

Teaching Women's History with Wikipedia

Professor Martha Saxton



In recent years, when I teach US women's history, I have been assigning my students the task of improving and expanding the coverage of women's history in Wikipedia. I surveyed, at Scott Payne's suggestion, some selected topics on American women and found that there was very little content, and some existing material that was inaccurate. Knowing little about the encyclopedia's procedures, I asked Scott to help us, and he introduced us to the editing and diplomacy required to work at Wikipedia. In our first round with Wikipedia, students uploaded rich material on women's activities during the Revolution (they had a reference to Abigail Adams pleading with John to remember the ladies), material on the Gold Rush, certain Native American nations and women's experience as indentured servants. Much of that material has since been removed or deleted. And over time, editing negotiations have proved to be less transparent than they first appeared and considerably more gnarly.

Wikipedia values brevity along with neutrality and verifiability through secondary sources, but allows no primary sources. They also insist on conformity with a consensus view of history, so that even if the "truth" is a minority point of view, they will support the view with the greatest acceptance. Women's experience is often seen as not neutral or as some kind of special pleading that justifies deletion. And brevity can be an easy way to cut material when there may instead be ideological reasons behind the editing. In an instructive exchange, a student added to Wikipedia's article on indentured servitude material on women's experience, including the punishment of extra time for pregnancy. The legal provisions in various colonies often essentially rewarded masters for impregnating their servants. The material was initially deleted, but since my article on Wikipedia went on line, it has been restored "neutrally." The article presents, without comment, the existence of laws giving owners an extra measure of work from women who became pregnant. Students learned more than research skills in their encounters with Wikipedia, including the fact that women's history has a long way to go before becoming part of the editorial consensus on what's important in American history. (The article, which is online, is entitled, "Wikipedia and Women's History: A Classroom Experience.")

Men's Lives in Context

Women's Lives in Context

Gender in its Contexts



We are sad to tell you that after fifty years at Amherst College, Professor **Rose Oliver** is retiring. The first tenured woman on the Amherst faculty as well as one of the department's founding members, Rose's absence will be felt in a variety of ways. Because she has provided the department's coverage of the psychology of gender roles and the psychology of gender development, as well as its inquiry into the relationship between gender and science, WAGS hopes to make a new hire to fill in some of these areas.

Last year **Aneeka Henderson** joined WAGS for the year as a Five College Fellow. Aneeka will defend her thesis this April—and then return to us in the fall as Dr. Henderson having accepted the position of Robert E. Keiter 1957 Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor. She will teach two courses for us in the coming academic year.

Professors **Martha Saxton** and **Amrita Basu** will be on leave in the spring of 2013. Professor **Margaret Hunt** has returned from leave in Sweden and will chair WAGS next academic year. Professor **Michele Barale** will return from leave in Fall 2012. Professor **Rick Griffiths** will continue next year half time as Associate Dean of the Faculty.

Amy A. Ford attended a Speech Level Singing master class with Greg Enriquez in Boston.

Spring 2012

Professor **Amrita Basu** is currently teaching a new seminar — *WAGS 300 Ideas and Methods*. A highlight of the seminar has been several fabulous guest lectures, including one by President **Biddy Martin** on the personal meaning and significance of her scholarship. In the Spring of 2013 the course will be taught by Professor **Margaret Hunt**.

Fall 2012

Professor **Amrita Basu** will offer a new seminar — *WAGS 467/POSC 467 Social Movements, Civil Society and Democracy in India*. The course will entail engaging Amherst students with scholars and activists in India using Internet technology.

