HIST 349-401 History of Sexuality in the United States

Course information:
Fall 2007
Tues/Thurs. 1:30-3:00
Room: Arch/Crest

Contact information:
Professor Kathy Peiss, peiss@sas.upenn.edu
Office: 315C College Hall; phone 215-898-2746
Office hours: Wed. 2-3; Thurs. 3-4 and by appt.
TA/grader: Julia Gunn, juliaeg@sas.upenn.edu

Introduction:

“Sex, which ought to be an incident of life, is the obsession of the well fed world.”
–writer Rebecca West, 1912

“I know it when I see it.”—Justice Potter Stewart, in a 1964 Supreme Court ruling on obscenity

"It is as if this most vital of human concerns is filled with too many dangers to allow it to be studied seriously." – gay rights activist David B. Goodstein, ca 1985

Dissected, categorized, evaluated, organized, feared, and enjoyed: Sexuality in the American past, including our obsession with it, is the primary concern of this course. Why has sexuality become so central to identities, culture, politics, and now, our history? This course explores a complex and often hidden history, from early America to the present. Many of the topics are relevant to contemporary public debates, including controversies over censorship, sexual violence, gay and lesbian sexualities, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases. At the same time, the course explores what sexuality has meant to ordinary Americans in the past; to do so, we will use a wide range of primary sources, such as private letters, law cases, photographs, films, and music. The course considers the following questions across the span of American history:

(1) What were the official or governing discourses of sexuality—in religion, the law, government, psychiatry, and sexology? What were the relationship of these ideas to sexual regulation and politics?

(2) What were popular beliefs and practices toward sexuality? How did they change over time? How can historians understand the response of ‘ordinary’ people to the governing discourses on sexuality? What is the relationship between sexuality and other forms of social difference, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity?

(3) What causes dramatic transformations in sexual attitudes and behavior? What are the causes and consequences of sexual revolutions, and how many sexual revolutions have there been in U.S. history?

(4) What is the relationship between past and present?
**Required Readings:**
The following books are available at the Penn Book Center and are on reserve in Rosengarten:

1. Kathy Peiss, ed., *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality* [note: copies on reserve; check ABEbooks or other on-line sellers for used copies]

Articles marked “CR/BB” in the syllabus are available in a bulk pack from Campus Copy Center, 3907 Walnut Street, and are on the Blackboard course website [courseweb.upenn.edu] under “Course Documents.”

“BB only”: articles from JSTOR or other databases available at Penn. Articles will be posted under “Course Documents.” They are not included in the bulkpack.

“BB links” indicates articles on external websites. Where possible, their URLs are provided; they are also available on the Blackboard website at “External Links.”

**Course Requirements:**
1. *Attendance, preparation and participation*: Attendance is expected. The course will mix lectures and discussions, and will be more successful if everyone completes the day’s reading before class. Thoughtful participation in discussions may be taken into consideration when determining final grades, especially in cases that are borderline between two grades. Students who miss more than a few classes should expect to have their final grades reduced.

2. *Two essays.* #1: analysis and comparison of assigned primary sources on early America. #2: analysis and synthesis of course materials on 19th c. and early 20th c. sexuality. Length: approximately 5 pages. Assignment sheets will be distributed and posted on the website. Due dates: 9/27, 10/23 (each 20% of final grade).

3. *Primary documents paper* (approximately 7-8 pages). This paper requires you to find a significant primary document on a theme or issue in the history of American sexuality (to 1970) and write an analysis of the document that places it in historical context. Instructions will be distributed and posted on the website. Due: 11/15 (35% of final grade).


**The fine print:**
*Communication:* I hold office hours because I’d rather speak to you in person; if you have a schedule conflict, we can make an appointment at another time. Please write email using accurate and appropriate language, as if you were working in a business rather than IMing your friends. I will respond to email but not always immediately; if your question requires a lengthy reply or a conversation, I will ask you to see me during office hours.

*Written work:* All written work should be double-spaced, with 1" margins and fonts set at 10-12 points. No faxed papers or e-mail attachments will be accepted. Late papers may be marked down.
Evaluations: In evaluating your work, Ms. Gunn and I will look for: how well you have understood the material and formulated a thoughtful, engaging, and persuasive response; how well you back up your statements with evidence and offer an argument, not simply an opinion; how coherent, clear, and well organized your paper is; how you use language, with a preference for writing that is vivid, precise, and grammatically correct.

Students are required to complete all assignments to pass the course. Improvement over time will be taken into consideration in determining course grades.

