Course Description
This class asks what sex looked and felt like before the instantiation of modern identity categories such as homosexuality or heterosexuality—before, that is, our desires became an index to our souls. To this end, we’ll examine texts by nineteenth-century American writers that represent the experiences and expressions of what we now call sexuality, but do so in ways that resist the organizational force that term implies.

Many of our texts will represent same-sex desires and gender deviant or, in at least one case, transgender expressions. As readers, then, our challenge won’t be to locate so-called queer content, but instead to know how to interpret this content—to ascertain, as Jordan Stein puts it, “what exactly this evidence is evidence of.” Do we, for instance, see pre-sexological representations of homoeroticism as somehow anticipatory, moving toward attitudes and behaviors that only now can be fully understood? Or might we see them as articulating alternative possibilities, futures that never came to pass? All of our texts, moreover, implicitly and explicitly position their representations of sex along the black/white color line that constituted the period’s dominant system for racial distinction. We’ll quickly find that interpreting sex in nineteenth-century America also demands that we grapple with the histories of race, particularly slavery, scientific racism, and the fears surrounding interracial sex and mixed-race people.

Course Promises
Successful completion of this course will:

* introduce you to the overlapping fields of queer studies and American studies, especially as they address the unique histories of the nineteenth-century Atlantic world;
* provide you with a preliminary overview to the histories of sexuality and racialization in the nineteenth-century United States;
• provide you with practice and tools to become a more fluent and active participant in critical conversations about literature and culture;
• help you to begin thinking about how to translate your knowledge into productive activities and discussions for secondary or college students;
• improve your writing and research skills on multiple levels: assessing the existing conversation on a topic, locating secondary materials, crafting sharper thesis statements, developing persuasive argumentative arcs, closely analyzing (and not just summarizing) your evidence, writing interesting and lively sentences, and closing with a bang;
• give you experience with two key academic genres/performances: the conference abstract and paper; and
• allow you to deeply, slowly read some wonderful literature.

Course Responsibilities
To get the most out of this course, you have several responsibilities:

Reading. Read and reread. Then read again. As you read, take notes in the margins, circle words, draw lines, reference earlier page numbers for later comparison, underline. Pay special attention both to those moments in a text that get you excited and those moments that make you frustrated or irritated; although quite different, both kinds of reactions signal a moment in the text that will reward further attention, particularly when you’re drafting a memo or a longer essay. When possible, bring hard copies of course materials to class.

Participating. A variety of voices will enrich our experiences with these texts and with each other, and the success of this seminar is thus a collective responsibility. Come to every class prepared with questions, notes, and observations to help us along.

Provoking. Four times over the semester, during weeks of your choice, you’ll send a single discussion question to the class. First and foremost, I encourage you to draft questions that generate thought and debate. This means in part hinging your question to a specific body of evidence (a passage, a pattern, a repeated word, a critical claim) that will provide a concrete focus. And, in part, it means locating ideas about which you can imagine credible disagreement or, at least, multiple reactions.

Teaching. Details for a lesson plan assignment tba on January 21st.


Grade Distribution
Active Participation (inc. provocations) 100
Lesson Plan 200
Conference Presentation 100
Seminar Paper 600
Total Possible 1000

A+ 980 – 1000
A 920 – 979
A- 900 – 919
B+ 880 – 899
B 820 – 879

Required Texts


**Course Schedule**

1. **JANUARY 14 – SEXOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE**
   - Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case” (1906).

2. **JANUARY 21 – THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY**

3. **JANUARY 28 – THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SEXUALITY; OR, READING QUEER TEXTS**
   - Rose Terry Cooke, “My Visitation” (1858).

4. **FEBRUARY 4 – NEW WORLD LESBIANS & OLD WORLD SODOMITES**
   - Charles Brockden Brown, *Ormond; or, the Secret Witness* (1799)

5. **FEBRUARY 11 – HOW SEX WAS MADE (AND UNMADE)**
• Julia Ward Howe, *The Hermaphrodite* (1847)
• Alice Dreger, Introduction to *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Harvard University Press, 1998).

6. FEBRUARY 18 – SEX OUTSIDE DISCOURSE

• Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852)

7. FEBRUARY 25 – SEX IN PUBLIC


8. MARCH 11 – SEX IN TIME

• Harriet Prescott Spofford, “The Amber Gods” (1860)

9. MARCH 18 – HOW (NOT) TO DO THE HISTORY OF THE SEX LIVES OF THE ENSLAVED

• Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
• Peter Coviello, “Unceremoniousness,” in *Tomorrow’s Parties*, 129-42.

10. MARCH 25 – CELIBACIES (AND OTHER SEXUALITIES)

• Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896)
• Peter Coviello, “Islanded: Jewett and the Unaccompanied Life,” in *Tomorrow’s Parties*, 79 – 103.

11. APRIL 1 – BIOPOLITICS: RACE AND SEX

12. APRIL 8 – SEX ACROSS THE COLOR LINE

13. APRIL 15 – QUEER STYLE
- Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces* (1900).

14. APRIL 22 – COURSE CONFERENCE

15. APRIL 29 – COURSE CONFERENCE