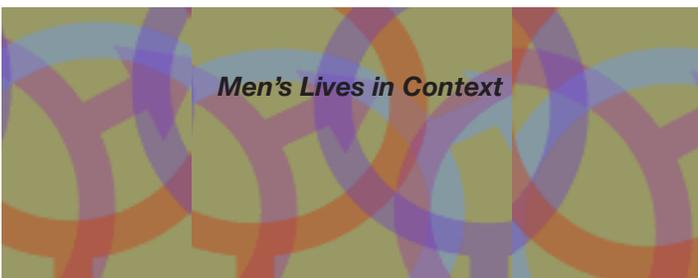
Professor Martha Saxton will offer a new research seminar — *WAGS 354/HIST 454 Antebellum Culture: North and South*. The course will explore family life and law, religion and literature in the pre-Civil War North and South.

Professor **Krupa Shandilya** will offer a new seminar — *WAGS 367 After "Midnight's Children:" Gender, Genre, and the Contemporary South Asian Novel*. The course will explore several topics including the mapping of woman onto nation, the transgendered cyborg body as citizen of the nation and the production of masculinity through state-sponsored violence.

Visiting Assistant Professor **Aneeka Henderson** will offer *WAGS 105 Women, Gender, & Popular Culture*. The course will explore women and gender through the lens of popular culture using music, blogs, television, advertising and fiction as the objects of analysis.

Spring 2013

Professor **Michele Barale** will offer a new LGBT course — *WAGS 312 Queer Geographies*. The course will examine three writers: Jewett, Cather and McCullers, looking for the ways in which gender and sexual categories appear in their work.



FEELING LIKE SUPERWOMAN

KRUPA SHANDILYA



On Saturday, March 17 I ran the Quincy half-marathon. It was on my bucket list of things to do before I die, so I did it. I knew nothing about running a marathon, so I went on the Internet and downloaded a training schedule. (I highly recommend it to anyone who might be interested in doing this.) It was a ten week training schedule, which worked nicely for me because it meant that I could run the marathon on the first Sunday of Spring break and then recover for a week after that. The training process itself was very interesting—I could feel my body transforming itself into another body—muscular, taut and always hungry. In the four weeks preceding the half-marathon I was eating 3 breakfasts, 2 lunches, and 1 dinner every single day. For someone who has spent her entire life dieting it was a wonderful feeling to eat whatever I felt like eating in huge quantities—foods that I had avoided all my life such as potatoes and cheese now became staples. It was a liberating feeling to eat well every day and not to count calories. That alone should be reason enough for every woman out there to try it at least once in her life.

On the day of the run I felt confident that I could make it. Two weeks prior I had run 12 miles, so 13 miles seemed doable. I started out very slowly and the first mile or two were excruciating, but once I hit mile 5, which was up a hill, the endorphins kicked in and I was on a roll. My friend Zeeshan was waiting for me at the 7-mile mark with water and Gatorade.



After taking a 5-minute break I was ready for the second half of the race. The second half of the run was hard—I hadn't accounted for the hilly terrain in my training, but by then I was flooded with endorphins and I was flying up and down the hills. The feeling of doing this was like no other—although I was surrounded by people, in my head I imagined myself completely alone, my body powerfully eating the miles.



At the end of the marathon my forehead was caked with flecks of salt and I was tired. But I had only one thought in my head—I had done this for me and me alone—a wonderfully liberating feeling that left me ecstatic and feeling like superwoman!



DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

NEW COURSES: AFFILIATED FACULTY

Fall 2012

Five College Dance Professor **Constance Valis Hill** will be offering WAGS 228/THDA 228 Feminist Performance. The course will explore performance art and the feminist agenda.

Professor **Lucia Suarez** will be offering WAGS 241/SPAN 240 Fact or Fiction: Representations of Latina and Latin-American Women in Film and Literature. The course will explore fictional representations of Latina and Latin-American women in the context of personal stories of survival.

Professor **Natasha Staller** will be offering a research seminar WAGS 352/ARHA 352/EUST 352 Images of Sickness and Healing. The course will explore sickness and healing by analyzing attitudes towards bodies, sexuality and deviance.

Professor **Amelie Hastie** will be offering a seminar WAGS 483/ ENGL 483/FAMS 426 Feminism and Film: A Study of Practice and Theory. The course will explore the ways in which feminism has shaped both film theory and film practice.

