

**Topics in American Political History:
The Politics of Pornography and Obscenity in the United States**

Spring 2021

Rutgers University-Newark
21:512:403:Q1, 21:988:389:Q2
Monday, 6-9pm
Smith Hall, Room 102

Professor: Whitney Strub
wstrub@rutgers.edu

Office hours: Mondays 3-4pm and available most afternoons so just email and we'll set it up!
Office hours will be on Zoom at the start of the semester but will migrate to in-person, possibly outside, depending on weather and regional health outcomes as the semester progresses.

In this course, we will examine the politics of obscenity and pornography in the United States, as they have developed historically. Our approach will highlight the politicization of sex and sexuality, the shifting meanings of both pornography and regulation, and the gendered and racialized meanings of pornographic works. Our coverage will extend from the 19th-century purity campaigns of Anthony Comstock, through the cold war politics of sexuality, into the mobilization of the New Right around social issues such as pornography, and then to the feminist antipornography movement and its aftereffects as well as LGBTQ engagements with erotic expression.

Learning Goals:

1. Situate sexual politics within historical contexts to better understand the historical forces that structure and inform our understandings of sexuality;
2. Similarly, to interrogate the social meanings of debates over censorship and sexual expression;
3. More sophisticated ability to read primary sources in their historical context to more fully assess the values and ideologies that they embody;
4. To critically and analytically engage with pornography rather than simply dismissing it as raw sexual expression.

Readings

There is one book assigned for this course: Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York University Press, 20th anniversary edition 2019).

The other readings will be an assortment of scholarly journal articles and primary source documents. These will be available either on Canvas or the Rutgers University Library website databases (<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/>).

The easiest way to access them is to do a search directly from the search bar on the main page. Another way is to search under Journals for the journal name. If you have trouble with one method, try the other. If both fail, email me right away. "I couldn't find the article" is not a legitimate excuse.

Assignments

Attendance/Participation (20%)

Participation/attendance policy: Because this course will be run in the seminar mode, participation is crucial. This entails arriving to class prepared, having read and contemplated the assignments, and contributing to class discussions in a substantive manner. Establishing a constructive dialogue is the goal here, not sheer quantity of verbiage. Attendance is required; more than five absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

Quizzes (10%)

Quizzes will be extremely short and conducted verbally in class, with 3-5 questions and people called on at random from the roster to answer. If you're called but not present, you miss the credit for the question. These will occur most class meetings, so the grade will be cumulative.

Informal response essays (15%)

Each week you will have a specific prompt for which you will write an informal 1-2 paragraph response on Canvas. This is due each Monday by noon and will help structure our discussion. You also must write a brief response to another post each week, by Wednesday at noon. These will not be graded, but they will be counted, and I'll let you know if your posts are not sufficing.

Short Paper 1 (15%)

This will be a 4-5 page paper digging into the early obscenity debates we'll be reading. It's due October 4, and I'll distribute a prompt in advance.

Midterm Exam (15%)

Straightforward exam to test knowledge of class materials. Formal prompt to follow, due on October 25.

Final Paper/Exam (25%)

This will be *either* a take-home exam or a modest (8-10 page) research paper that allows you to explore a particular theme in more depth. It will be due by 10pm on Monday, December 20.

Grading Guidelines

A: work of exceptional quality, showing profound and meaningful engagement with the materials in question, thoughtful and comparative analysis, superior writing—and most importantly, containing a clear, inventive, and persuasive thesis.

B: work that is above average—shows knowledge and/or contains a thesis, but does not develop it as strongly as it could.

C: adequate work that fulfills the assignment—often based on summarizing rather than thesis or analysis.

D: subpar work that falls short of fulfilling the assignment but deserves some credit.

F: work that fails to earn credit for the assignment, including plagiarism.

Late assignments will not be accepted. Extensions may be negotiated under extenuating circumstances (which do *not* include computer-related issues), with some grade deductions, *before* the due date.

No incompletes will be granted unless the matter has been discussed with me in advance.

