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EDU 6710 C07: *The Enduring Legacy of the American Revolution – Freedom*

Public Image, Private Reality: Changing Attitudes towards Women in American Culture and Society

April 14, 2009

Final Project

Grade Level:

This project was used with 10th grade U.S. History students but could be easily adapted for use with elementary or junior high students as well. The students I was working with during this unit were in our general level courses, as opposed to the honors level U.S. History course that we offer. I used this project in two separate sections of the course. The first section contained 18 students, 12 boys and 6 girls. The second section contained 22 students, 12 boys and 10 girls.

Milestones:

There were four major milestones in this project. The first one was examining the lives of some of the women we learned about in the seminar who were “heroes of freedom”. Secondly, students were asked to conduct an oral history interview with a female friend or relative. The third milestone was performing research on how attitudes towards women have changed over the course of American History. And finally was using all of the information gathered in the three previous phases to create a PowerPoint presentation of their findings.

Proposal:

My proposal was to develop and implement a unit of study that analyzed the changing attitudes towards women in American history, especially as they were portrayed in various media. I wanted to examine the role of individual heroes who worked to change these prevailing attitudes over the course of our nation’s history. In particular I wanted to begin by focusing on the time period that the seminar covered as a starting point (early to mid 19th Century) and then carry the analysis forward to the present day. This gave my students a frame of reference that they could apply to their own moment in history and also let them see that you don’t have to accept the status quo -- that a few brave heroes assured of the power of their convictions can achieve lasting change.

I began with a review of our nation’s founding ideals, which were established during the Revolutionary War era (i.e. “The Enduring legacy of the American Revolution”). The Founders planted the seeds and spoke and wrote eloquently about their ideals for the perfect nation but it has taken the work of countless individual heroes to advance those ideals and try to make their words ring true.

The activities that I developed for this project were designed to take what the many heroes of freedom have done to advance women’s rights and tie their actions to changes in the lives of my students and their female relatives. The students conducted a small oral history assignment and a media literacy project that examined current attitudes towards women in the

mainstream media. The idea behind the oral history assignment was to have students interview an older, female member of their family to gain information on how being a woman in America has changed over the course of their lifetime. As I always do, I wanted to tie the historical information that we learned to the current day to make it more relevant to the students. Obviously, with the recent political campaigns involving Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin there were plenty of opportunities for lively class discussions on the current position of women in American society and the potential for further change in these areas.

Seminar Impact:

The theme of this year's seminar tied in very well with the unit that I created for last year's seminar. It got me thinking about the gradual march towards fulfilling the promises contained within the lofty ideals expressed by our nation's founders. In particular, as the summer seminar focused on the beginnings of the women's rights movement in this country, I wanted to have my students explore the long struggle for women to attain political and social equality in our nation. Once again, I couldn't deal directly with the American Revolution as I teach the second U.S. History survey. I usually start with the Civil War and end up in 1991 with the end of the Cold War. I wanted to look at the evolving public attitude towards women as expressed in our nation's art, literature, and other media and then examine "heroes of freedom" (as the seminar title describes them) who have worked to change these attitudes and bring them in line with our nation's founding ideals.

One particular part of the seminar that influenced me was John Peterson's presentation, *Out of the Woodpile: Race and Slavery in Antebellum Art and Popular Entertainment*. His lively presentation reminded me how much I enjoyed the courses that I took as an undergraduate to complete my minor in art history. It also reaffirmed my belief in the use of as many visuals as possible in high school history courses. Therefore, I wanted to have my students examine the evolution of the prevailing social attitudes towards women, especially as expressed through the media and in the various arts.

Central Questions:

- What are the central ideals upon which our nation was founded?
- What do the terms liberty, freedom, and equality mean to us today and has this meaning changed since 1776?
- Why were certain categories of people denied access to the rights contained in our founding ideals?
- In what ways has the U.S. government tried to advance these ideals and expand them to include minority groups over the course of the nation's history?
- Which individuals in our nation's history deserve to be considered "heroes of freedom" for their efforts to expand the rights contained in those ideals to women?
- What role has the media played in creating a popular attitude towards women?

Challenge Questions:

- What were the pros and cons of the cult of domesticity to the American family and American society in general as well as to American women as individuals?

- Why does a nation need heroes/what purpose do they serve?
- Does a hero need an identifiable enemy to be juxtaposed against (Can there be heroes without “evil-doers”)?
- What motives might cause those in positions of power to promote certain individuals and acts as heroic while leaving other individuals in relative obscurity?
- How have our ideas of unalienable rights changed since the Declaration of Independence was penned (relate this to current issues, for example, is universal healthcare an unalienable right)?

Lesson Length:

- This unit of study took six class periods (40 minutes each) to complete. Three of these were for research and computer lab usage. In addition, the students had to do significant work outside of class such as conducting their oral interview and creating their PowerPoint projects.

