Meet Claire Robertson

Autumn Quarter, 1984, Claire Robertson joined the staff of the Center for Women's Studies with a joint appointment in History. As an internationally recognized expert in the field of African History, Claire brings a cross-cultural perspective to both departments that acts as a corrective to the ethnocentrism that tends to prevail in American universities. Having published on African History for ten years (her latest book, Women and Class in Africa, is in press and will be out in 1985), Claire was the only American invited to a "Women and Development in Africa" conference held in Kenya this past fall. We are pleased to welcome Claire to our staff and would like to take this opportunity to introduce her to Sojourner readers.

Many feminists speak of the "awakening" they experienced when they were first exposed to Women's Studies -- the "click," the shock of recognition that transformed their perspectives of the world. For Claire, this same "awakening" occurred through her experience in African History, which actually predates her involvement with feminism. "I got into women's history after I was in African history. I was a history major all through college before I ever did anything about Africa -- nothing about Africa was offered at my undergraduate school. I got a master's in European History, which continued what I had been doing before, and then at that point had sort of a crisis because I got really bored with it. I was doing intellectual history and I felt like all I was learning about was my own brain, and I was tired of learning about my own brain -- which seemed to have limitations."

After receiving her Master's degree at the University of Chicago, Claire moved to Madison, Wisconsin, and while working at the Historical Society there, "fell in with a whole bunch of Biafran graduate students. That was during the Biafran war. They were incredibly eloquent, telling me about the background to the war and how all this developed. And I thought, 'I never learned any of this. How long have I been in History and I never heard a word of this ever. Nothing about Africa.' Also, my sister had been in Africa for three years -- Ghana and then Ethiopia -- back in the early 60's, and she had written me letters and brought me stuff and it sounded really interesting." She decided to enroll in the Ph.D. program at the University of Wisconsin and changed her major field to African History. "This was in the late 60's and everybody was getting radical. I wasn't yet at that point. I definitely would not even describe myself as a liberal. I went up to Madison and just fell in love with the whole place. It was really exciting. People were challenging everything, and African History really appealed to me from that point of view, too, because it turns everything on its head. Standard European stuff gets turned on its head because you're not justifying the Europeans anymore; you're saying that they really did bad things, right? So, I guess I developed revolutionary tendencies. Going into African studies immediately broke the mold for me, got me out of doing all this junk I'd been doing before and made me conversant with new methods and new ways of looking at things and so on. ... African studies performed the same function for me that Women's Studies does for a lot of people. That was 1969 that I started back to school, and I also got married the same week that I went back to school. So then for a couple of years I did coursework and so on."
and in that period of time I decided to do something on market women in West Africa. These women had always had an important place in the economy. There had been stuff written about them, but not huge amounts and I thought, "this is really fascinating." In 1971, I decided I was going to do my dissertation on market women. I told my adviser, "I want to do my dissertation on African women." And he said, "Do you really think that's sufficient?" That was before Women's Studies. This was really at the beginning and no one had any women's studies programs and I'd never taken a course on women. ... So I went off and did field work in Ghana for about a year and a half and got into it much more. But for me it's been an evolution over time because what that did is it made me a Marxist. I saw the economic situation, and working with those women I realized how important economics was to their lives and I really got into economic history -- which I'd never done before. ... I had to analyze the data from the economic point of view because that was the only way you could make sense out of what was going on there.

"I came back and I wrote it up and finished in 1974." Claire got her first job -- teaching European History -- in 1975 at Bucknell. She later taught at SUNY-Oswego and helped them develop a Women's Studies program. She has also taught at Indiana University and Miami University, and even taught sociology for two years at Ball State.