Policy on Academic Integrity (Cheating and Plagiarism)

You are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the Academic Integrity Policy, available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>. **All students are required to sign the Rutgers Honor Code Pledge.**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any use of the ideas or words of another person without proper acknowledgment of credit will result in penalties up to and including a course grade of F and referral to the academic integrity board. I aspire to be your ally and supporter in all possible ways, but on matters of plagiarism, expect no sympathy. Cases will be handled in a draconian manner, and excuses will not be entertained.

Note that the uncited usage of uncopyrighted material such as Wikipedia entries still constitutes plagiarism.

Students with Disabilities notice:

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus' disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219, by phone at 973-353-5375 or by email at odsnewark@newark.rutgers.edu.

Policy on Classroom Conduct

Video or audio recording of the instructor or other students is not permitted and constitutes a violation of the Rutgers University Code of Student Conduct.

In class discussions, I expect universally respectful interactions. In examining our texts, there may be differing perspectives, disagreements, and debates. This is fine; through such dialogue comes greater understanding. When challenging someone else's perspective, though, refrain from personal attacks or blistering scorn. If someone makes what you consider an offensive or disrespectful comment, note that this does not absolve you of adhering to the iron-clad rule of respect in responding to it. If the instructor tells you to stop speaking, you must stop speaking.

I have frequently enforced a laptops-down policy. Social science research demonstrates clearly that open laptops are a distraction to both their users and those around them. They are also useful for looking things up and referencing, as well as taking notes. I remain conflicted on this issue, and we'll begin the semester allowing laptops, but I reserve the right to implement a laptops-down policy, with exceptions for those who might need them, if the classroom environment begins to feel adversely impacted by them.

Failure to abide by these rules, or other interference with the classroom learning environment, will result in a lowered course grade, or removal from the classroom.

Policy on Office Hours

My office hours are for you. Stop by with any questions you have about assignments, readings, classroom discussions, other pertinent topics, or just drop by to say hello. The only thing I discourage is visiting to cover material from a missed class; for that, consult fellow classmates. All else is warmly welcomed. I'm flexible on timing as long as it's after noon, so we can set up an appointment at a mutually agreeable time.

Controversial Subject Matter: This is a class about pornography, and we will read and view sexually explicit material. I can work with students who are concerned about specific material being upsetting or triggering, but ***if the sheer presence of graphic sexual content is unpalatable to you, you should drop the course.*** Of necessity by virtue of the topic, we will be reading, viewing, and discussing themes and imagery that some people might consider controversial or offensive. Indeed, this is part of the course's purpose: to approach these loaded matters analytically, investigating their social meanings. If you have specific concerns or questions about course materials, please contact me.

FINALLY: A NOTE ON THE PANDEMIC: We live in uncertain times. Returning to the classroom after so long on Zoom is exciting but might also be a source of stress and anxiety, particularly for those who have been directly impacted the most by the pandemic. I respect everyone's different and complicated feelings about all of this, but I expect complete adherence to Rutgers policy on things like masking. I will stop class, ask you to leave, or call security if necessary for anyone who refuses to follow policy, out of respect for your fellow students. We'll run this class as though things were normal, though I know they are not and will work with you and help as best I can if you find yourself impacted by the pandemic. We'll all do our best—overall, the Rutgers community has done so for over a year!

Tentative syllabus of readings

Week 1 (WEDNESDAY, Sept 8: NOTE THAT WE BEGIN IN AN OFF-KILTER WEEK!): Introduction: What is Pornography? What is Obscenity?

Week 2 (Monday Sept 13): The End and the Beginning: 21st Century, 18th Century

Nicolas Kristof, "The Children of Pornhub," *New York Times*, December 2020:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/opinion/sunday/pornhub-rape-trafficking.html>

Gustavo Turner, "New York Times Fights Pornhub With Emotional Pornography," *XBiz*, December 2020: <https://www.xbiz.com/news/256091/op-ed-new-york-times-fights-pornhub-with-emotional-pornography>

Pornhub (browse site): <https://www.pornhub.com/>

John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure (Fanny Hill)* selection (1748), Canvass

Commonwealth v. Holmes, 17 Mass. 336 (Mass. 1821), Canvass

Flash Press selection (1840s), Canvass

Week 3 (Sept 20): Comstock and Victorian America

Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, "Victoria Woodhull, Anthony Comstock, and Conflict over Sex in the United States in the 1870s," *Journal of American History* (2000) (Rutgers Library)

