

English 5723/6733: The South and Sexuality

Spring 2013

Kimpel 313, Thursdays 2:00–4:50PM

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English Department

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Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30–2:00, or by appointment

Course Overview

This seminar will explore the myriad roles sexuality has played in the literature and culture of the U.S. South. We will examine how expressions of gender, intimacy and sexual identity unfold in regionally specific ways and how fluid understandings of sexuality might prompt us to rethink mainstream geographies, histories and identities. Topics will include the intersections between class, race, gender and sexuality; the relationship between social justice and sexual identity; the social geography of gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and transgendered spaces; the social institution of the family and the formation of sexuality; the ways in which the global economy, nationalism, and regionalism shape sexual identity; the erotics of friendship; the relationship between the public sphere and private life; reproduction and (ambivalent) maternity; tactics of secrecy, indirection, and ambiguity; and the relationship between religion and sexuality. We will examine key texts and debates in feminist, queer and transgender theory, and we will think critically about the rifts that have emerged in these debates along lines of class, color and gender identity, as well as the politics of place that often underscore discussions of sexual identity.

Primary Texts (All secondary readings can be found on Blackboard.)

William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (Vintage; 978-0679748144)

Erskine Caldwell, *God's Little Acre* (U Georgia Press, 978-0820316635)

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics; 978-0061120060)

Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (W.W. Norton & Co.; 978-0393311600)

E. Lynn Harris, *Invisible Life* (Anchor; 978-0385469685)

Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (Mariner; 978-0618492398)

Frances Newman, *The Hard-Boiled Virgin* (Brown Thrasher Books; 978-0820305264)
Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (New Directions; 978-0811216029)
---. *Suddenly Last Summer* (Dramatists Play Service; 978-0822210948)
Russell Banks, *Lost Memory of Skin* (Ecco; 978-0061857645)

Suggested Texts

Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York UP, 2003.
Donald E. Hall, et. al, Eds. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Requirements: Primary text presentation; secondary text presentation; seminar paper (15–25 pages).

Requirements

Attendance: This is a graduate seminar; attendance at every session is expected. If you must miss a session, you should notify me in advance.

Presentation: Each member of the seminar will present one short talk designed to instigate discussion by posing questions, framing problems, and making links between primary and secondary works. Strive to balance summarizing the material and eliciting seminar discussion of the material. You might prefer to generate your own ideas and critical argument, but you could also choose to draw on one of the supplemental critical, theoretical, or historical readings for the week. You may refer to notes, but these talks should not be read from a prepared script: think of this as a teaching opportunity and keep this presentation as provocative, engaging and energetic as possible. Length: 10 minutes.

Book report: Each student will write a professional-style book review of a pertinent secondary work and summarize it in class. The works to be reviewed will be coordinated to the schedule of readings. Suggested length: 1000 words (3–4 pages). Your written review should be submitted on the day of your report in multiple copies for the members of the seminar. Your oral summary (not a verbatim reading) should last 10 minutes.

Semester Essay: Your principal original work this semester will be an article-length (c. 15–25 pages) paper on a topic that you formulate over the course of our reading. The essays will be due on May 4. I'll ask for a 250-word prospectus of your paper and brief annotated bibliography (4–5 sources) by April 11, but you should by then have conferred with me individually about your project. Please come to see me during office hours as soon as you are ready to discuss ideas you may have, no matter how preliminary they are.

Schedule

January 17: Introduction: Sexuality and “the South”

- Course overview; introductions; conference opportunities; goals of a graduate course.
- Dorothy Allison, “River of Names” (Blackboard)
- Karen L. Cox, “We’re Here, We’re Queer, Y’all” (NY Times, October 3, 2012)

January 24 Discourses of Sexuality / Sex, Race, and Power

- Excerpts from *Out in the South*: Edited by Carlos L Dews and Carolyn Leste Law (Temple UP, 2001)
- Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?” (PMLA, 1995)
- Warner, Michael: “Queer and Then?” (The Chronicle Review, January 1, 2012)
- E. Patrick Johnson, “ ‘Quare’ Studies, or ‘(Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother’ ” (Blackboard)
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer and Now” (Blackboard)
- **See also:** *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America*, by Margot Canaday

January 31: At Conference (Film: Hollywood to Dollywood)

February 7 The Cult of Southern Womanhood

- Frances Newman, *The Hard-Boiled Virgin*
- **Report:** Michael Bibler, *Cotton’s Queer Relations* (2009)
- **Report:** James T. Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian*

