

FEMINISM AS CULTURAL CRITIQUE

GNDR_ST 231



This class will consider the origins and ongoing force of feminism as a critique of culture and power. From the 1790s until the middle of the twentieth century, Western feminism fought on two fronts, condemning women's legal and political disenfranchisement as well as practices, like the wearing of corsets, that subordinated women at the level of everyday life. GSS 231 will explore feminism in America after the legal and political battle has, to some extent, been won. We'll examine the so-called second wave of feminism, from the mid-1960s to the end of the 1970s. This radical, widespread, and intimately critical phase of the feminist movement attacked inequity that persisted beyond women's nominal political and legal enfranchisement. The second wave locates oppression in personal life—in intercourse, domestic labor, fashion, representation, art, family, and love—to assert that mainstream norms, habits, and assumptions operate just as powerfully as repressive laws. Because much second-wave feminist argument exists in the forms of physical activism, cultural interventions, and artistic production, we will encounter a variety of media: academic prose, but also manifestos, journalism, film, visual art, video art, novels, and performances. At the same time that we track the historical roots and articulations of this feminist movement, an ongoing goal of the class will be to investigate the critical methods pioneered by the second wave. What analytic tools does second-wave feminism use to criticize culture? What conceptual, aesthetic, and concrete resources does second-wave feminism deploy to project equitable, revolutionary, and even utopian reconfigurations of gendered power? We will contemplate the fate of the second wave today, as the #MeToo movement replicates (or fails to replicate) some second-wave arguments and aporias.

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MWF 11-11:50am
Annenberg Hall G21