Summer Session 1981
July/August

Instructor: Janet Patterson

Women's Roles: A Comparative Study

Description

Is inequality between the sexes universal? Or have there been societies in which egalitarian relationships between men and women are the norm? What are the historically specific forms that sexual inequality takes? What are the current explanations for the origin, development and continuation of sexual inequality? Recently, in North America, we have seen a resurgence of ideological arguments that women's role as housewife follows from her role as mother and is both universal and biologically based. How can we assess such arguments? An examination of cross-cultural studies of the position of women now and in the past can provide a way to explore answers to these, and other questions and can inform our work to understand and change the conditions of our daily life in this society.

How have the processes of Western colonialism affected the positions of women in non-Western societies? Ethno-historical research into the social, economic and political roles of women in various societies prior to the emergence of the world capitalist system allows us to investigate the impact of Western colonialism on the lives of women in "traditional" tribal and state societies. Such research also makes clear that egalitarian relations, or alternatively, mutually respectful relations, were a living reality in many societies in pre-colonial times and that this was clearly not the case in Western culture. Such comparisons also allow us to consider the implications of "equality" as a Western value and as an ideal goal.

The class will also examine feminist critiques of traditional Western anthropology and, in the process, some of our cultural assumptions about the "nature" of women and men.

Required Reading - to be purchased

Rayna Reiter (ed.) - "Toward an Anthropology of Women"
Yolanda and Robert Murphy - "Women of the Forest"
Reprint package of information on women and colonialism, and theoretical issues in anthropology that affect analysis of women's roles (available from the instructor).

Course Requirements

In addition to their attendance at lectures and participation in tutorials (25%), students will be asked to write a brief "ground-work" paper (5-6 pages, 15%) in preparation for an essay (10-12 pages, 30%) and a take-home exam (30%).

Pre-requisites - Women's Studies 100-3

Lectures - Tuesdays & Thursdays - 10:30 - 12:20

Tutorials - Tuesdays & Thursdays - 9:30 - 10:20