Prof. Joan Rubin History 200

Rush Rhees 363 Spring 2022

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Little Women*: Touchstones of Race and Gender in America

This discussion-based seminar will focus on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) for the first part of the semester and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868-69) in the second part of the course. Stowe’s book was the best-selling novel of the nineteenth-century and famously earned its author credit for starting the Civil War. Alcott’s semi-autobiographical novel was likewise a great commercial success. Both books were repeatedly adapted for the theatre and the movies, inviting consideration of what those new forms meant to viewers. Together the books have become touchstones or markers for ways that Americans have thought about race and gender for the last one hundred fifty years.  
  
Students will read both texts closely and explore the historical issues they reflected and influenced. They will consider such topics as: the reception of Stowe’s book in relation to abolitionism, colonization, and other depictions of slavery; authorship for women; ideals of domesticity in the North and South; the role of religion in both works; constructs of American girlhood and masculinity; and sentimental culture in Victorian America. Uncle Tom’s Cabin will especially raise questions about how we should handle language and images that modern readers may consider offensive. Students will be encouraged to voice their views on ways to grapple with racism and gender stereotypes in books that have shaped Americans’ current quests for justice and equity.

Texts: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/uncletom/utfihbsa1t.html>

*Little Women* [*https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37106*](https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37106)

This course will meet on zoom for the first weeks of the semester.

With possible exceptions, each week the class will engage in close reading of the texts one day and investigate related primary and secondary sources on the other day.

Requirements:

1. Active participation, including completion of reading assignments and written formulation of questions and comments about the reading prior to each class meeting (60% of final grade)
2. Three 2-3pp papers throughout the semester (5% x 3) (15%): one due by the end of January, one due by the end of February; one due by the end of March. These are text-based analyses that do not require additional research. Instructions to follow.
3. A final, 10-12 pp paper on a visual version of one of the texts. Instructions for this project will be provided later. (25%) This paper will be due on Friday, May 6.

Concerns and Policies:

The instructor invites any student with concerns about the readings or discussions, especially including matters pertaining to portrayals of race and gender, to speak with her privately if they are not comfortable addressing their views in class. She can always be reached by email: [joan.rubin@rochester.edu](mailto:joan.rubin@rochester.edu) and will set up individual zoom appoints or phone calls. Regular office hours will be Thursdays, 2-4 pm on zoom.

The College’s credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIS 200 are expected to devote at least one hour each week to identifying the main lines of argument in course readings, working alone or in groups, and carrying out writing assignments.

The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course resulting from the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the Office of Disability Resources at: disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/. For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association’s ‘Defining Plagiarism,’ <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/plagiarism-curricular-materials-for-history-instructors/defining-plagiarism>.

University of Rochester COVID-19 regulations: The University is committed to protecting the health and safety of the entire community – students, faculty and staff. For this reason, it is mandatory that everyone wear a mask in University buildings and observe appropriate social distancing, including classrooms. Masks have been provided to students, faculty and staff and classrooms have been specifically assigned to allow for social distancing to support these requirements. You must wear a mask appropriately (e.g. over nose and mouth) if you are attending class in person, and you must do this for every class session and for the entire duration of each class session. If you fail to do this, you will be politely reminded of the requirement and then asked to leave if you do not comply.

Students who refuse to adhere to the requirement for mask wearing or social distancing will be in violation of the COVID-19 Community Commitment and will be referred to the Student Conduct system through a COVID-19 Concern Report. Such referrals will lead to student conduct hearings and may result in disciplinary action.

Students who feel unable to wear a mask may contact the Office of Disability Resources to explore options for accommodations. Students requiring accommodations may be asked to participate in the course through synchronous or asynchronous learning as part of this accommodation.

