HISTORY OF WORK & FAMILY ROLES

I. A PORTRAIT OF PRE-INDUSTRIAL AMERICA

WORK/FAMILY HISTORY VARIES BY REGION, RACE/EthNICITY, AND CLASS.

- For African-Americans, we must take into account the legacy of over two-hundred years of slavery.

- For Hispanics, we must understand the ways in which Spanish culture in the Americas differed quite radically from Anglo-American culture in the 18th and 19th centuries.

- For working class white European immigrants, we must understand the effects of poverty that forced children and wives to work outside the home in violation of middle-class "male breadwinner" norms.
A. THE ENGLISH COLONIES

1. SUBSISTENCE ECONOMIES AND WORKING FAMILIES

In 1900 75% of American families were still living and working on the land (according to historian, Elizabeth Pleck).


- From hearth and New England boiled dinners (17th century) to rudimentary woodstove (18th century) to improved and temperature-regulated cook stove (19th century).
- With each improvement, standards for women's work increase making MORE WORK FOR MOTHER
- Many improvements reduce men's and children's work without reducing women's work (coal furnaces, garbage disposals)

2. THE DOMESTIC IDEOLOGY AND CULT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD

A. Letter from Harvard medical students to Harriot Hunt, 1850:

"RESOLVED. THAT WE OBJECT TO HAVING THE COMPANY OF ANY FEMALE FORCED UPON US, WHO IS DISPOSED TO UNSEX HERSELF, AND TO SACRIFICE HER MODESTY BY APPEARING WITH MEN IN THE MEDICAL LECTURE."
B. THE DIARY OF BRIGHAM NIMS, one 19th century New England man (1845) [ONLINE READINGS]

C. SPANISH WOMEN IN NEW MEXICO (1821-46) (LeCompte in Hardcopy Reader)

D. NAVAJO MEN & WOMEN (from sheepherding to clerical and service work)

E. AFRO-AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN (c.f. Portrait of Ella Jane Porter by Regina Prizont)

II. INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPLIT HYPOTHESIS

   A. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A WAGE ECONOMY

   B. "HOUSEWORK" FIRST USED IN 1871

   C. 75% of U.S. FAMILIES STILL LIVING ON LAND in 1900

   D. CHILDREN WORK OUTSIDE HOME AND WIVES IN INFORMAL ECONOMY

III. WW II and "ROSIE"
FILM TO BE SHOWN IN CLASS NEXT TUESDAY
IV. CONCLUSION:

THE HISTORY OF WORK AND FAMILY IN THE U.S. IS REALLY MULTIPLE HISTORIES VARYING BY REGION, GENDER, CLASS, AND RACE/ETHNICITY.

Questions on Lecture 14 : History of Work and Family Roles and "Rosie the Riviter" film (Class 15)

A: Terms

cult of true womanhood or domestic code (1840's)
cult of motherhood (1950's)
Ella Jane Porter
public/private spheres
domestic code
public/private spilt hypothesis
labor force participation rate

B. Review Questions

1. When did the term "housework" come into being in the U.S. Why?

2. Why did the development of household technology make more rather than less work for the individual housewife?

3. What rights did the New Mexican woman of the 1840's have that her Eastern U.S. counterpart was denied? How do you explain the phenomenon of the "independent New Mexican Woman"? What developments took a toll on that independence after 1846? (Based on your reading of her article, how much do you think Janet Lecompte knows about Native Americans?)

4. How did the reduction of sheep herds affect Navajo work and family lives?

5. Describe Brigham Nims' experience as an early 19th century New England man. What does his experience tell you about the ideology of the domestic code and the idea of the "public/private split"?

6. How did the media portrayals of WWII factory life in "Rosie" compare to the actual experiences of factory life described by the five women whose stories are told in the film?
7. How did the experiences of the three black women in "Rosie" differ from those of the two white women? Why?

8. Compare what you learned from "Rosie" to the material on pp. of R&C.

9. What did the women in "Rosie" do after the war?