APPROACHES TO HISTORY 5:

GENDER AND HISTORY

This Approach enables students to look both at the historiography of gender history and at the contribution it has made to other historical agendas. The contributions of women’s history are evaluated alongside the more recent stress on gender as a category of historical analysis, which has demonstrated the degree to which masculinity is a contested social category. The paper allows students to look at the means by which gender hierarchies are maintained and contested. The methodological problems of recovering the histories of women and men are addressed; key concepts like patriarchy are interrogated; some of the most influential models of change (such as ‘the separation of spheres’) are evaluated; and the contribution of other disciplines assessed.

Gender and work
This topic looks at the ways in which men and women’s work has been differentiated, at the relationship between the social and sexual division of labour, and at the determinants of change in male and female roles in the household and workplace.

Gender and political change
This topic examines the contribution of gendered approaches to the stuff of conventional history, such as war, colonialism, and nationalism. In what ways are the languages of colonialism, nationalism, and citizenship gendered? How far does war reinforce or undermine gender stereotypes? By what means have women been excluded from formal political structures, and what varieties of informal power have they exercised?

Gender, religion, and culture
This topic explores the ways in which religious, legal, medical, and scientific discourses have contributed to the construction and subversion of gender roles. The variety of forms of religious expression available to men and women is discussed. The complex relationships between intellectual and religious change and the positions of women and men are assessed.

Family and sexuality
This topic encourages students to look at varying household and family
structures, at the determinants of male and female roles within the family, at how and why they vary between cultures, and at how they change. Another rich area of investigation is provided by the history of sexuality, looking at the ways in which the sexual identities (including homosexuality) of men and women are culturally variable. Particular attention is paid to the interdisciplinary insights provided by anthropology, demography, and literary theory.