Key Ideas:

- Although a select few are widely known by the American public, there are numerous unsung female heroes in American history.
- The public perception of the proper role of women in society has undergone significant changes during the course of our nation’s history.
- As a nation of immigrants with a relatively short, shared history compared to many nations, what really binds us together as a nation is our dedication to our founding ideals.
- Our interpretation of these ideals, what constitutes them, and *who is entitled to them* have changed over the course of the nation’s history (property ownership requirements for voting, Civil War and amendments, women’s suffrage, civil unions in Vermont, etc.)

Intended Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to:

- Discuss the ideals upon which our nation was founded.
- Explain how the popular idea of what constitutes liberty, freedom, and equality has changed over time and how it has been selectively applied to certain groups of Americans at various points in the history of our nation.
- Identify and discuss the evolving public attitude towards women over the course of our nation’s history.
- Explore the role of music, literature, the arts and the mainstream media in maintaining the status quo towards women during certain periods of American History while acting as agents of change during other periods.
- Identify heroes who fought to change the status quo of women’s rights during their lifetime.

National History Standards:

- **Standard 4:** How democratic values came to be, and how they have been exemplified by people, events, and symbols.

4A The student understands how the United States government was formed and the nation's basic democratic principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Explain the importance of the basic principles of American democracy that unify us as a nation: our individual rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; responsibility for the common good; equality of opportunity and equal protection of the law; freedom of speech and religion; majority rule with protection for minority rights; and limitations on government, with power held by the people and delegated by them to their elected officials who are responsible to those who elected them to office. **[Demonstrate and explain the influence of ideas]**

4B The student understands ordinary people who have exemplified values and principles of American democracy.

Identify *ordinary people* (emphasis added) who have believed in the fundamental democratic values such as justice, truth, equality, the rights of the individual, and responsibility for the common good, and explain their significance. **[Assess the importance of the individual in history]**

4C The student understands historic figures who have exemplified values and principles of American democracy.

Identify *historical individuals* (emphasis added) who believed in the fundamental democratic values such as justice, truth, equality, the rights of the individual, and responsibility for the common good, and explain their significance in their historical context and today. **[Assess the importance of the individual in history]**

4D The student understands events that celebrate and exemplify fundamental values and principles of American democracy.

Describe the history of events, such as the signing of the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence, and the writing of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Emancipation Proclamation. **[Demonstrate and explain the influence of ideas and beliefs]**

Vermont Standards:

- **Historical Connections**

6.4 Students identify major historical eras and analyze periods of transition in various times in their local community, in Vermont, in the United States, and in various locations worldwide to understand the past, the present, and the relationship between the two. This is evident when students:

d. Identify and sequence patterns of change and compare historical data from Vermont, the U.S. and the world by examining:

UNITED STATES

-how democratic values came to be and how people, (e.g., Washington, Lincoln, King) events (e.g., 4th of July, Memorial Day, Labor Day) and symbols (e.g., flags, eagles) have exemplified them.

-regional folklore and cultural contributions that helped form our national heritage.

- **Traditional and Social Histories**

6.5 Students investigate both the traditional and the social histories of the people, places, and cultures under study, including those of indigenous peoples. This is evident when students:

a. Describe and interpret events through the perspectives of people (both famous and common) living in the time and place under study.

b. Demonstrate understanding of the relationships among powerful people, important events, and the lives of common people

- **Being a Historian**

6.6 Students use historical methodology to make interpretations concerning history, change, and continuity. This is evident when students:

f. Identify and analyze recurring themes in the midst of change (e.g., ethnic and national identity); and

g. Explain why we study human actions in the past.

- **Human Rights**

6.12 Students identify and evaluate the concept of human rights in various times in their local community, in Vermont, in the United States, and in various locations world wide. This is evident when students:

aaa. Identify and evaluate how individual and group action promote or deny human rights; and

bb. Compare and contrast various statements about human rights (e.g., U.S. Bill of Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and examine their current impact.

Preparation for Teaching:

- Copies of primary sources for student use
- Various media (music, art, literature, etc.) to establish the evolving public perception of women and African-Americans
- LCD projector to display images for class discussion and analysis
- Computers with internet access for student research

Activities: (see attached student handout)

- Analysis of primary sources to determine America’s founding values and how they have evolved throughout our nation’s history
- Analysis of various media and how they have been used to express the prevailing American attitude of the time towards women during different periods of American History
- Oral history of an older, female family member’s recollections of how being a woman in America has changed over the course of their lifetime (thanks in part to the work of the earlier “heroes of freedom” whom we discussed)
- Media analysis and presentation of current attitudes towards women in today’s mainstream media (PowerPoint)

Assessment:

- Participation in class discussions (evidence of reading required documents)
- Oral history assignment
- Media literacy assignment/PowerPoint assignment

Annotated Resources:

Primary Sources:

The Declaration of Independence
The U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights
Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments
The Emancipation Proclamation
The Gettysburg Address
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

* All of the above documents can be found on Yale's Avalon Project web page at the following address: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm>

Secondary Sources:

Craven, Wayne. *American Art: History and Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

This book is an art history textbook that focuses on American art. It presents a cultural history of the United States by following the evolution of American art. It was a useful resource for me as I searched for images of women in American art. The book is an example of first class scholarship and while it was very useful to me as a resource it would not be appropriate for my students, as it is intended to be utilized as an art history textbook at the college level.