One of the most important functions of African Studies for Claire, the elimination of cultural myopia, is one that also has implications for Women's Studies. "You've got to get outside your own culture, too. Then you know what's universal and what's not. I'm a little tired of these theories that are all based on Western experience; I make a profession, in fact, out of shooting them down. And models that are based on just what happened in the West. Or the assumption that what happened here is going to happen elsewhere -- which is wholly erroneous -- partly because this country is involved in seeing to it that what happened here will not happen elsewhere." Claire feels that, in general, "Women's Studies is opening up and that makes it much more exciting." "

Aware of the fact that white middle-class feminists have been accused of attempting to define issues for women in other countries, Claire is "hypersensitive to imposing a white middle-class view because that's what I've been conditioned not to do and I'm watching myself all the time. Every African who's ever read my work has said, 'Bravo,' and I'm including African men in that even though I'm writing from a feminist point of view. ... I have in fact participated in writing some strong criticism of people who I thought were imposing a biased view. One of the things that white middle-class feminists have gotten onto about Africa is genital mutilation. I've been one of the instigators of the counter-attack, of saying: a) genital mutilation is a terrible thing and it affects the mortality of women; b) most African women don't have it and it's being overblown in its importance; but c) even more important, economics is where it's at in Africa. Most African women have to worry about eating. That's the number one problem -- feeding themselves and their children and having to raise most of the food. One of the reasons for this big drought and famine is because of what's been happening to African agriculture where women are being systematically underprivileged. The worst place for genital mutilation is the Sudan; it's been illegal since 1956 in the Sudan, but they don't enforce it so it's still done. It's very bad and there are things one can try to do about that, and they are being done among Sudanese and Somali women and Egyptian women themselves. There are militant women who are involved in trying to put it down, but I very much object to the Kate Millett sort of thing -- that we can go over and tell them what to do. Because you can't. That sort of reformism has to come from within. ... We have a lot of money and we can help that way, but it doesn't do any good for us to just go around with this moralistic condemnation."

The importance of economics and agriculture on the lives of African women and men is reflected in Claire's recent article on African women in agriculture which will be in Africa Report, the most widely circulated American newspaper on Africa. The famine, which has actually been going on for three years, "is connected not only to the drought, which is cyclical in Africa (the last big drought was ten years ago), but also to the drop in food production in most countries since 1960. This reduction is due to other factors besides climate, one of which is the fact that African women do upwards of 70% of the agricultural labor. However, there are hardly any inputs into food production. Women's crops tend to be food crops and women are expected to feed their families, whether they buy the food or grow it. In rural areas, men work on cash crops -- which are export crops like cocoa or coffee and are not edible; there's a large immigration of men to towns because men tend to get more education so they can go try and find a wage job and get out of agriculture. Africa has a big problem in that almost all the developmental inputs have been in towns. There has been a lot of unproductive investment because the population growth is such that you're just trying to keep up with providing schools, sewers, etc. as opposed to promoting business or supporting agriculture. ... They've also been suffering from Western and Eastern European and American advisers. This agricultural advising has no anthropological input, and the same sexual
division of labor is assumed to apply in Africa as here, i.e., that men do most of the farming. So there's a joke that goes around development conferences which goes, 'African agriculture extension agents are men who have never farmed, who are teaching men who will never farm, how to farm.' "When I was in Kenya they told me that only now are there two female agricultural extension agents for the first time ever this year. Women really have to talk to women. There's a lot of suspicion involved if a strange man is going around talking to everybody's wives. So you really need women doing this and you need capital inputs into agriculture. Western advisers have done little to facilitate women farmers getting capital, so food production tends to go down. Also, because of the differential migration of men to towns, women have had to take over jobs that men were doing -- like raising cash crops -- and they only have so many hours in the day. I said that African women do 70% of the agricultural labor, but that was based on a 1960 estimate. I'd put it at 80% now. It's going to take a major restructuring to fix this. You've got to be funneling resources to women." According to Claire, this will require not just attitudinal changes among U.S. advisers, but also in the African agricultural ministries, which are usually staffed mainly by men and in which male authority has been unchallenged until recently. "The African feminist movement, I would say, is beginning all over the place. We're helping. That's why people are interested in people like me because Americans -- feminists -- tend to be more radical, but also because someone like me knows enough about Africa to not go around being holier-than-thou. I'm just going to say, 'How can I help you? What do you think? What do you need?' And, at the grass roots level, women know what they need. Even elites in these countries are not paying much attention to the needs of lower-class people -- which is most of the population (98%). The Kenya conference encouraged me because that group of elite women were paying attention to peasant women. There is hope for the future."