Classroom environment: I encourage the free expression of thought and diversity of opinion in all my courses. Censorship, including self-censorship, defeats the purposes of higher education. But I also believe that free expression is most free when it is accompanied by civility, respect, and tolerance. This may be even more true in this course, in which we are studying sexuality as an academic subject that is, simultaneously, a deeply personal one. My aim is not to impose a point of view on you, but to encourage you to think about your own views, to subject them to the test of evidence and argument, and to revise and refine them when appropriate. Be open to the perspectives of others, engage their arguments thoughtfully, and answer them by acknowledging their viewpoints.

Please note that some of the course materials use sexually explicit language and images, in the conventional sense of that phrase.

Academic honesty: Plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitating the academic dishonesty of others are grounds for failure in this course. Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as your own work. You may not copy another writer's exact words without using quotation marks around them and citing their source. Nor may you use the ideas or information of another without citing their source in a reference (a footnote or endnote). You may not submit the already written papers of another or the research of another. Although you are encouraged to discuss the readings and your ideas with your classmates, you must develop, outline, and write your papers alone. Please ask if you are unsure about how to cite sources.

Course Outline

9/6 Introduction

9/11 Sexuality in history
Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality, 1-24
Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 3-13 [BB/CR]
Madison Hemings’s Memoir,” in J. Lewis and P. Onuf, eds., Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson [BB/CR]
Joseph J. Ellis, Appendix, American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson [BB/CR]

9/13 Sexual cultures and encounters in the New World
Major Problems, 26-68
Recommended: Richard C. Trexler, “Making the American Berdache: Choice or Constraint?” Journal of Social History 35 (Spring 2002): 613-36 [BB only]

9/18 Regulating sexuality in colonial America
Major Problems, 70-105
9/20  **The first sexual revolution?**
*Major Problems*, 109-112, 120-131
Sharon Block, “Bringing Rapes to Court,” *Common-Place* 3:3 (April 2003)  
[http://common-place.org/vol-03/no-03/block/](http://common-place.org/vol-03/no-03/block/) [BB links]

9/25  **What was Victorian about Victorians?**
Review: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* [BB/CR]

9/27  **Utopian alternatives**

**first paper due**

10/2  **Sexuality, slavery, and violence**
*Major Problems*, 142-147, 152-186
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Incidents* also available on line at:  
If you read the online version, be sure to read introduction by Jean Yellin in the Harvard University Press edition (on reserve).

10/4  Discussion: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

10/9  **Sexual speech and censorship**
*Major Problems*, 238-271
Andrea Tone, *Desires & Devices*, chapters 1, 2

10/11  **Sexual science and technology**
*Major Problems*, 197-201
Sigmund Freud, “The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis,” 4th Lecture, 1910,  
[http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Origin/origin4.htm](http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Origin/origin4.htm) ; also read Raymond Fancher’s introduction to the lecture,  
[http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Origin/intro.htm](http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Origin/intro.htm) [BB links]

10/16 Fall break—no class

10/18 **Sex and the city: prostitution and women’s sexuality**
*Major Problems*, 273-307
Film excerpts: “Traffic in Souls” and 1897-1905 short films from the Library of Congress

10/23 **Homosexual identities and heterosexual norms**
*Major Problems*, 337-356
George Chauncey, *Gay New York*, introduction. **In time for the discussion on 10/31, you should complete: introduction; chapters 1-5; one or more of chapters 6-9; chapters 10-12 and epilogue.

**2nd paper due**

10/25 **Sex in an emergent popular culture**
Continue reading Chauncey, *Gay New York*
Screen and discuss excerpts from “It” (facilitated by Julia Gunn)

10/31 **Gay culture and politics in the early 20th century**
Class discussion: Chauncey, *Gay New York*

11/1 **Sexuality and reproductive freedom**
*Major Problems*, 308-336
Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires*, read chapters 3-7 by next class (ch. 8 optional)

11/6 **Science, the state and sexuality**
*Major Problems*, 445-451, 460-471
Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires*, complete chapters 3-7

11/8 **Open secrets in Cold War America**
*Major Problems*, 367-402

11/13 **Sexual revolutions**
*Major Problems*, 405-414, 423-431
Tone, *Devices and Desires*, chapters 9-10
Janice Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, introduction, ch 1 [read over the next few weeks, be ready to discuss on 11/27; chapters 5 and 9 optional]

11/15 **Feminist and gay liberation movements**
*Major Problems*, 414-422, 431-443
Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, continue

**Primary document paper due**

11/20 **Transsexual and transgender movements**
Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, continue
In class screening: “Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton Cafeteria”

11/22 Thanksgiving Day: no class

11/27 **Sexuality and the politics of ‘culture wars’**
Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, finish

11/29 **The AIDS crisis in American culture**
*Major Problems*, 451-460, 471-483
AIDS Memorial Quilt Website, [www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org) [BB links]

12/4 **Sexual identities, families, and communities, post-1980**
*Major Problems*, 484-515

12/6 **Archiving the present. Wrap-up and final discussion. *Take home essay exam distributed today; due by noon 12/11***