Spring 2013

Professor **Paola Zamperini** will be offering WAGS 326 /ASLC 326 Enlightening Passion: Sexuality and Gender in Tibetan Buddhism. The course will explore the lives of female teachers in Tibetan Buddhism by reconstructing the narratives of these women as they seek realization.



Gender in its Contexts

WAGS CLASS OF 2012

Katherine Berry is a Political Science and WAGS double major and **Ivonne Ortega** is an Environmental Studies and WAGS double major. To satisfy the comprehensive exam they read Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and wrote an essay entitled— "Between Frontiers: Gender, Culture, and Education" and "Feminist Contentions in Nervous Conditions," respectively.

ANDREA PARK CLASS OF 2012

Andrea Park is an Anthropology and WAGS double major writing her senior honors thesis in Women's and Gender Studies. Her thesis advisor is Professor **Krupa Shandilya**. She has been furiously writing, rewriting and editing forgoing spring break in the process. We did catch a glimpse of her in her jeans shorts taking advantage of the unseasonable summer-like weather we had. A breath of fresh air and sunshine can do wonders for the mind, clearing away all the doubts and second-guessing that are often a part of the thesis writing process.



"Yellow MCs: The Invisibility Between Black and White"

My thesis explores Asian American performances of masculinity in hip-hop music as a lens through which to understand the racial construction and socio-political positioning of Asian Americans within the white-dominated power structure of the U.S. Asian Americans occupy a fraught position within the U.S.'s racial hierarchy as the "yellow," "model minority" that lands somewhere between black and white. I make a cross-racial examination of black masculinity to explore this liminal social space. Specifically, I look at how and why Asian Americans perform alternative masculine identities within hip-hop music. Articulations of feelings of marginality are implicit in these anti-model minority performances of masculinity. I chose to look at masculinity not only because it is a relatively new scholarly inquiry within the field of gender studies but also because I believe that men must be included in feminist discussions in order to destabilize the hegemonic expectations of gender performances that are major catalysts of female subordination.



Martina Castro '04 has been unusually busy: "The summer after I graduated I was accepted as an intern at National Public Radio (NPR). I was taken on as a production assistant on contract basis after that summer, and worked with NPR in D.C. on the National Desk (that means with all of the national reporters) producing stories, elections, and breaking news coverage all over the country. After a couple of years working there I decided I needed a change of scenery (D.C. and northern Virginia is where I grew up), so I took a job producing for NPR's midday news magazine at the time, *Day to Day*, in Los Angeles. There I was a producer for the show, and also directed the live program on a fill-in basis. It was an incredibly challenging job; I learned so much! But my boyfriend at the time lived in San Francisco and I wanted to give freelancing and reporting a try, so I quit my job with NPR and went up north to San Francisco (where I currently live) to freelance for local NPR station KALW.

I got along very well with the news director and before long I was hired as a reporter, covering the the impact of the recession on the Bay Area. I then became the arts and culture editor/reporter. A year ago I was promoted to Managing Editor of the newsroom. It's been a very quick ascent. I can hardly believe I got this far, and I'm just now about to turn 30! I have done every kind of job there is to have in radio journalism (intern, reporter, editor, producer, trainer, manager) and now I'm adding entrepreneur and co-founder to the list as I am launching a new Spanish-language public radio podcast in April called *Radio Ambulante*. I've had amazing mentors and have cultivated few, but very strong relationships with people who could see my potential and saw my genuine ambition and interest. It also helps that I absolutely love what I do — I honestly cannot believe that I get paid to sit and talk with interesting people, to tell their stories and put on a radio show everyday."



Jane Shay '98 writes that she is in the middle of a neonatology fellowship at UCLA. She is now married, has one daughter and is expecting another in the fall.