In spite of the positive reception of Claire's work in Africa, in this country her credibility occasionally has been challenged because she is not a woman of color. She admits that she does not know how to deal with such hostility or with the out-of-hand dismissal of her research. "I think being in Africa really taught me not to be racist. I thought I wasn't racist when I went and I realized that I was when I got to Ghana -- not in the sort of superficial way but in some ways that any American is brought up to have racist assumptions, stereotypes about different groups. In Ghana, people don't stereotype people by race. It's very cosmopolitan, and they've had contact with so many different cultures over so many years that they judge people for their own worth. They really taught me that, but coming back to this country, I think everyone in some way or another, whether black or white, ... I mean, that's the problem right there -- black or white or oriental or whatever. I think everyone is forced to be racist in some ways because of those definitions of who's what. I'm dismayed by it. ... In general, however, I would say there hasn't been terribly much reaction [to my work] because there hasn't been that much interest in Africa in this country." A renewal in academic interest in Africa seems to be occurring, however, in that last month, Claire's monograph, Sharing the Same Bowl, came in second for the American Historical Association's Joan Kelly Women's History Award.

For her next project, Claire wants to continue to explore the effects of the international expansion of capitalism. This time, however, she wants "to turn what I know on my home" and explore the effect of the internationalization of the American economy since World War II on the elite in a middle-sized town in the United States. She is also considering a study of African education, focusing on women.

In addition to her teaching duties and extensive research interests, Claire is also managing to survive successfully a commuter lifestyle, in which she spends three days a week in Columbus and the remainder of the week in Bloomington, Indiana, with her husband and two children. As a family made up of two academicians, they are used to this kind of separation, although they hope that they will be able to alter the arrangement in the future.

However, this is not the only sacrifice that Claire made in order to teach at Ohio State. It is a little-known fact that Claire has been singing in "very small singing groups to large choirs" since the age of eight, when she sang the lead in "Hansel and Gretel" and that she had to give up her membership in the Bloomington Chamber Singers when she came here. Her other interests include reading humorous mysteries, particularly those which are feminist or in the British country-house genre, and she believes that "Amanda Cross's Death in a Tenured Position should be required reading for every female faculty member."

This quarter Claire is teaching Women's Studies 620, "African Women: Historical and Comparative Perspectives" and History 523, "Women in the Western World: Ancient Civilization to the Industrial Revolution." Next quarter, Claire will be teaching Women's Studies 201, "Introduction to Women's Studies in the Humanities" and History 781, "Women, Class, and Colonialism." Again, we would like to welcome Claire to the Center and also encourage students to take advantage of the opportunity to share Claire's unique perspective.
BIRTH PROJECT at OSU

The Birth Project, a series of needlework hangings designed by feminist artist Judy Chicago, will be on exhibit March 4–31 at the Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art in Columbus, Ohio. The show, to be held in the Hoyt L. Sherman Gallery, will be making its only appearance in Ohio and surrounding states in conjunction with the Downtown YWCA's Artworks 85, a month-long program celebrating women's accomplishments in the arts.

The Birth Project consists of over 100 large needlework hangings that illustrate the mythological, emotional, and physiological experience of birth. Twelve pieces from this monumental undertaking will be exhibited at Ohio State.

