern Historical Association Meeting  
Houston, Texas November 1971

The paper of my colleague from Alabama raises a number of very pertinent observations and questions about the place of woman's history and its ultimate objective, as well as reporting some slightly depressing news from Alabama.

I have not been so ambitious as she in surveying the place of woman's history in North Carolina, but from my reading of a couple of newspapers and the usual academic grapevine, I can report that the picture is a trifle better there. Not much, mind you. There is the shining example of Professor Arne Scott at Duke. One of my colleagues at UNC-CH, in American history, will be doing I believe a graduate-undergraduate course next year dealing with twentieth century American womankind. This spring I will be teaching an undergraduate course entitled "Woman's History in the West." I know of no other such courses in North Carolina, but they may exist unpublicized.

My own course is technically one of our undergraduate seminars, which vary from year to year. I have tried to get this course approved as a regular offering, at both the undergraduate and graduate-undergraduate levels, but so far the chairman has turned down my attempts. One reason is the "not a valid course" approach, the other has to do with my position in the department -- another story altogether. At any rate, I am still trying to get the course regularized, and I expect to be teaching it again another year in one guise or another.

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What I will do now is talk about what I hope my course will be and where it might go. Some of this will give specific reference and evidence for Professor Marks's generalizations. I started into woman's history from the position of an English/European historian. My real research love is still the early eighteenth century, its politics and diplomacy. I have a certain general teaching knowledge of western civilization, owing to years in the freshman vineyard. I am not an American historian, and this is perhaps the main reason why my observations may be of some interest. From what I can see, most woman's history has started from a U.S. background. My course is proposed as one in woman's history in the West since the middle ages. We may not get much beyond the mid-nineteenth century, for there are considerations beyond the merely chronological that I think must take first place.

We will start with the problem of historiography -- or how does one find out about the history of a "minority" group. If we are to support our claim that woman's history is a valid subject for investigation, we must use the methodology of the trade. On the other hand, this is certainly a field where one must make use of other disciplines far more than the more traditional history courses. The sources and findings of the sociologist, anthropologist, psychologist are among the most obviously useful. But we shall look for the historical sources as well -- the charters, pamphlets, diaries, letters, autobiographies -- the usual array. If we are lucky, we will find something directly about women: Eileen Power's translation of the late fourteenth century treatise on "domestic economy"; Vives, Fenelon, Hannah More, on the education of women; Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, John Mill on the position of women in

the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But most of the sources are less direct -- references in charters, the inferences and conclusions one draws from the letters or literature. There are a few examples of how this may be done: an article by Betty Bandel in the Journal of the History of Ideas in 1955 ("The English chroniclers' attitude toward women"), one by Sir Frank Stenton in the Transactions of the Royal Historical Society in 1943 ("The place of women in Anglo-Saxon society"), Carroll Camden's The Elizabethan Woman (1952), a few books on women novelists (mostly English), or women in fiction (a recent one for instance on Women in Soviet Fiction 1917-1964 by Xenia Gasiovowska, 1968). Therefore we shall engage in some of the serious and exciting business of the professional historian -- the writing of history from the sources. If we can produce at the end of the course an essay or two on women in western society during even one or two brief periods, I will be satisfied.

Some obvious problems present themselves. They are to some degree the same ones we all face in a 'regular' history course. Most of us have often had to say: don't talk to me about "the people", especially before the latter nineteenth century, they don't count, we know little or nothing about them. Now we are trying to reverse this tack -- if anyone is people, it is women. The source problem rears its head again. Our sources for the most part concern, or are written by, women of the middle and upper classes. How far can we generalize from these sources to describe the position, attitudes to and of women in all classes? Here especially we will need to turn to our friends in other disciplines.

Beyond this exercise in historiography, we shall look at the position of women in western society since the middle ages. What has been its general characteristics? How was the position of women explained and/or justified? What is the relation of women to the social and class structure? What is the relation of the position of women to the various intellectual, political, and economic movements and changes in the West. I have some ideas about some of these questions that I would like to kick around. For instance, it is often said that Protestantism is a step forward in the liberation of women. I wonder about this -- have people maybe confused Protestantism and the Renaissance? Another question that we might raise is one concerning American women: does the frontier experience really have much long term effect? Is the difference of position between the American woman and her European sister not perhaps more one of degree and outward trappings than reality?

One thing this will not be is a biographical course in great women. The colleague who says, "I always mention women in my courses: Queen Elizabeth, Victoria, Florence Nightingale," is obviously not doing woman's history. Pacé, Professor Marks, I don't think women rulers, particularly rulers in their own right belong in a woman's history course, though John Knox and his "Blast of the Trumpet" certainly do.

All this glib talk of sources and airy references to periodical material may lead you to raise the bibliographical question posed by Professor Marks. I don't know where to go either. I have made my own bibliography. For over a year now I have had a steadily mounting stack of 3 by 5 cards, references acquired hither and yon -- books I am reading, culling the standard bibliographies, the usual way most of us start. I have had the services of two graduate assistants, one last spring semester

and one currently working for me, checking these cards in our library and adding to my stack. Our department book order chairman has passed on to me all catalogues he gets that bear on the woman's history area. One of the things I hope will emerge as I get really down to the technical business of organizing the course is at least a selected bibliography. I will be glad to share this with any of you who want it.