Anthony Comstock, *Traps for the Young* (selection on Canvass)

Comstock Act (1873), pp.598-600:

<https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=17&page=598#>

Week 4 (Sept 27): Contra Contraception: Obscenity Law and Patriarchy

Andrea Tone, "Black Market Birth Control: Contraceptive Entrepreneurship and Criminality in the Gilded Age." *Journal of American History* 87.2 (2000): 435-459 (Rutgers Library)

Margaret Sanger, *My Fight for Birth Control* (selection, Canvass)

Mary Ware Dennett, *Who's Obscene?* (selection, Canvass)

Week 5 (Oct 4): Stag Films and Gendered Regulation at Midcentury

**Paper 1 due

Mark Hay, "Porn from the 1920s Was More Wild and Hardcore Than You Could Imagine," *Vice* (2018): <https://www.vice.com/en/article/59k785/porn-from-the-1920s-was-more-wild-and-hardcore-than-you-could-imagine>

Stag films:

A History of the Blue Movie (1970): up to 1 hour 15 min mark:

<https://tubepornclassic.com/videos/147429/a-history-of-the-blue-movie/>

The Forbidden Daughters (1927, 13 min): <https://archive.org/details/TheForbiddenDaughters>

Andrea Friedman, *Prurient Interests Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945* (selection), Canvass

Week 6 (Oct 11): Cold War Sexual Politics

Andrea Friedman, "Sadists and Sissies: Anti-pornography Campaigns in Cold War America," *Gender & History* (2003) (Rutgers Library)

Whitney Strub, "The Clearly Obscene and the Queerly Obscene: Heteronormativity and Obscenity in Cold War Los Angeles," *American Quarterly* (2008) (Rutgers Library)

Roth v. U.S. (1957), <http://supreme.nolo.com/us/354/476/case.html>

Week 7 (Oct 18): New Right mobilizations

Perversion for Profit (1963): <https://youtu.be/OG-uhmtDweo>

Citizens for Decent Literature documents, Canvass

Richard Nixon, "Statement About the Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography" (1970), <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-about-the-report-the-commission-obscenity-and-pornography>

Christian Right compilation (Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, Phyllis Schlafly, Meese Commission Report, Donald Wildmon), Canvass

Week 8 (Oct 25): The Arrival of Hardcore

****Midterm exam**

Watch *Boys in the Sand* (1971), *Deep Throat* (1972)

Read collected reviews (Canvass)

Week 9 (Nov 1): The Antipornography Feminist Movement

Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (selection), Canvass

Catharine MacKinnon, "Pornography: On Morality and Politics," *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* Canvass

Gloria Steinem, "Erotica vs. Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference," Canvass

Week 10 (Nov 8): Antiporn Feminism and Its Critics

Text of 1984-85 Minneapolis and Indianapolis ordinances

Lisa Duggan, Nan Hunter, and Carole Vance, "False Promises: Feminist Antipornography Legislation in the U.S." *Women Against Censorship*, Canvass

Patrick Califia, "Among Us, Against Us: The New Puritans," *Public Sex*, Canvass

Week 12 (Nov 15): Queering Porn Theaters: Times Square, Newark

Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, pp.1-120**

Whitney Strub, “Can New Jersey's Last Porn Theater Survive Gentrification?,” *Vice*, June 2016:
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/nnkwyg/the-little-theater-newark-porn>

Week 12 (Nov 22): Sex-Worker Voices

Linda Lovelace, *Ordeal* (1980) Canvass

Annie Sprinkle, *Hardcore from the Heart* (2001) Canvass

Sprinkle, 8-minute clip from her film Annie Sprinkle's *Herstory of Porn* (contains explicit images): <https://xhamster.com/videos/annie-sprinkle-short-stories-2850017>

**optional: the entire 68-minute film is available for rent for \$5.95 at PinkLabel.tv, a venue established by queer women of color: <https://pinklabel.tv/on-demand/film/herstory-of-porn/> **

**optional: Nina Hartley, "In the Flesh: A Porn Star's Journey" **

Selections from the *Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (2012) by Lorelei Lee and Buck Angel, Canvass