A lecture series focusing on various issues in contemporary feminism will be presented in conjunction with the exhibition. An opening reception will be held March 4, following a gallery lecture by needlework historian Ricky Clark. Ms. Clark will speak on the tradition of women expressing social concerns through needlework in a lecture titled "Needling Society."

Admission will be $4 to the general public; groups, students, and senior citizens, $2. Group tours will be available by advance request. For more information, contact: University Gallery of Fine Art, 240 Hopkins Hall, 128 N. Oval Mall, Columbus, Ohio 43210, 614/422-0330.

Rockefeller Grants

The Rockefeller Foundation is pleased to announce the Gender Roles Program, which will support projects that will improve the understanding and recognition of changing roles in the work place and within the family. The Foundation's purpose is to encourage attention to changes in gender roles by supporting projects that address the social, psychological, political, and economic phenomena associated with the rapidly changing status of women. Projects could examine factors underlying such changes, or analyze ways in which policy could respond to these changes.

The competition is open to women and men around the world who have completed their professional training. Awards cannot be made for the completion of degree training, for curricular projects, the writing of fiction or poetry, or for projects offering direct services to individuals. Applicants need not have an academic or institutional affiliation. Most grants will be in the range of $15,000 to $30,000. Deadlines for submission of proposals are March 15, 1985 and September 15, 1985.

For further information write to: Gender Roles Program, The Rockefeller Foundation, 1133 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10036, or see the bulletin board outside the O.S.U. Center for Women's Studies, 207 DuBuis.

TORCH SONG TRILOGY

Torch Song Trilogy, Harvey Fierstein's 1983 Tony Award winning play, will be performed Thursday, January 31, and Friday, February 1, at the Palace Theater, 34 West Broad. A limited number of tickets, which include admission to a pre-performance reception, is available from Stonewall Union for the Friday night performance.

Torch Song Trilogy is about the humorous and touching unfolding of the relationships of Fierstein's gay hero, Arnold Beckoff, and Arnold's quest to find what everyone wants in life -- a decent home, a good job and someone to share it all. The play has garnered several awards, including the 1983 Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Play. Torch Song Trilogy is now in its third year on Broadway.

Tickets to the February 1 performance and Stonewall Union-sponsored reception are available by calling 299-2580. Visa and Mastercard telephone orders are encouraged.

Fernean at OSU

Elizabeth Fernea, author of A Street in Marrakech, Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak (co-edited with Basima Bezirgan), and Guests of the Sheik, will be speaking on February 21 at 4:00 in Stillman 100 on "Middle Eastern Women Portrayed in Western Literature." In addition to her work as an author and Middle Eastern Studies lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin, Fernea is also a film-maker. Her film, Saints and Spirits, which depicts Islamic religion and folkways through the eyes of two Moroccan women, will be shown as part of the sixteenth annual conference of OSU's Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, February 22-23, 1985. Saints and Spirits will be shown at 11:00 on Friday morning, February 22, in the George Rogers Clark Room of the Holiday Inn on the Lane, 328 W. Lane Ave. (across from St. John Arena). For further details and/or registration, contact the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 322 Dulles Hall, 422-0798.

CWS Colloquium

A reminder that the next Women's Studies Colloquium will be held at 4:00 on February 13 in 09 Dulles. Leila Rupp, Associate Professor of History and Women's Studies, and Verta Taylor, Associate Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies, will speak on "Feminism in the Fifties: A New Look at the American Woman's Movement."
SPRING QUARTER COURSE OFFERINGS

WOMEN'S STUDIES 201: Introduction to Women's Studies in the Humanities

This course will be an inquiry into the cultural, historical, and economic forms that shape the lives of women. This information will be used to emphasize the relationship between institutionalized perspectives and everyday experience and to develop strategies for change.

