



Introduction to Women's/Gender History

Sandra Prlenda, CEU

28/10/2016



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Origins of women's history

- feminist consciousness, women's movements
- UK: New Social History, Marxist feminism – dual system capitalism-patriarchy, sexual division of labor
- USA: cultural history – women's lives and life cycles, separate sphere/women's culture (Smith-Rosenberg, Cott)



Women's to Gender History

Criticism of women's history approach:

- Tendency to assume a universal women's experience, ignoring differences among women: black women's critique, post-colonial critique
- Cultural / Linguistic turn: sources are representations
- Isolated and marginalized production of history of women



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, *The American Historical Review*, 91/5, December 1986

reprinted in Joan Scott: *Gender and Politics of History*, Columbia UP, revised edition 1999



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Joan Scott, Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis

- Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and
- Gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Gender as constitutive element of social relationships involves:

- Culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations
- Normative concepts that set forth interpretations of these symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphorical possibilities
- Politics, social institutions and organizations
- Subjective identity



- History of masculinities, sexualities
- Post-colonial critique – interrelations of gender, race, class, nation, religion



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Tensions between cultural and social history approaches

- Textuality vs. social and political structures and power relations
- Experience -> identity -> politics vs. floating meanings; agency

- Gender and empire
- Gender and citizenship
- Gender and nation
- Body/sexuality
- Transnational turn



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



How to do and teach women's/gender history

- Finding women in the archives
- Women's history and history of gender in school education



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Recommended readings

- Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 2nd edition, Bloomsbury, 2010
- Sonya O. Rose, *What is Gender History?*, Polity Press, 2010
- Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia UP, 1999 (revised edition)
- Bonnie G. Smith (ed.), *Women's History in Global Perspective*, 2005
- Françoise Thébaud, *Ecrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre*, 2007

Thank you for your attention!
Prlenda_Sandra@phd.ceu.edu



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