Selections from *Coming Out Like a Porn Star* (2015): Betty Blac, Ignacio G. Rivera aka Papí Coxxx; **optional: Joanna Angel {a lead figure in so-called "alt-porn" and a graduate of the Rutgers New Brunswick Women's & Gender Studies Program!} ** Canvass

NOVEMBER 29 is on a Wednesday schedule, no class

Week 13 (Dec 6): Black Feminist Analysis

Jennifer Nash, “Desiring Desiree” (*Porno Chic and the Sex Wars*, 2016)

Mireille Miller-Young, “Interventions: The Deviant and Defiant Art of Black Women Porn Directors” (*Feminist Porn Book*)

Ariane Cruz, “Pornography: A Black Feminist Woman Scholar’s Reconciliation” (*Feminist Porn Book*)

Cinnamon Maxxine, “Porn Changed Everything” (*Coming Out Like a Porn Star*)

Viewing:

-Desiree West scene from *Sex World* (1978): <https://xhamster.com/videos/sex-world-1978-12332700>, from 30-minute mark to 37,

-optional: CrashPadSeries Episode 243: Cinnamon Maxxine and Amani Luxe, <https://pinklabel.tv/on-demand/film/crashpadseries-episode-243-cinnamon-maxxine-and-amani-luxe/> (14 minutes, \$5.95 streaming rental)

Week 14 (Dec 13): Trans Porn

Jeffrey Escoffier, "Imagining the she/male: Pornography and the transsexualization of the heterosexual male." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 12.4 (2011): 268-281. (note that we will certainly discuss nomenclature here!)

Sophie Pezzutto, "From porn performer to porntropreneur: Online entrepreneurship, social media branding, and selfhood in contemporary trans pornography." *AG: About Gender* 8.16 (2019): 30-60

Revisit Ignacio G. Rivera aka Papí Coxxx's short essay from *Coming Out Like a Porn Star* from a few weeks ago

Linda/Les and Annie, 2-minute preview here (renting the whole film is optional): <https://pinklabel.tv/on-demand/film/linda-les-and-annie/>

And finally, survey the Transgender section of PornHub; no need to watch any particular thing, but do a few brief samples, to consider analytically how trans porn is represented within a mainstream/tacitly heteronormative setting: <https://www.pornhub.com/transgender>

FINAL PAPER/EXAM DUE 10pm on Monday, December 20

Accommodation and Support Statement

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals with Disabilities: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS at (973)353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (e.g., illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to [University Policy 10.2.7](#) for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries: The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (e.g., broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.

For English as a Second Language (ESL): The Program in American Language Studies (PALS) can support students experiencing difficulty in courses due to English as a Second Language (ESL) and can be reached by emailing PALS@newark.rutgers.edu to discuss potential supports.

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. For more information, students should refer to the University's Student Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Relationship Violence, Stalking and Related Misconduct located at <http://compliance.rutgers.edu/title-ix/about-title-ix/title-ix-policies/>.

For support related to interpersonal violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance can provide any student with confidential support. The office is a **confidential resource** and does *not* have an obligation to report information to the University's Title IX Coordinator. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based line available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a support plan to address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Students, faculty and staff may contact the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-being: The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805. If you are not quite ready to make an appointment with a therapist but are interested in self-help, check out *TAO at Rutgers-Newark* for an easy, web-based approach to self-care and support: <https://tinyurl.com/RUN-TAO>.

For emergencies, call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.

Lectures and materials utilized in this course, including but not limited to videocasts, podcasts, visual presentations, assessments, and assignments, are protected by United States copyright laws as well as Rutgers University policy. As the instructor of this course, I possess sole copyright ownership. You are permitted to take notes for personal use or to provide to a classmate also currently enrolled in this course. Under no other circumstances is distribution of recorded or written materials associated with this course permitted to any internet site or similar information-sharing platform without my express written consent. Doing so is a violation of the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Similarly, these copyright protections extend to original papers you produce for this course. In the event that I seek to share your work further, I will first obtain your written consent to do so. Finally, as the instructor for this course, I have the responsibility to protect students' right to privacy. Classroom recordings of students will therefore be treated as educational records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the U.S. federal law that governs access to educational information and records. Instructors and students must provide notification if any part of online sessions are to be recorded, and such recordings cannot be circulated outside the course.