Kelly McCormick  M-F  12:00
Glynis Carr  M-F  12:00
Willa Young  M-F  2:00
Vivian Schaefer  M-F  3:00
Claire Robertston  TR  1:00-3:00
Susan Dyer  M-W  2:00-4:00  *5 credit hours U
(Not open to students with credit for Women's Studies 202)

WOMEN'S STUDIES 202: Introduction to Women's Studies in the Social and Behavioral Sciences

This interdisciplinary course will introduce students to the history and content of contemporary feminism and will investigate feminist theories which provide alternative perspectives from which to re-examine the basic concepts, issues, methods, and ways of thinking proposed by the traditional social sciences.

Phyllis Gorman  M-F  12:00
Tania Ramalho  TR  7:00-9:00 pm  *5 credit hours U
(Not open to students with credit for Women's Studies 201)

WOMEN'S STUDIES 215: Women Writers: Text and Context

This course will be an interdisciplinary inquiry into the nature of female literary tradition and its complex relationships to cultural ideology regarding the status of women, past and present.

Lynn Fauss  215N  M-W  7:00-9:00 pm  *5 credit hours U
Judy Johnson  Newark Campus  M-F  9:00  *5 credit hours U
(Not open to students with credit for Comparative Studies 215.01 or 215.02)
Prerequisites: English 110 or equivalent

WOMEN'S STUDIES 300: Issues in Women's Health

This course will be an interdisciplinary inquiry into the issues affecting women's health and the politics of gender in the medical health care professions.

Chris Smithies  W  6:00-9:00 pm  5 credit hours U

WOMEN'S STUDIES 599: Senior Seminar

This course will explore the major concepts of modern feminism through analyses of both fiction and non-fiction.

Kris Dugas  TR  2:00-4:00  5 credit hours UG
Prerequisites: Women's Studies 201 or 202 or permission of instructor

WOMEN'S STUDIES 620: Freud, Women, and Feminism

This course will be an analysis of the encounter between Freud, women, and feminism in three contexts: 1) Freud's writing on women and sexual difference (Dora, "On Femininity," Studies in Hysteria, etc.; 2) early attempts to define a "female psychology" on the basis of Freud's work (Karen Horney and Melanie Klein); and 3) the feminist critique of Freud (Millett, Freidan, Chodorow) and the possibility of a feminist psychoanalysis (Mitchell, Gallop, Irigaray, the "French Feminists").

Judith Mayne  TR  10:00-12:00  5 credit hours UG
WOMEN'S STUDIES 693: Individual Studies

Students may register for individual directed study in subjects not covered in their regular course work. For more information, please contact the Center for Women's Studies or Professors Marlene Longenecker, Kris Dugas, Judith Mayne, Claire Robertson, Leila Rupp, or Verta Taylor.

Times to be arranged 1-5 credit hours UG

WOMEN'S STUDIES 7783: Honors Essay

This course is an individual study for undergraduate honors students; may include individual conferences and reports; requires presentation and oral defense of an honors thesis.

Times to be arranged 3-5 credit hours U

ANTHROPOLOGY 810B or HOME MANAGEMENT AND HOUSING 895: Women in Development

This interdisciplinary seminar will examine the role of women in developing nations and women's potential impact on economic development.

Erika Bourguignon W 1:00-3:00 3 credit hours
Francille Firebaugh

BLACK STUDIES 865: Black Role Models: Racism and Sexism

This course will examine the effects of racism and sexism on various role models prevalent in the black community emphasizing consequences and alternatives from an Afrocentric perspective.

Linda James Myers TR 2:00-4:00 5 credit hours
Prerequisites: 15 hours in social and behavioral sciences or permission of instructor

COMPARATIVE STUDIES 694 or JAPANESE 694: Women, Society, and Literature in East Asia

This course will examine how the reality of women's lives in East Asia is perceived and reflected in literary works by women by focusing largely on the female writer, both past and present, from China, Japan, and Korea. The seminar will explore the inter-relationship between women and the social forces which help shape the concept of women, the institution of marriage, human relationships within the family and outside, and women's images of themselves. The course will also closely consider the functions of love, jealousy, hatred, fantasy, dreams, sublimation, leisure, rumor, and gossip as recurring literary motifs.