This bibliography building supports a problem referred to by Professor Marks -- that of getting information about women in countries other than the United States and Great Britain. There is a little, but so far at least neither I nor my minions have uncovered anything like the same volume of material for the rest of the West. (Naturally outside the West it is even scander. I thought originally of trying to do something more comparative with Asian and/or African areas for my course, but decided that must wait.) Maybe we are looking in the wrong places, but my current assistant, a young woman in French history with an excellent command of the language, has been combing the French bibliographies without too much success. That last statement is not quite accurate, really. There is in fact the splendid French tradition, "les publications de textes ou de documents inédits." Many of the documents have something to say about the position of women -- the kind of source from which our story is written. The difficulty is that they appear in provincial French journals which our library, probably like most in this country, does not have. If any of you have any leads to solving this problem, I will gratefully accept your help. Surely one of the pleasures in pioneering a field is the opportunity to share and cooperate. I hope by the end of the spring semester I will have more to offer here too.

You may have wondered what about texts for this course. I have ordered several paperbacks. One, Evelyne Sullerot, Woman, Society, and Change (McGraw Hill, 1971) is moderately comprehensive, sociological, but historically so, in orientation. The author, by the way, seems to be one of the leading French writers on feminine subjects. I have also ordered W.L. O'Neill, The Woman Movement (Quadrangle, 1969) which has documents from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for Britain and the U.S., and Trevor Lloyd, Suffragettes International (American Heritage, 1971), contents as described in the title and splendid illustrations. Obviously nothing for the earlier part. Another hope I have is that the course will produce a source book from say the middle ages to the mid-nineteenth century. Publishers take note! Surely the present audience will sign up as prospective purchasers.

This paper seems to be founded on hope -- but maybe this is logical, for what else have women often had to go on?

Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg

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## HISTORY 90.6

### Woman's History in the West

The object of the course is to examine the role and position of women in western history since the middle ages. This will involve first a discussion of the problems of research and writing a 'minority' group history. Each student will engage in a project, the specific nature of which will be determined in individual conferences with the instructor. The final grade will be based on this project, reports on it presented in class, and participation in class discussions.

The following paperbacks have been ordered for the course:

Evelyne Sullerot: WOMAN, SOCIETY AND CHANGE

a general sociological account with a good historical base

William L. O'Neill: THE WOMAN MOVEMENT

a book of readings on woman's history in Britain and the U.S. since ca. 1850

Trevor Lloyd: SUFFRAGETTES INTERNATIONAL

the title is self explanatory, the illustrations worth the price

Beyond these books you will be expected to read in various materials applicable to the topics under discussion. To give you a guide to some of these, and a start on material for your project, there is appended a bibliography. The entries are all in the UNC libraries, generally Wilson. The call numbers are included. Books marked with an asterisk are also available in paperback editions. There are also a number of other books on woman's history -- largely U.S., 19th and 20th centuries -- available in paperback.

### Course outline

- I The problems of studying woman's history
  - what are the sources?
  - what are the differences between it and general history?
  - what distortions might this produce?
  - what are the uses and gains?
- II The medieval woman
  - the definition of her role
  - the economics of her role
  - were there rebels? what did they do?
- III Early modern woman
  - the Renaissance -- false dawn of equality
    - why? why doesn't it last?
  - Protestantism -- good or bad for women?
  - the Enlightenment -- equality again?
  - the colonial woman -- is her role different?
- IV Industrialization
  - early effects on women
  - ultimate results, economic and social
- V Woman's Lib -- ups and downs since ca. 1850
  - Votes for Women
  - the push for other civil and political rights
  - where do we stand today?

## A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY ON WOMAN'S HISTORY IN THE UNC LIBRARY

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### Medieval

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### Early Modern

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 Caroline Bird: BORN FEMALE (1968) HQ1420.B5  
 Frederick L. Clark: WOMAN, WORK AND AGE (1962) HD6059.G7C537  
 Roger Fulford: VOTES FOR WOMEN 324.3/F962v

HISTORY 90.6 Class schedule

Outline I 18, 25 January

Begin reading Sullerot, look at O'Neill for kinds of materials.

Look at enough to discuss in light of questions proposed one work from bibliography.

You may want to compare it with a 'straight' treatment of the same material. You may want to look at one of the handbooks on history.

Outline II 1, 8 February

Read something on medieval women to be able to discuss the questions.

Have you thought about St. Paul, nunneries, Courts of Love, Cult of the Virgin in relation to the status of women?

Outline III 15, 22 February

Read something on the list for Early Modern and 18th century. What does it tell you in relation to the questions asked?

Why don't intellectual movements tending toward the change of status (i. e. the Renaissance) have much lasting effect?

Is there value in studying the 'great' women (i. e. Elizabeth I of England, Catherine the Great, Catherine de Medicis, etc.)? What do they tell us about woman's history?

Do you begin to get national differences in the role and importance of women by the latter part of the 18th century? Does the French Revolution do anything for women?

Outline IV 29 February, 7 March

You should be well along in, if not finished with, Sullerot. Read O'Neill, pp. 1-54, 103-115.

Look at a book on 19th century women. How does it compare with the one you looked at for early modern times?

Why is industrialization so important in changing the status of women? Does it change women's attitudes about themselves? Why does it take so long for this impact to be visible and practically felt?

Who are the 'great' women of the 19th century in a 'straight' text? How well do they represent what is happening to women in general?

Outline V 21, 28 March

Finish Sullerot and O'Neill, read Lloyd.

Why weren't the results of the suffrage campaign as decisive in helping the status of women as many hoped? What might have been done to make it more effective? What influence might outside factors have had, i. e. when it happened?

What validity do you see in the arguments of current writers on Women's Lib? i. e. Millet, Firestone, Friedan, Bird, etc.

Do you have any answers? What can we do?

Reports on projects 4, 11, 18 April