PROVISONAL
NOTE TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS: This is last fall’s syllabus. Readings, lectures, and assignments are subject to change.

HIST 349-401 History of Sexuality in the United States

Course information:
Fall 2006
Tues/Thurs. 10:30-12
Classroom: Graduate School of Education Building, Room 203 [37th and Walnut]

Contact information:
Professor Kathy Peiss, peiss@sas.upenn.edu
Office: 315C College Hall, 898-2746
Office hours: Tues/Thurs. 2-3:30 and by appt

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? Many of the topics we will discuss continue to have relevance today, from reproductive rights to gay marriage and the fight against AIDS.

Required Readings:
The following books are available at the Penn Book Center and are on reserve in Rosengarten:
Allan Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880*
Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the U.S.*
Kathy Peiss, ed., *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality* [note: multiple copies are also on reserve; check ABBooks 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: LINKS” indicates articles on external websites. Where possible, their URLs are provided; they are also available on the Blackboard website at “External Links.” Please note that they are not included in the bulkpack.

Course Requirements:
1. *Attendance, preparation and participation:* Attendance is required. The course will mix lectures and discussions, and will be more successful if everyone completes the day’s reading before class. Attendance and thoughtful participation in discussions will be taken into consideration when determining final grades.

2. *Two interpretive essays.* Maximum length: 5 pages. These will be based on the readings and are intended to help you analyze and synthesize course material. Assignment sheets will be distributed and posted on the website. Due dates: October 3rd; October 26th (each 20% of final grade).

3. *Primary Documents Project* (~7-8 pages, plus up to 6 pages of documents). This paper requires you to find 2-3 significant primary documents on a theme or issue in the history of American sexuality. You will write an introduction to these documents, analyzing and comparing them and placing them in historical context. Detailed instructions will be distributed in class and posted on the website.

Please submit a short paragraph via email with your topic and names of documents by November 7th. The paper is due November 28th (40% of final grade).

4. *Take-home final,* based on broad historical issues and concepts addressed in this course. Due: December 12th. (20% of final grade).

Other Matters:
*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 in 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. Panken 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**

9/7 **Introduction**

9/12 **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]

9/14 **Sexual cultures and encounters in the New World**
Regulating sexuality in colonial America

Major Problems, 70-105


The new nation: political transformation and the sexual domain

Major Problems, 107-141

Sharon Block, “Bringing Rapes to Court,” Common-Place 3:3 (April 2003) [BB: LINKS]

Recommended: Patricia Cline Cohen, “Unregulated Youth: Masculinity and Murder in the 1830s City,’ Radical History Review 52 (1992): 33-52 [BB]

Sexuality and slave societies

Major Problems, 142-147, 152-186


Monogamous heterosexual marriage and its alternatives

Major Problems, 229-237


The Victorian world of intimacy

Major Problems, 187-228

Susan Lee Johnson, “Bulls, Bears and Dancing Boys: Race, Gender, and Leisure in the California Gold Rush,” Radical History Review 60 (Fall 1994): 4-37. [CR/BB]

**First paper due**

Sexual speech, censorship, and camouflage

Major Problems, 238-271

10/10  **Sex and the city: prostitution and working-class sexuality**
*Major Problems*, 273-307
Allan Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, intro and chapter 1
Begin reading Chauncey, *Gay New York*. **In time for the discussion on 10/19, you should complete: introduction; chapters 1-5; one or more of chapters 6-9; chapters 10-12 and epilogue.**

10/12  **Gender, race/ethnicity, and the making of homosexual identities**
Chauncey, *Gay New York*—continue
In class: film clips from “A Florida Enchantment” (1914)

10/17  **The making of heterosexual norms: psychoanalysis and popular culture**
*Major Problems*, 337-356
Film clips: “Our Dancing Daughters,” “The Shiek”; audio clips of 1920s women’s blues

10/19  **The politics of homosexuality in the early twentieth century**
Class discussion: Chauncey, *Gay New York*

10/24  no class/fall break

10/26  **Sexuality and reproductive freedom**
*Major Problems*, 308-336

**Second paper due**

10/31  **Wars and sexually transmitted disease**
Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, chapters 2-3

11/2  **Science, the state and sexuality**
Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, chapters 4-5
*Major Problems*, 445-451, 460-471
Joanne Meyerowtiz, *How Sex Changed*, intro, ch. 1 [begin reading, have completed by 11/21 for discussion]

11/7  **Sexual cultures in the 1940s and 1950s**
*Major Problems*, 367-402
Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, chapters 2-3
**email topic and identify documents for documents project**

11/9  **Sexual revolutions**  
*Major Problems*, 405-412, 423-431  
Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, chapters 4-5

11/14  **Second wave feminism and sexuality**  
*Major Problems*, 414-419  
Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, chapter 6  

11/16  **Gay liberation**  
*Major Problems*, 419-422, 431-443  

11/21  **The history of transsexuality**  
Class discussion: Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, finish book

11/23  No class: Thanksgiving Day

11/28  **Sexuality and the politics of ‘culture wars’**  
George Chauncey, *Why Marriage*, ch. 3

**Primary Documents paper due**

11/30  **The AIDS crisis in American culture**  
*Major Problems*, 451-460, 471-483  
Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, ch. 6  
AIDS Memorial Quilt Website, [www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org) [BB: LINKS]  
Chauncey, *Why Marriage*, continue

12/5  **Sexual identities, families, and communities, post-1980**  
*Major Problems*, 484-515  
Chauncey, *Why Marriage*, finish for discussion

12/7  Wrap-up/final discussion/discussion of projects.

**Take home final distributed in class; due: 12/12 by noon**