Yung-hee Kwon TR 1:00-3:00 5 credit hours
(All texts in English)

ENGLISH 592: Women in Literature: Plot and Design

This course will involve a close reading of seven or eight twentieth century novels by women with a view toward determining whether there are typical patterns of plot among women writers which are qualitatively different from those characteristic of representative male writers of the same period. Writers to be studied in detail include Woolf, Chopin, Wharton, Laurence, Lessing, Olsen, Morrison, Walker.

Mildred Munday M-F 12:00 5 credit hours
Prerequisites: 10 hours of literature of permission of instructor
ENGLISH 871: The Female Protagonist in Fiction: Toward of Theory of Female Heroism

This is the second half of a two-quarter seminar on the changing conceptions of the female hero in fiction. It is not necessary to have had the first quarter to enroll for the second, but those who did will have first priority for Spring enrollment. For a complete description of the course, please contact the instructor or see the description posted in Denney Hall (4th floor). New students will be welcome if there is room in the class.

Marlene Longenecker  TR  1:00-3:00  5 credit hours  G
Prerequisites: Graduate standing in English or permission of instructor

HISTORY 237: History of Women in the United States

This course will examine American women and the economics, social, and political factors responsible for women's status in society from the colonial period to the present.

Warren Van Tine  M-F  12:00  5 credit hours

HISTORY 781: Women, Class, and Colonialism: Comparative Perspectives

This class will consider the impact of colonialism on women worldwide and its implications for class formation. Included will be Latin American, African, European, Asian, and American perspectives. We will deal with women both as colonialists and as the colonized.

Clare Robertson  R  4:30-6:30  5 credit hours

LINGUISTICS 230: Languages and the Sexes

This course will examine types of sex differentiation in different languages and their social and symbolic consequences.

Catherine Callaghan  M-F  10:00  5 credit hours
Prerequisites: English 110 or equivalent

PSYCHOLOGY 543: Psychology of Women

This course will be an exploration of the nature and causes of sex differences in behavior patterns and factors influencing the development of women through psychological theory and research.

Nancy Betz  MW  3:00-5:00  4 credit hour
Prerequisites: 12 hours in Psychology

SOCIOLOGY 435N: Sociology of Women

This course will examine sociological aspects of sex differentiation and sex-role behavior, including studies of sexual stratification and division of labor, sex-role socialization, and sex-role performance.

Instructor to be announced  TR  7:00-9:00 pm  5 credit hours

* Indicates BER credit

RECOMMENDED COURSE:

ENGINEERING 195: Women in Engineering

The main goal of this course is to give students an appreciation of the contribution women are making to the field of engineering and to help them develop a sense of identification with engineering as a career.

Marianne Mueller  T  4:00  1 credit hour
Faculty and Teaching Staff

Marlene Loven, Associate Professor, Women's Studies/English, Director, Center for Women's Studies
Marlene Bauer, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Women's Studies
Sue Blayman, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Women's Studies
Coordinator, Office of Women's Services
Joanne Blue, Instructor, Women's Studies/English
Glynnis Czar, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies/English
Kris Duncan, Assistant Professor, Women's Studies/English
Susan Dyer, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies/Social Work
Nancy Eren, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies
Phyllis Goran, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies
Sociology
Judith Johnson, Instructor, Women's Studies/English
(Tamis Campus)
Theresa Wayne, Associate Professor, Women's Studies/Religious Languages and Literatures
Kelly McCormick, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies
Sociology
Tania Ramilo, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies/History
Laia Rupp, Associate Professor, Women's Studies/History
Victor Schenker, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies/Photography and Cinema
Donna Stark, Graduate Teaching Associate, Women's Studies/Education, Human Services
Verta Taylor, Associate Professor, Women's Studies/Sociology
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