

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:

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Office hours: Wed. 2-3; Thurs. 3-4 and by appt.

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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]
2. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. by Jean Yellin (Harvard University Press)
3. Andrea Tone, *Devices & Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (Hill & Wang)
4. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books)
5. Janice Irvine, *Talk About Sex* (University of California Press)

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).
4. *Take-home exam*, essay question format. Distributed 12/6; due **12/11**. (25% 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]

Annette Gordon-Reed, "The Memories of a Few Negroes': Rescuing America's Future at Monticello," J. Lewis and P. Onuf, eds., *Sally Hemings & 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

Elizabeth Reis, "Impossible Hermaphrodites: Intersex in America, 1620-1960," *Journal of American History* September 2005 [BB only]

- 9/20 **The first sexual revolution?**
Major Problems, 109-112, 120-131
 Cornelia Hughes Dayton, "Taking the Trade: Abortion & Gender Relations in an 18th Century New England Village," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd series, vol. 48, issue 1 (January 1991): 19-49 [BB only]
 Sharon Block, "Bringing Rapes to Court," *Common-Place* 3:3 (April 2003)
<http://common-place.org/vol-03/no-03/block/> [BB links]
- 9/25 **What was Victorian about Victorians?**
Major Problems, 107-108, 112-119, 131-141, 187-197, 201-237
 Review: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* [BB/CR]
- 9/27 **Utopian alternatives**
 Donald M. Scott & Bernard Wishy, eds., "Families in Utopia" documents, in *America's Families: A Documentary History* [BB/CR]
 Julie Dunfee, "'Living the Principle' of Plural Marriage: Mormon Women, Utopia, and Female Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *Feminist Studies* 10 (Fall 1984): 523-536 [BB/CR]
 Suzanne Thurman, "Shaker Women and Sexual Power," *Journal of Women's History* 10 (Spring 1998): 70-88 [BB/CR]
 Sarah Barringer Gordon, "Chapel and State," *Legal Affairs* (Jan-Feb. 2003)
[\[http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2003/review_gordon_janfeb2003.html\]](http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/January-February-2003/review_gordon_janfeb2003.html)
 [BB links]
- **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:
http://digilib.nyu.edu/80/dynaweb/digs-t/wwm97255/@Generic_BookView . [BB links]
 If you read the online version, be sure to read introduction by Jean Yellin in the Harvard University Press edition (on reserve).
 Martha Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South after the Civil War," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 402-417. [BB only]
- 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>; also read Raymond Fancher's introduction to the lecture, <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Origin/intro.htm> [BB links]
 Rachel P. Maines, "Socially Camouflaged Technologies: The Case of the Electromechanical Vibrator," *IEEE Technology and Science Magazine*, June 1989, 3-11, 22 [BB links]

- Recommended (but challenging): Lisa Duggan, “The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America,” *Signs* 18 (1993): 791-814 [BB only]
- 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
 Nayan Shah, “Between ‘Oriental Depravity’ and ‘Natural Degenerates’: Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans,” *American Quarterly* 57 (2005): 703-25 [BB only]
 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**
 Hazel V. Carby, “‘It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometime’: The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues,” in E. DuBois and V. Ruiz, eds., *Unequal Sisters*, 238-249 [BB/CR]
 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)
 Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement, Dolan DNA Learning Center, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. <http://vector.cshl.org/eugenics/> [BB: links]
- 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
 Elaine Tyler May, “Brinkmanship: Sexual Containment on the Home Front,” *Homeward Bound* (1988): 114-134 [CR/BB]
- Recommended: Margot Canaday, “‘Who Is A Homosexual?’: The Consolidation of Sexual Identities in Mid-Twentieth-Century American Immigration Law,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 28 (Spring 2003): 351-386. [BB only]

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

Cherrie Moraga, "From a Long Line of Vendidas: Chicanas and Feminism," in T. de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (1986), originally published 1983 [CR/BB]

Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman" (1970) and Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1968) <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/womid/> and <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/#myth> [BB: links]

****Primary document paper due****

11/20 **Transsexual and transgender movements**

Joanne Meyerowitz, "Sex Change and the Popular Press: Historical Notes on Transsexuality in the United States, 1930-1955," *GLQ* 4 (1998): 159-187. [BB only]

Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, continue

Review *Major Problems*, 384-93, Reis, "Impossible Hermaphrodites."

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 [BB links]

Screening: excerpts from Tony Kushner, "Angels in America" (1993; HBO production, 2003)

12/4 **Sexual identities, families, and communities, post-1980**

Major Problems, 484-515

Screening: excerpts from "Paris is Burning," dir. Jennie Livingston (1991)

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