Schedule of Class Meetings and Assignments:

January 13 Introduction: How can we read these books?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dw06K0dG1Zw>

18 Slavery in the antebellum South

<https://vimeo.com/29065029> (David Brion Davis discussing his *Inhuman Bondage*

(2005) at the New York Historical Society)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX2JnY0Fbac> (Stanley Engerman on slavery)

Reading: Stephen Railton, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Slavery,” interpretation section of UVA website

20 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 1-6

Explore illustration section on UVA website

25 Slavery’s witnesses, critics, and defenders

Reading: Weld, *American Slavery As It Is* and William Lloyd Garrison, Philadelphia

Declaration (under American Anti-Slavery Society heading) and Josiah Priest, “Bible

Defence of Slavery” (under Christianity and Slavery/Christianity and UTC)

<https://glc.yale.edu/SlaveryanditsLegacies/episodes/ManishaSinha> on abolitionists

27 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 7-10

Further exploration of illustration section

February 1 Biographical contexts for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

Reading: Joan Hendrick, “Stowe’s Life and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” interpretation section of

UVA website; Archive for Hendrick, especially Stowe’s poem and Stowe’s son’s bio, UVA

Discussion of Stowe, chs. 11-14

3 Evangelical Christianity in 19th century America, I

Daniel Walker Howe*, What Hath God Wrought*, chapter 5 (ebook available through Rush Rhees)

8 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 15-18 (end of volume I)

What have we learned so far?

10 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 19-22

15 Evangelical Christianity in 19th century America, II

Reading: Patricia Hill, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin as a Religious Text,” interpretation section of

UVA website and

materials in “Christianity and UTC,” especially “Evangelical Christianity” and

“Christianity and Slavery,” UVA

17 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 22-25

22 What was sentimental culture?

Reading: Mary Kelley, “’Feeling Right’: Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the Power of

Sympathy,” interpretation section of UVA website; Sentimental Culture archive on UVA

website, especially “Gallery of Images,” and “Parlor Songs”

24 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 26-29

March 1 Afterlives, I

Reading: selected American reviews and African-American responses, UVA

(browse homepage)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/09/the-pervading-influence-of-em-uncle-toms-cabin-em-in-pop-culture/279281/>)

3 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 30-33

SPRING BREAK: FINISH READING STOWE! Chs. 34-45

March 15 Discussion of Stowe, chs. 34-45 and entire book

17 Afterlives, II

Later readers: excerpts from Barbara Hochman, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Reading*

*Revolution* (scans provided)

22 Afterlives, III

Louise Stevenson, “Virtue Displayed: The Tie-Ins of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” and Deane L.

Root, “The Music of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” Interpretation section of UVA website

Explore media section of UVA website

29 Contexts for Louisa May Alcott and *Little Women*

<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2009/novemberdecember/feature/little-woman>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB9KjryUmcM> (Susan Cheever, talk on *Louisa*

*May Alcott: A Personal Biography*

Read in <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38049/38049-h/38049-h.htm>

(Alcott, *Life, Letters, and Journals*)

31 Alcott, chs. I-XI

*Life, Letters, and Journals*

Examine illustrations in our edition

April 5 Alcott, chs. XIII-XXIV

*Life, Letters, and Journals*

Explore Alcott papers on line at Houghton Library, Harvard University

7 Women and authorship

Alcott, chs. XXV--XXXVI

Susan S. Williams, “Authors and Authorship,” in *A History of the Book in America: The*

*Industrial Book, 1840-1880*, ed. Scott Casper *et al*

<https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__ebookcentral.proquest.com_lib_rochester_detail.action-3FdocID-3D879962&d=DwICAg&c=kbmfwr1Yojg42sGEpaQh5ofMHBeTl9EI2eaqQZhHbOU&r=1X339fVhMyEohLrBtyoc9RI-NL9NtAQ8nnZjbKUK1WY&m=8G1d9RI7KyV_mxuV-2nRKS1F-rnfPU6dydCdtl-iPPc&s=FtyW3C7eM9S4AWfcQsB90GoyEQu1aeLfNbbUJHqjc_Q&e=>

Selections from *Life, Letter, and Journals*

12 Girlhood

Alcott, chs. XXXVII-XLVII

Angels and Tomboys: Girlhood in 19th Century American Art

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsii9kOBfL4>

14 Versions of Domesticity

Catherine Beecher and T. S. Arthur, in Home section of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* website UVA

Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18:2,

part I (summer 1966), available through Rush Rhees

Jeanne Boydston, “Cult of Domesticity”

<https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/not-for-ourselves-alone/cult-of-true-womanhood/>

19 Readers over time

Barbara Sicherman, “Reading Little Women,” in Sicherman, *Well-Read Lives*

(available on line through Rush Rhees)

April 21 Afterlives of *Little Women*: editions, films

26 Wrap-up