Course Description

In a 1999 speech to a U.S. Congressional Subcommittee, Representative Christopher Smith claimed “Things that involve sex are just different.” His words inadvertently reflect one of the most deeply engrained, yet little understood facets of American law, politics, and culture. Both desired and reviled, feared and controlled, embraced and policed, sexuality has occupied a central if often profoundly contested place within American culture and society, and remains a central facet of our policy and culture.

This course explores the history of sexuality in the U.S. Centrally, it explores the past to consider why sexuality has become so central American identities, culture, and politics. Using both primary and secondary sources, we will explore the relationship between expression, regulation, ideology, and resistance; trace the emergence of distinct sexual cultures and identities; and interrogate the relationship between sexuality and other forms of social difference such as gender, class and race. We will also explore the relationship between sexuality and state building, both domestically and transnationally. Topics include reproduction, censorship, sexual violence, gay and lesbian identities, slavery, and the politics of sexually transmitted disease.

Although we will move chronologically from the colonial era to the present, this is not a survey course. Some weeks will trace a smaller set of ideas over a longer period time; others many debates within the same historical moment. A background in twentieth-century US history is helpful, but not necessary.

Readings

Required books are available at Penn Book Center (34th and Sansom) and are on reserve in the Rosengarten Reserve Reading Room. Please note that second-hand copies of these books are often available through online booksellers, such as Amazon or AbeBooks.

• Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Alfred Knopf, 1929)
• Larry Kramer, *The Normal Heart* (1985)

All other articles and materials are located on the course Blackboard page, under “Course Documents.”

**Course Evaluation**

**Attendance and Participation – 15%**

Class meets from x-x, on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. Attendance will be taken, and is imperative to your success in this class.

Although this is a lecture course, your active participation is no less crucial. Please come to class having completed all of the readings, and be prepared to think through them as a group. We will devote the last fifteen minutes of each class to group discussion, which will also provide us with an opportunity to work through the relationship within and between course readings.

Every course, whether a lecture or seminar, is a collaborative learning environment in which we work together to generate new ideas. Participation therefore refers as much to the *quality* as it does to the quantity of your words. This does not mean that every comment you make must be brilliant - in fact, some of the most innovative ideas begin as half-formed thoughts that we can work through as a group. Rather, it refers to your level of informed engagement, both with the readings and your peers. I encourage you to think of yourselves not merely as participants, but also as facilitators of our discussion – responsible not only for contributing your own ideas but also responding to the ideas of others. Needless to say, all in-class comments should be respectful and considerate, particularly as we work through sensitive and often highly personal topics. No one benefits unless everyone feels respected and safe.

**Absences**

Life happens to all of us, and sometimes it happens during class time. You will therefore receive *one* free pass per semester, for an unexcused absence that will not impact your final grade. I encourage you to use your free pass wisely - you never know when an appointment will run long, your flight will get canceled, or the bus will break down on the way to school. Once you have used up your free pass, all other absences will be counted against your final grade. Students who miss more than a few lectures can expect to have their final grades reduced. Excused absences for documented illness and other extenuating circumstances will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

**Primary Source Paper – 20%**

One of the most important ways historians access the past is through the use of primary sources. From photographs to newspapers to letters, primary sources give us a window into how historical actors themselves viewed the world around them.
This assignment requires you to find and analyze three primary sources related to one of our course themes. The sources can be anything you feel enables us, as historians, to better understand the period and the topic in question. They can be the same, or they can be different. For instance, you may choose two newspaper articles that provide opposing viewpoints on a single historical event, or you can opt to analyze one newspaper article, a photograph, or a political cartoon. Your analysis should include a discussion of why these sources offer us a window into this particular moment in time, how representative you think they are of the phenomenon you are exploring, what they can tell us about the period and, as importantly, what they cannot.

4-5 pages

Analysis Paper – 15%

This assignment provides you an opportunity to analyze in detail one of the subthemes of our course. Using course materials, please trace the changing meaning of sexuality from the late 19th to the mid 20th century within one of our major themes. Examples include race, sexual violence, gay and lesbian identities, and the state.

4-5 pages

Final Paper – 30%

Please select a topic of interest that relates to our course themes and write a research paper using both primary and secondary sources. Your paper need not relate directly to one of the topics we’ve covered in class, however it should reflect the key themes and questions of the course.

You are not required, but are welcome to use this paper as an opportunity to expand on the material from your primary source exercise. Please note, however, that the focus of this paper is very different from the previous assignment. While the primary source exercise was an opportunity to explore what such sources can tell us about the past, you are now acting as the historian - using these sources in conversation with other historical works to make an argument about the period in question. You may use the primary sources you analyzed in your exercise as a jumping off point, but should expand both your source base and analysis for the final paper.

8-10 pages

Take Home Final – 20%

A take-home final exam will be distributed on the last day of class, and will be due during the exam period.