Sarah Kooperkamp '05 was just ordained a deacon in the Episcopal church. In September, if all goes well, she will be ordained a priest. She writes that she often thinks "about how my time as a WAGS major shaped me, and I know for certain it gave me a lens to understand my experience, critical thinking skills, and an insistence on looking at the particulars of situations. I have spent and do spend a lot of time reading feminist and womanist theology. It has helped me to always be aware of my social location. I am about to get a job (I hope) in Brooklyn Heights doing outreach and children's ministry at a church."

GOINGS ON

WAGS Lecture Series Fall 2011

Amrita Basu and I (Krupa Shandilya) decided to host a Lecture Series of South Asian intellectuals working on issues of women and gender in conjunction with our class — *WAGS 207/POSC 207 Home and the World: Women and Gender in South Asia*. The idea was to give our students a sense of how academics in disparate fields approach the question of women and gender through different disciplinary perspectives. Our first speaker, Professor of History at Cornell, Durba Ghosh, spoke to us about her ongoing research on a little known freedom fighter Beena Devi, whose life has been obscured by nationalist narratives. Our second speaker, Professor of English at George Washington, Kavita Daiya, spoke to our class on her work recovering the narratives of women who lost husbands and children during the Partition of India. Our next speaker was renowned novelist Amitav Ghosh, whose novel *River of Smoke* we had the class read. Ghosh spoke to a large audience in the Red Room about how he came to write about the opium trade of the late 19th century and the ways in which the history of Asia (specifically India & China) is more interconnected than we usually imagine it to be. He also addressed our class the following day about issues specifically related to his portrayal of women and gay men in his novel. Our last speaker, Professor of Political Science at Yale, Tariq Thachil, spoke about his research on the Hindu-right in contemporary Indian Politics. Overall the series went off very well and a lot of our students told us they enjoyed the series and that it enriched their classroom experience.

DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

GOINGS ON

Professor **Krupa Shandilya** and Five College Fellow **Aneeka Henderson** will present papers at the American Comparative Literature Association this spring (March 30-April 1). Aneeka's paper is entitled "Feminine Topography: Mapping the Representations of Women in African American Romance Film." Krupa is co-leading a panel — Queer Crossings/Convergences: Gender and Sexuality in Transnational Cinema — where she will present her own paper entitled "Muscular Masculinity: Salman Khan the New Bollywood Action Film."

On April 7 Professor **Margaret Hunt** will be delivering the Marjorie Fortunoff Mayrock Lecture at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY. Entitled "Managing Ethnic and Religious Difference in the Early English East India Company: The Mughal Siege of Bombay (1689-1690)" her talk will consider the multiethnic and multi-confessional alliances the Bombay authorities were forced to make in the face of the military and demographic crises of the 1680s and 1690s, focusing on what "British" soldiers and sailors actually thought about racial and religious difference in this period.

Amy A. Ford directed the 2nd Annual WAGS Inter-term staged reading. She chose Paul Zindel's "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the Moon Marigolds." Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1971 this autobiographical play tells the story of Beatrice and her two daughters Tillie and Ruth. It deals with themes of parental cruelty, the resiliency of youth and the courage to keep your dreams alive. It was performed in the Friedman room on January 19 with the following cast: Beatrice was played by **Crysta Song** '14, Tillie was played by **Yasmina Martin** '14, Ruth was played by **Noel McCann** '14 and Janice Vickery was played by **Fengsheng Zhu** '14 (WAGS major). We had a lot of fun, great snacks and a terrific audience! Join us next January when we'll be performing Turkish playwright Ozen Yula's "For Rent."



WHO, WHERE & WHAT

Social Media

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Blog with us at wagstalk.wordpress.com



Women's and Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural exploration of the creation, meaning, function, and perpetuation of gender in human societies, both past and present. It is also an inquiry specifically into women's material, cultural, and economic productions, their self-descriptions and collective undertakings. We invite you to join us.

Professor **Amrita Basu**, Chair

Amy A. Ford, Academic Coordinator & Editor

Liz Durham, Office Assistant

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