

HIST 326: Sex and Sexuality in America  
Spring 2015  
University of Northern Colorado

Professor Nicholas Syrett  
Office: 3295C Ross Hall  
Phone: 970.351-2595

Tues./Thurs. 12:30-1:45  
2295 Ross Hall

Email: [nicholas.syrett@unco.edu](mailto:nicholas.syrett@unco.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-3 and Thursdays, 11-12, and by appointment

This course will explore the history of sex and sexuality in America. Beyond simply examining who was having sex with whom, it will primarily investigate two interrelated fields: (1) the *meanings* that different communities attached to sex. As such, the course will be an investigation into when and how Americans understood “sexuality” as a concept. In part the goal of the course will be to disrupt our own notions of sexuality (heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality) such that students can understand the very different ways that earlier Americans conceptualized sex. (2) The course will pay special attention to the ways that race, class, and gender structured not only Americans’ understandings of sexuality but also the very possibilities for sex itself. Who had sex with whom was governed by complex rules, themselves a product of religious, racial, class, and gender hierarchies. This is not to say that people did not break these rules – and we will explore a number of cases where this occurred – but the rules themselves have always structured Americans’ understandings for the possibilities for sex and the meanings they attached to it. The class will also explore the histories of rape, pregnancy, abortion, prostitution, and marriage, phenomena intimately related to our topic either as possible consequences of sex or as forms of sexuality themselves.

At the end of the class students should have an understanding of the history of sex and sexuality in America and the ways that these categories have been shaped by race, region, class, and religion. They should be capable of reading and analyzing primary sources as well as writing papers about them, marshaling evidence in order to make an argument about its significance. They will also be skilled in evaluating historians’ arguments, what we call “historiography,” and discussing these arguments in class.

### Requirements

*Attendance and Punctuality:* Attendance and punctuality are both required. You may miss two classes with no consequence to your grade whatsoever; **you need not tell me when or why you have missed these two classes.** After those two initial absences, however, your final grade will decrease by 1% for every additional missed class. Because most of us are unable to foresee when we might become ill or experience a family emergency, I suggest that you save your two free classes for situations when you **need** to use them. Please make sure that you show up to class on time; entering the classroom late not only means that you have missed some material, it is also disruptive to your fellow students. Three tardy entrances will be understood as the equivalent of one missed class.

*Participation:* All students are expected to participate in the discussions that will take place each week. Students must arrive at class having completed that day's reading assignment and prepared to talk about it. A valuable part of discussion is the posing of questions; no one is expected to have a perfect grasp of the meaning and import of all that they have read for class. Intelligent questions are just as important in advancing our understanding of the materials and will be encouraged throughout the course. Participation will account for 20% of your grade.

*Response Papers:* On certain days (marked on the syllabus), you are required to submit a one-page paper (typed, double-spaced) responding to the reading. The first sentence or two of the paper should summarize the argument made by the author or authors. The rest of the paper gives you an opportunity to focus on a particular aspect of the reading that interested you: you could relate it to other readings or class discussions; you could also talk about something in the readings with which you disagree; you could discuss aspects of the reading that confused you or that you did not understand. The point of these responses is to get you to give serious thought to some of the more challenging readings so that we can have a more fruitful discussion in class. I will grade these papers with a check (given to a perfectly adequate paper), check minus (to an inadequate paper), or check plus (to a really smart and thoughtful response). **These responses must be typed and handed in at the beginning of class; I will not accept them late. If you know that you are going to be absent from class, however, you may email your response to me beforehand.** These responses constitute 10% of your final grade.

*Papers:* You will be required to write two papers in this class. The first paper will focus on the primary sources in Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Attitudes Toward Sex in Antebellum America*. I will give you a complete assignment a number of weeks before the paper is due. This paper will constitute 20% of your grade. The first paper is due on **February 26** in class. The second is a research paper on a topic of your own choosing (30% of your final grade) and will be due on the second last day our class meets (**April 28**). Further instruction and discussion of the papers will occur later in the semester.

*Exam:* You will not have a midterm exam in this class but you will have a final exam that will constitute 20% of your final grade. That exam will be given **May 7<sup>th</sup>** from 10:45 to 1:15 in our regular classroom.

Papers will be downgraded 10 points per day but will not receive credit if they are handed in more than four days late. That said, you must hand in the paper in order to pass the class, even if you earn a zero on it. No student can receive credit for a class for which s/he did not fulfill all major requirements.

