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Office hours T 1:30-3:00, W 12:30-2
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HIST 410
Sex in Early America
Winter 2013

While it is often tempting to think of the past as a time when sexuality was either more “traditional” or more “repressed” (depending on one’s standpoint), historians of colonial North America and the early United States have found evidence of extreme sexual diversity. From the colonial period to the Civil War, many different voices spoke loudly about the power, pleasure, science, and spirituality of sex. Taking this multiplicity as a starting point, this course will introduce students to major questions in the history of early American sexualities. Some of these themes include: How did sexuality factor into colonial and national politics? What did sex have to do with witchcraft, slavery, commerce, and war? How much control did early modern women have over their fertility? Did people have recognizable “sexual identities” before the twentieth century? What are the historical roots of modern definitions of contested terms such as rape, obscenity, and chastity?

Note: This class satisfies the pre-1800 field requirement for history majors.

Readings

Although this is an upper-division, reading and writing intensive course, there is only one required textbook: **Elizabeth Reis, ed. *American Sexual Histories*, Second ed. (2012).** Please **bring this textbook with you to class every Friday for discussion.**

- Additional books will be selected and accessed independently (see attached).
- Primary documents and secondary essays will be posted online or distributed in class.

Assignments

Participation in class discussions: 10%
Book reviews: 30% @ 10% each
Independent project presentation: 10%
Independent paper: 30%
Final exam: 30%

The small size of our class affords a valuable opportunity for group discussion and individualized assignments. Your participation grade will evaluate your ability to verbally engage in historical analysis based on the material presented in this class.

Fridays are designated as special discussion days when we will interpret primary documents and secondary essays together as a group. **Come to class having already read the assigned readings for the week, and bring a copy to consult** during the course of the conversation. This includes engaging with the ideas of other students as well as those raised by the professor and the readings.

Written assignments in this class revolve around your independent engagement with one of the weekly themes listed on the schedule below (e.g., Licit & Illicit Sex, The Licentiousness of Slavery, etc.). **On the first day of class, each student will choose one of these themes to pursue in depth over the course of the quarter.** S/he will read three scholarly monographs related to that theme and write a review of each (see attached bibliography). Those books will lay the foundation for both an independent research paper, due week 9, and a presentation to the group during the most relevant class discussion.

The paper should pose an original research question informed by the secondary literature and answer it by consulting additional primary sources. The research paper should range from ten to twelve pages in length for undergraduates and from twenty to twenty-five for graduate students. Some sources may be found in Knight Library's Special Collections; others may be located via indices such as Early American Imprints (microform), or through online databases such as Lexis Nexis, American Periodical Series, or Women and Social Movements. For more guidance, please make an appointment to see me in office hours about your specific topic.

The presentation will be scheduled to coincide with our class discussion of the theme in question. Therefore, they will vary in content. Students who present on March 8 will have completed all of their book reviews and research and be ready to present their findings in a holistic way. Those who present earlier will have done some but not all of the research and reading; they will present their findings to date and raise some interpretive questions for us to consider as a group. The presentation grade will take into account the timeline of each project. In all stages, students should prioritize original questions and interpretations of evidence over factual description. In terms of length, undergrads should aim for a 15-20 minute presentation, including questions and discussion. Grad students should strive for a 30-40 minute mini-lecture and discussion.

Book reviews should first summarize, then evaluate, scholarly monographs related to your research interest. Each review should be about four pages in length. After outlining the author's narrative, give a sense of the sources he or she used to create it. How did the available sources shape the author's interpretation? Can you identify alternative approaches that might have been more persuasive, more rigorous, or more balanced? Then assess the contribution of the book to the history of sex in early America. If it appears to have had a significant impact, why was it so influential? If it fell short, what questions did it leave unanswered? Based on this book, can you suggest future research questions?

Please submit book reviews and research papers via blackboard (Safeassign) prior to class on the due-date, unless otherwise directed. Uploaded papers should use size 12, Times New Roman font and format pages with standard margins.