- and *Gay Southern Life, 1948–1968* by (Westview Press, 1997)
- **Report:** Gary Richards, *Lovers and Beloveds: Sexual Otherness in Southern Fiction 1936–1961* (2005)
- **Report:** John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (U of Chicago, 2000)

February 14 Faulkner and Femininity

- William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*
- **Report:** Deborah Clarke, *Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner*
- **Report:** Annette Trefzer, Ann J. Abadie, eds. *Faulkner's Sexualities*. (UP Mississippi, 2010)
- **See also:** Florence Dore, *The Novel and the Obscene: Sexual Subjects in American Modernism* (2005)

February 21 At Conference (Film: Southern Comfort)

February 28 Modernization, Capitalism, and Desire

- Erskine Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*
- **Read:** John D'Emilio: "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (from *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, 1983)
- **Read:** Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex" (Originally published in in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York, Monthly Review Press (1975))
- **Report:** Michael Trask, *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (Cornell UP, 2003)

March 7 Marriage

- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- **Read:** Carla Kaplan, "The Erotics of Talk: "That Oldest Human Longing" in their Eyes Were Watching God." *American Literature* Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), pp. 115–142.
- **Report:** Frances Smith Foster, from *'Til or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in African America* (2010)

March 14 Ideology, Desire and the Body

- Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*

- **Read:** Jay Watson, “Uncovering the Body, Discovering Ideology: Segregation and Sexual Anxiety in Lillian Smith’s Killers of the Dream” (American Quarterly, 1997)
- **Report:** Jay Watson, Reading for the Body: The Recalcitrant Materiality of Southern Fiction, 1893–1985 (Georgia UP, 2012)
- **See also:** Mab Segrest, “‘Lines I Dare’: Southern Lesbian Writing” (from Out in the South); Dorothy Allison, Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature

March 21 Spring Break: No Class

March 28 Gender as Performance

- Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire
- **Read:** Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as Masquerade” (excerpts)
- **Report/Excerpts:** Judith Butler, Gender Trouble

April 4 Sex and Hunger

- Tennessee Williams, Suddenly Last Summer
- **Read:** “Cannibals and Queers: Man–Eating” in David Bergman, Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self–Representation in American Literature (1991)
- **Report:** Siobhan Somerville, Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture (Duke UP, 2000)

April 11 Tomboy Culture

- Carson McCullers, The Member of the Wedding
- **Read:** Elizabeth Freeman, “‘The We of Me’: The Member of the Wedding’s Novel Alliances” (from Freeman, The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture; Duke UP, 2002)
- **Report:** Sarah Gleeson–White, Strange Bodies: Gender and Identity in the Novels of Carson McCullers (U Alabama Press, 2003)
- **See also:** Michelle Ann Abate, Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History (Temple UP, 2008)
- **PROSPECTUS AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

April 18 Contemporary Black Gay Male Life in the South

- E. Lynn Harris, Invisible Life

- **Read:** Michael Hardin, “Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man: Invisibility, Race, and Homoeroticism from Frederick Douglass to E. Lynn Harris” (Southern Literary Journal, Fall 2004)
- **Report:** E. Patrick Johnson, Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South (UNC Press, 2008)
- **See also:** Black Queer Studies, A Critical Anthology (Ed. E Patrick Johnson; Duke UP, 2005); Chapter 4 of Suzanne Jones, Race Mixing: Southern Fiction Since the Sixties “Tabooed Love” (Johns Hopkins UP, 2006); “Double Lives on the Down Low” by Benoit Denizet-Lewis (NY Times Magazine, 2003); Kathryn Bond Stockton, Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer” (Duke UP, 2006); Riche Richardson, Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta (Georgia UP, 2007)

April 25 Rural Desire

- Small Town Gay Bar (film)
- **Report:** Scott Herring, Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism. (NYU Press, 2010)
- **See also:** Brock Thompson, The Un-Natural State (Arkansas UP, 2010)
- **See also:** “Whistlin’ Dixie” at Queersouth.com; Out of the South documentary; Mississippi I Am (film trailer)

May 2 Law, Sex and the South

- Russell Banks, Lost Memory of Skin
- **Read:** Excerpts from “The Smart Child is the Masochistic Child: Pedagogy, Pedophilia, and the Pleasures of Harm” from Kathryn Bond Stockton, The Queer Child

May 3 Dead Day

May 4 Final papers due to my department mailbox by 4pm.