### **Grading Breakdown**

Participation – 20%

Responses – 10%

Paper I – 20%

Paper II – 30%

Final Exam – 20%

The papers and the exam will each earn a number grade between 1 and 100. Your final grade in this class will be determined by the grade breakdown (below). I enter your grades into a spreadsheet that generates a final number. That number accords with a letter grade in the following manner: A (94 and above); A- (90-93); B+ (87-89); B (84-86); B- (80-83); C+ (77-79); C (74-76); C- (70-73); D+ (67-69); D (64-66); D- (60-63); F (below 60). There is no final A+ grade at UNC; however, students could potentially earn an A+ on an individual assignment or exam. That A+ *will* be factored into the calculations of your overall grade for the course, increasing your chances of earning an A overall.

### **Disability Statement**

Students with disabilities: Any student requesting disability accommodation for this class must inform the instructor by giving appropriate notice. Students are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services at (970) 351-2289 to certify documentation of disability and to ensure appropriate accommodations are implemented in a timely manner.

### **Honor Code**

*All members of the University of Northern Colorado community are entrusted with the responsibility to uphold and promote five fundamental values: Honesty, Trust, Respect, Fairness, and Responsibility. These core elements foster an atmosphere, inside and outside of the classroom, which serves as a foundation and guides the UNC community's academic, professional, and personal growth. Endorsement of these core elements by students, faculty, staff, administration, and trustees strengthens the integrity and value of our academic climate.*

UNC's policies and recommendations for academic misconduct will be followed. For additional information, please see the Dean of Student's website, Student Handbook: <http://www.unco.edu/dos/handbookindex.html>

Do not plagiarize in your written work. While quoting others and paraphrasing their ideas are important parts of historical writing, you must always cite your sources. If you plagiarize and I catch you, you will fail the assignment, and depending on the nature of the plagiarism, you may fail the class. Handing in the same paper for two classes (either two you are taking concurrently or one you have taken in the past) also constitutes cheating. Further, cheaters and plagiarizers will be reported to the Dean of Students; whatever punishment they choose to exact will be beyond my purview.

### **Questions**

If you have questions about anything on the syllabus or about any aspect of the class, please feel free to email me or come to my office hours. If you are busy during my office hours but would like to speak with me in person, please email me and we'll figure out another time to meet.

### **Required Texts**

There are five required books in this class as well as a number of articles and book chapters that are available electronically through the library's website (these are marked as **Library Reserve** on your syllabus). The books are available for purchase at The UNC Bookstore in the UC. You may also order the books online but please do so quickly so that you have them in time to discuss them in class.

Kathy Peiss, *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality*. Cengage/Houghton Mifflin. 0-395-90384-X  
Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina*. Cornell University Press. 0-8014-8679-3  
Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Attitudes Toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History With Documents*. Bedford/St. Martin's. 0-312-41226-6  
Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City*. University of North Carolina Press. 0-8078-5601-0  
Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest*. University of California Press. 0520240480  
Beth L. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*. Harvard University Press. 0674009746

The readings under each date are to be read **for that day** so that we can discuss them in class. Primary sources are marked with a **PS**. Items on Library Reserve are also indicated. When you have a response paper due, it is marked on the schedule.

### **January 13 – Introductions, Syllabus, Expectations**

#### **January 15 – How to study the history of sexuality**

Jeffrey Weeks, "The Social Construction of Sexuality"  
Rictor Norton, "Essentialism and Queer History," both in *Major Problems*.

#### **January 20 – Native Americans, Anglo Americans, and Sexuality**

Documents 1-3, pp. 27-36, in *Major Problems*. **PS**  
Chapter 2 of Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations*

#### **January 22 – Anglo Americans and Sexuality**

Documents 1 & 2 in *Major Problems*, pp. 71-76. **PS**  
Sharon Block, Chapter 1 of *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America*: "Consent and Coercion: The Continuum of Sexual Relations." **Library Reserve**.  
**Response Paper due on Block**

#### **January 27 – NO CLASS; Professor Syrett Away**

#### **January 29 – Breaking Regulations in Anglo America**

Documents 3 & 4 (pp. 76-80) **PS**  
Kathleen Brown, "Changed ... into the Fashion of a Man': The Politics of Sexual Difference in a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Settlement."  
Richard Godbeer, "Sodomy in Colonial New England," all in *Major Problems*  
**Response paper due on Godbeer**

#### **February 3 – Suspect Relations: Race and Sex in Early America**

Introduction, Chapters 1 and 3, *Suspect Relations*

#### **February 5 – Suspect Relations, Continued**

Chapters 4, 5, and Epilogue of *Suspect Relations*

### **February 10 – Cultural Attitudes Toward Sex in Antebellum America**

Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, “Introduction” in *Attitudes Toward Sex*.