Policies

All work should be completed independently. Plagiarized assignments will fail, and I will report all instances of plagiarism. By plagiarism, I mean representing the words or ideas of another writer as your own. For more details, go to:

<http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/tabcid/68/Default.aspx>

Although I am not constantly online, I will return emails within 24 hours. I am also committed to meeting the needs of students with disabilities who are registered with Disability Services and who may need individual arrangements.

Over the course of the semester, I look forward to meeting individually with all of the students in this course, either during my regular office hours or by appointment. Office visits can help you understand and digest information covered in class, provide additional resources for pursuing independent work, and, ideally, spark intellectual curiosity. Please do not attend office hours in order to ask me to repeat a lecture that you did not attend or to change a grade retroactively.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1. Sexual “contact”

- M Jan 7 Course introduction
- W Jan 9 Sexual Cultures: Europe, Africa, and the Americas
- F Jan 11 Discussion: Sexual diplomacy or sexual conquest?
 - Read: Malintzin, Pocahontas articles on blackboard

Week 2. Licit & illicit sex

- M Jan 14 Sex in zones of cultural contact
 - Read: primary documents online
- W Jan 16 Who was a “wife,” who was a “wench”?
 - Read: Kathleen Brown, Kirsten Fischer articles
- F Jan 18 Discussion: Colonial laws and the racialization of female sexuality

Week 3. Gender norms and sexual nonconformity

- M Jan 21 **Martin Luther King day (no class)**
- W Jan 23 “The Pure Nazarite” and his Felonious Neighbors
 - **Book review #1 due**
- F Jan 25 Discussion: The question of sexual identities
 - Read Reis ch. 1-2
 - **Extra credit opportunity: attend Estelle Freedman lecture**
 - Friday, 1/25, 12:30, Knight Library Browsing Room

Week 4. Power and control

- M Jan 28 Rape and incest in colonial laws
- W Jan 30 Fertility control in slavery and freedom
 - Read Reis ch. 4
- F Feb 1 **No class: attend Sharon Block's lecture instead**
 - Thursday 1/31, 3-5, Knight Library Browsing Room

Week 5. Virtue and vice in the age of revolution

- M Feb 4 A Sexual Revolution?
- W Feb 6 Liberty vs. license
 - **Book review #2 due**
- F Feb 8 Discussion: republican sexual ideology
 - Read Reis ch. 5-ch. 6, Christine Stansell article online

Week 6. Family strife in the early republic

- M Feb 11 Seduced daughters, runaway wives, female husbands
 - Read primary sources online
- W Feb 13 The “amalgamation” scandals
 - Read primary sources online
- F Feb 15 Discussion: family politics
 - Read Reis ch. 7

Week 7. The licentiousness of slavery

- M Feb 18 Abolitionist vs. proslavery sexual ideals
 - Read primary sources online
- W Feb 20 Sexual mores in antebellum slave communities
 - **Book review #3 due**
- F Feb. 21 Discussion: what was at stake in the discourse of licentiousness?

Week 8. Sex reform and its discontents

- M Feb 25 Female moral reformers vs. the sexual double standard
 - Read primary sources online
- W Feb 27 Freethinkers and the flash press
 - Read primary sources online
- F Mar 1 Discussion: “Solitary vice” and the origins of obscenity
 - Read Reis ch. 8, primary sources online

Week 9. Utopian communities and manifest destiny

- M Mar 4 Free love and polygamy in the west
- W Mar 6 “Intimate frontiers”: interethnic marriage and prostitution
- F Mar 8 Discussion: your papers
 - **Paper due**; draft 1. Optional rewrite due via Safeassign 10 a.m., March 22.

Week 10. Toward sexual identity?

- M Mar 11 Romantic friendships: the sex debates
 - Read: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg article; primary sources online
- W Mar 13 “The invention of heterosexuality”
- F Mar 15 Course conclusion & final review

Final exam 10:15 Monday, March 18.