Ginzberg, Lori D. *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

This book tied into the theme of my project very well. I wanted my students to look at the lives of the average American woman which is what Ginzberg did in this work. The significance of Ginzberg's work lies in the fact that she concentrates on events that occurred prior to the 1848 Seneca Falls convention. In doing so she adds to the growing body of work that establishes a timeline of woman's rights prior to the well documented meeting in Seneca Falls. *Untidy Origins* illuminates heretofore unknown events in New York that add more evidence to refute the laymen belief that the woman's rights movement just appeared out of thin air in 1848 at the Seneca Falls convention. While the book succeeds in giving us further insight into the origins of the woman's rights movement and illuminates the lives of average women in New York, Ginzberg uses too much speculation and first person commentary for this to be considered a reliable source of information for serious historians. This book would be too difficult for the students in my U.S. History II classes but it could be used with upper level high school readers.

Ripley, C. Peter and others, eds. *Witness For Freedom: African American Voices on Race, Slavery, and Emancipation*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

This book consists of a collection of documents written by African Americans that illustrate their struggle for freedom and equality. It is an excellent collection of primary documents which could be utilized in a variety of ways in the high school classroom. This book was not particularly useful to me for the simple reason that I chose to focus my project on women's history instead of African-American history.

Ritchie, Donald A. *American History: The Modern Era Since 1865*. New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 2001.

This is the textbook that is used in my 10th grade U.S. History classes. It covers American History from 1865 to 1999. In the context of this project, it was mostly useful for examining how women are presented in American History textbooks. Many students have commented over

the years on the scant coverage given to women in this textbook. While it is a modern textbook that makes an attempt to include women and their contributions in the story of our nation's past it more often than not still adds them as an aside -- often in a box in the margins.

Salerno, Beth A. *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America*. DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005.

This book provided a very concise and illuminating history on the contributions of women to the antislavery movement. This book gave me the inspiration to develop a project that would focus on the contributions experiences of women in American History. Salerno's book is informative and well documented. This book could be used in upper level high school history courses.

Stauffer, John. *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Stauffer examines the development of the radical faction of the abolitionist movement and the calculated manner in which they gradually embraced violence as a means to end slavery in the United States. In one fell swoop Stauffer gives us a collective biography of four significant figures in the radical abolition movement and illuminates the ways in which religion played a vital role in legitimizing the use of violence as a means to an end in the minds of the participants. This book was not particularly useful to me as it was not relevant to the project I developed. This book would be too difficult for the students in my U.S. History II course.

Wineburg, Sam. *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.

This is a very informative book that presents a wealth of information on how we learn about the past. It examines the teaching of history and how we can improve the ways in which we present the past to students. It is a brilliant book which is intellectually stimulating and really makes educators examine the ways in which they are presenting information in their history courses. It is a book that should be read by history teachers at all levels of education.

Accommodations:

- Accommodations were made on an individual basis according to each student's particular needs and learning style and in accordance with any student's IEP, 504, or 157 plan.

U.S. History II
Mr. Bruce
Women's History
Oral History/Media Literacy Assignment

Interview a female family member or friend (the older they are the better it will work for this assignment) or better yet, interview several! During this interview, ask them to describe how things have changed for women in America over the course of their lifetime. Some of the questions you should ask them in particular are how the following aspects of women's lives have changed:

- Acceptable social behavior
- Acceptable dress/clothing styles
- Social interaction with males/dating
- Socially acceptable jobs/professions
- Domestic duties (e.g. cooking, cleaning, etc. at home)
- Political life
- How women are portrayed in the media

You will take the information that you gather from your interview(s) as well as your own observations of the current state of things in America today and use them to create a PowerPoint presentation. Your PowerPoint must satisfy the following criteria:

- Biographical information on two "Heroes of Freedom" (individuals who advanced women's rights/challenged the status quo of their day)
- Information from your interview answering questions on the above aspects*
- Images illustrating how things have changed (e.g. clothing, media treatment)
- Information on two modern women who hold positions in society that would have been closed to women in the past
- Your presentation must have at least 12 slides (a title slide, a slide for each "Hero of Freedom", one slide for each of the bulleted aspects from part 1 above, and a slide for each of the modern women you chose)

* Take notes while you are doing the interview (or record the interview if possible) as you will need to use quotes in your PowerPoint presentation