**First Paper Assignment Handed Out.**

### **February 12 – Slavery and Sexuality**

Documents 1-4 (pp. 143-152) **PS**

Brenda Stevenson, “Slave Marriage and Family Relations”

Nell Irvin Painter, “Soul Murder and Slavery,” all in *Major Problems*

### **February 17 –Victorian Sexuality – Women and Men**

Documents 2 and 4 in *Major Problems* (pp. 112-113, 115-117). **PS.**

Nancy Cott, “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850,” in *Major Problems*.

Charles Rosenberg, “Sexuality, Class, and Role in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America.” **Library Reserve.**  
**Response Paper due on Cott**

### **February 19 – Marriages in Victorian America**

E. Anthony Rotundo, Chapter 7, “Marriage,” from *American Manhood*. **Library Reserve.**

Karen Lystra, “Sexuality in Victorian Courtship and Marriage,” in *Major Problems*.

### **February 24 – Romantic Friendships**

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Major Problems*.

E. Anthony Rotundo, “Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States, 1800-1900.” **Library Reserve**

**Response Paper Due on Smith-Rosenberg and Rotundo.**

### **February 26 – Abortion**

Cornelia Hughes Dayton, “Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in an Eighteenth-Century New England Village.”

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Abortion Movement and the AMA, 1850-1880.”

**Both on Library Reserve.**

**First Paper Due**

### **March 3 – Comstock, Obscenity, and Free Love**

Documents 1-5 (pp. 239-252) **PS**

Shirley J. Burton, “The Criminally Obscene Women of Chicago”

Jesse F. Battan, “‘The Word Made Flesh’: Language, Authority, and Sexual Desire in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” all in *Major Problems*.

**Discussion of Second Papers**

### **March 5 – Sexuality in a Gilded Age City**

Wood, *Freedom of the Streets*, Introduction, Chapters 1 & 4 (**skip 2 and 3**)

### **March 10 – The Regulation of Prostitution**

Wood, *Freedom of the Streets*, Chapters 6 & 7 (**skip 5**)

**March 12 – Prostitution, Continued**

Wood, *Freedom of the Streets*, Chapters 8, 9, and Conclusion

**March 17 and March 19 – NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK**

**March 24 – Homosexuality in Turn-of-the-Century America**

Lisa Duggan “The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America.”

George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conception of Female ‘Deviance.’” **Both on Library Reserve.**

**Response Paper due on Duggan.**

**Paper Proposal also due**

**March 26 – Homosexuality in Working Class Culture**

Introduction and Part One of Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs*

**March 31 – Homosexuality in Middle-Class Culture**

Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs*, Part 2

**April 2 – Progressive Responses to Sexuality**

“Reformers Condemn ‘Tough Dancing’ c. 1910,” (pp. 283-4) **PS**  
Kathy Peiss, “Charity Girls and City Pleasures,” in *Major Problems*.

Boag, Chapter 6 of *Same-Sex Affairs*

**April 7 – Birth Control and Eugenics**

Documents 3-5 (pp. 311-18) **PS**

Linda Gordon, “Birth Control and Social Revolution,”

Molly Ladd-Taylor, “Eugenics, Sterilization, and Social Welfare,” all in *Major Problems*.

**Response Paper due on Gordon**

**April 9 – The Sexual Revolution in Kansas**

Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, Introduction, Chapters 1-2

**April 14 – The Sexual Revolution, Continued**

Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, Chapters 3, 4, 5

**April 16 – NO CLASS; PROFESSOR SYRETT AWAY**

**April 21 – The Sexual Revolution Concluded**

Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, Chapters 6-8 and Epilogue

**April 23 – AIDS**

Documents, 3, 4, 5, 6 (pp. 451-459)

Ronald Bayer, “AIDS and the Bathhouse Controversy,” all in *Major Problems*.

**April 28 – Sexual Dilemmas in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Arnold Kahn, “What College Women Do and Do Not Experience As Rape” **Library Reserve.**

**Second Papers Due**

**April 30 – Exam Review**

**May 7 – Final Exam, 10:45-1:15, in this classroom**