NB: Please note that all written work is due, in hard copy format, at the beginning of class, unless otherwise noted. Please note that I do not accept papers via email, unless otherwise specified. All work should be printed on white computer paper, with 1” margins, double-spaced, using Times New Roman 12 point font. Late papers may be marked down.
Academic Honesty

All course work must be performed in accordance with Penn’s Code of Academic Integrity, [http://www.upenn.edu/provost/PennBook/academic_integrity_code_of](http://www.upenn.edu/provost/PennBook/academic_integrity_code_of). Violations of this code, including cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitating the academic dishonesty of others, will result in failure for the course. For a useful guide to avoiding plagiarism, see [http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/guides/engineering/ee/plagiarize.html](http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/guides/engineering/ee/plagiarize.html). Please ask if you have any questions about university policy or proper practices in writing papers and citing sources.
COURSE OUTLINE

Wed. 1/11 Study Sexuality in U.S. History

Readings:
Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality, 1-19

Week of 1/16 Sexuality in Early America

Lectures:
Sexual Encounters in the New World
Race and Sex in Early America

Readings:
Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality, 26-38, 71-80
Richard Trexler, Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas - chapter 4
Martha Hodes, White Women Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South – Introduction, chapter 1

Mon. 1/23 Martin Luther King Day, no class

Wed. 1/25 Sexuality and the Politics of Revolution
Lecture:
The First Sexual Revolution and the Birth of an American State

Readings:
Major Problems, 107-113, 120-131
Sharon Block, Rape and Sexual Power in Early America - chapter 1
Clare Lyons, Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia 1730-1830 - chapters 4,5
Kathleen Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia - chapter 6

Week of 1/30 What was ‘Victorian’ about the Victorians?
Lectures:
Sex and Gender in the Early Republic
Troubling the Victorian Landscape

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Readings:
- Major Problems, 113-119, 131-14, 201-229
- Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 3-13
- Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860, chapter 9
- Peggy Pascoe, What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America - chapter 7
- Nayant Shah, “Adjudicating Intimacies on U.S. Frontiers” in Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History

Week of 2/6  Sexuality and Slavery—and Its Legacies
Lectures:
- Sex and Slavery
- Sex, Violence, and the Politics of Reconstruction

Readings:
- Major Problems, 142-147, 152-186
- Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, chapters 1-2, 5-7, 10
- Hannah Rosen, “Not that Sort of Woman: Race, Gender, and Sexual Violence During the Memphis Riot of 1866” in Martha Hodes ed., Sex, Love, and Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History
- Martha Hodes, White Women Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South - chapters 6-8

Primary Source Exercise Due 2/13

Week of 2/13  Sex, Empire and the Making of the Modern State
Lectures:
- Sex Along the Imperial Current
- Making a Modern State

Readings:
- Laura Briggs, Reproducing Empire – Introduction, chapter 2
- Pamela Haag, Consent: Sex and the Transformation of American Liberalism - chapter 3
- Margot Canaday, The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America – chapters 1,2
- Laura Wexler, “The Fair Ensemble: Kate Chopin in St. Louis in 1904” in Anne Laura Stoler ed., Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North America

Week of 2/20  Sex and the City, 1890s-1920s
Lectures:
- Women and Urbanization
- Illicit Sexualities in the early Twentieth-Century
Readings:

Major Problems, 274-288
H.W. Lytle and John Dillon, From Dance Hall to White Slavery, ch. 6
Jessica Pliley, Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI, chapter 2

Week of 2/27 Race, Sex and the Crisis of Modern Culture
Lectures:

Mass Media and Heterosexual Norms
Sexual Identities, the “Other,” and Popular Culture

Readings:

Major Problems, 239-251, 337-356
Nella Larsen, Passing (1929)
Hazel V. Carby, “‘It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime’: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues,” in Ellen DuBois and Vicki Ruiz, eds., Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History
George Chauncey, Gay New York - chapters 5-7

Week of 3/6 Spring Break: No Class

Week of 3/13 Sexuality and Reproduction
Lectures:

Birth Control
Eugenics

Readings:

Major Problems, 309-327
Wendy Kline, Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom, chapters 1, 3
Laura Briggs, Reproducing Empire - chapters 3-5

Week of 3/20 War and Its Aftermath
Lectures:

Race, War, and Venereal Disease
Regulating Sex/Regulating Deviance

Readings:

Major Problems, 446-451, 460-471
Leisa Meyer, Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corps during WWII – chapter 6
George Chauncey, *Gay New York*, ch. 12 and epilogue
Margot Canaday, *The Straight State* - part II

**Analysis Paper Due**

Week of 3/27  **Sexual Liberalism in Postwar America**
**Lectures:**
*The Contradictions of Postwar Sexual Liberalism*
*Race, Sex and the Making of a 1960s Revolution*

**Readings:**
*Major Problems*, 367-402, 368-383, 412-414
Renee Romano, *Race Mixing: Black- White Marriage in Postwar America* - chapter 6
Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – A New History* - chapter 4
Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire* - chapter 6

Week of 4/3  **Sexuality and Social Movements I**
**Lectures:**
*Talking About a Revolution*
*Gay Rights and the Politics of Sexual Liberation*

**Readings:**
*Major Problems*, 405-443
Susan Brownmiller – *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1973) – chapter 1
John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* – chapter 4

Week of 4/10  **Sexuality and Social Movements II**
**Lectures:**
*Sex Wars and Feminist Debates*
*AIDS and the New Activism*

**Readings:**
*Major Problems*, 485-492
Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* – Chapter 11
Carole Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* – Introduction
Week of 4/17  **Sexuality and the Late 20th-Century State**  
Lectures:  
*Abortion, Reproduction, and the Contraceptive Revolution*  
*Sex and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*

Readings:  
President Bill Clinton Addresses U.S. Military Generals on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (1993) [https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5956215](https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5956215)  
Vice President Dan Quayle speaks to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco about the television show *Murphy Brown* (1992)  
Kristen Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* – chapters 5,6  
Janice M. Irvine, *Talk About Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States*, chapter 5  

Mon. 4/24  **Sexual Rights and the New Transnational History**  

Readings:  

*Final Paper Due*