This course explores gender and the politics of the family in the United States, considering the intimate, private lives of American women over time and place as well as the public manifestations and ramifications of the same. We will study how ideals of wifehood and motherhood have been constructed, and how who has created and had access to these ideals has changed over time. We will analyze the evolving meanings and value assigned to women’s reproductive labor, particularly the larger forces that influenced and were influenced by women’s various roles and responsibilities within their families. Throughout the semester, we will play close attention to questions of race, ethnicity, class, region, and sexuality. We will also consider how the social history of women’s family lives intersected with politics (domestic and international), law, medicine, social movements, and the economy, among other issues.

Students will be asked to write several short papers over the course of the semester, as well as a longer, historiography based paper as a final project.

Course Schedule:

August 30: Reconsidering Public and Private


September 6: Marriage and Race in Early America


September 13: Reproduction and Race in Early America


September 20: Reproduction and the American Revolution


September 27: Same-Sex Marriage in the New Nation

Reading: Rachel Hope Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America* (Oxford University Press, 2014)

October 14: Marriage in the Borderlands

October 18: Fiction, Marriage, and Race


October 25: Motherhood and the Welfare State


November 1: Motherhood and Modernity


November 8: Reproductive Rights


November 15: Adoption across Borders


November 22: Beyond the Heterosexual Family


November 29: Marriage and Consumer Culture


December 6: Marriage and Power