

Young Scholars in American Religion  
Syllabus Project

***Sexuality and American Religion***

**Anthony M. Petro**  
Boston University

**Institutional Setting**

With over 33,000 students, Boston University (BU) is a large, private research university. The main campus runs along the Charles River, from Kenmore Square into the Allston neighborhood. Although the university is now non-sectarian, it was founded in 1839 as a Methodist seminary, and the BU School of Theology remains affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The Department of Religion, which is located in the College of Arts and Sciences, was officially formed in 1966. For much of its history, BU was a commuter school, but the university has reinvented itself as a residential college over the last forty or so years. BU boasts a diverse student body in terms of religion, class, and racial and ethnic background, including a relatively large percentage of international students (20.6%). Many undergraduates come to BU from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, fostering a very northeastern feel to the university. My main appointment is in the Department of Religion, and I am on the faculty of the Graduate Division of Religious Studies (a collection of faculty that administers our MA and PhD programs in religious studies) and the Program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. I have several colleagues (in religion, sociology, theology, and history) who also teach in the area of American religion, though to my knowledge no one has offered a course on sexuality and American religion, and my own teaching focuses mostly on the history of Christianity (indeed, my official position is in "Modern Christianity").

**Curricular Context**

BU has a fairly large Department of Religion (~20 full-time faculty) and offers a broad range of courses in Religious Studies, with particular strengths in early Christianity and the history and philosophy of Judaism. We also have several faculty offering courses on religion and women, gender, and sexuality. Given this depth, I am pitching my course as an advanced undergraduate seminar, and it will have a graduate section. This usually translates to about 10-12 undergraduate students and 2-4 graduate students. I also designed this course so it can be cross-listed with the Program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. This will be my first course listed in this program. I hope that crosslisting this course will help attract more students who otherwise may never have considered religious studies as an option.

**Pedagogical Approach**

This course does not require previous background in religious studies, American history, or gender/sexuality studies. Very few, if any, of the courses in my department have pre-requisites, so this is not unusual. But I also underscore this point because I hope this course will draw a diverse group of students. Let me focus my remarks here on the narrative arch of the course. After a series of articles situating the study of sexuality and American religion, it starts off with a very readable, academic text, one that I think students will find compelling both for its methodology (qualitative sociological analysis) and for the topic (sex and religion among American college student). Shortly after this introduction, the course pushes students to begin

questioning key categories for thinking about religion and sexuality. Jordan and Baldwin start this push, by helping us historicize the concept of “adolescence” and its relationship to religion and sexuality (and to race and age). Then we jump full in with Halperin, Foucault, and Rubin, who provide a theoretical framework and methodology for thinking about the history of sexuality, desire, and sexual identity. Rambuss and Boyarin in many ways follow the queer studies approach that these scholars open up, but they also help disrupt their narratives of secularization, thus bringing “religion,” in at least two different figurations, back to the table. The course continues to unfold through thematic case studies, ranging from sodomy and intermarriage in colonial America to contemporary debates about sexuality and religious freedom. Course assignments include the submission of discussion questions (2 per week) and working towards a 20-page final research paper, which will allow students to pursue in more depth topics that come up in the course or areas of interest that we do not cover. In my department, 400-level classes should have a significant writing/research component. To guide students, I have included three components in the research paper: an initial meeting with me during office hours to discuss paper topics; a 5-page essay on a source related to their final paper; and then the final essay itself.

**Boston University**  
College of Arts and Sciences

## SEXUALITY AND AMERICAN RELIGION



(Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1981)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines sexuality and religion in colonial America and the United States. We trace the history of this intersection while also paying attention to theoretical tools scholars have used to think about religious and sexual desire, identity, bodies, ritual, and regulation.

We consider how religion and sexuality have changed over time, how they have mutually constituted one another, and how they continue to shape cultural and political debate in American society. Our course will survey a range of cases, with particular attention to Protestant and Catholic history, Mormonism, and Judaism, as well as to the history of same-sex and opposite-sex encounters, the history of sex and gender, queer history and politics, and the history of colonialism and race. Given the nature of this course, some of the materials we cover include graphic depictions of sex, including sexual violence. Students should be prepared to engage with these materials critically and thoughtfully.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students will have gained:

- Advanced knowledge of the history of religion and sexuality in colonial America and the United States;
- Critical understanding of key theoretical and historiographical approaches to thinking about the history of religion and sexuality in North America;

**FALL 2015**  
**CAS RN4XX/GRSXXX**  
Tues @ 3:30-6:30  
REL 404 (145 Bay State Road)

**Professor: Anthony Petro**  
Office: 145 Bay State Road, Rm 401  
(617) 353-3088 \* apetro@bu.edu  
Office Hours: Wed 1-3 (appt) / Thurs 3.30-4.30

(*Boston Evening Post*, 7 January 1751, Woodcutting depicting a supposed act of sodomy)



- Ability to analyze and present effectively this understanding in written and spoken form.

## UNDERGRADUATE COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade for this course will be determined based on your performance in the following:

1) Regular **attendance**, careful **reading** (expect ~200pp per week), and thoughtful **participation** in class are necessary to succeed in this course. You have two free absences, no questions asked. Each additional unexcused absence or tardiness will lower your overall course grade by two percentage points. Please note that missing class for most minor illnesses will not count as excused absences; they count toward your two free absences. I follow the [Student Health Services guidelines here](#): “SHS supports the developmental transition into young adulthood, which includes negotiating work and school demands in the face of illness.” Exceptions are made in the event of major illnesses that may impact your performance in class. Exceptions will also be made for absences necessitated by religious observance – though it is your responsibility to obtain class notes and make up any work missed. Please note that this course will involve a good number of group-based activities. In-class exercises will be designed to help us better understand complicated readings through means both scholarly and creative.

2) Weekly **discussion questions** – rather than regular reading responses, students will compile a weekly list of 2 thought-provoking questions about the readings. You are free to submit one question for each day of class (i.e., one for Tuesday and one for Thursday) or two questions for one day (though, if I see us trend toward only submitting on Thursday, we may need to revisit this policy!). In total, you should submit 2 questions for at least 10 weeks of the semester (thus 20 questions in all) and each will be worth 2% (for a total of 20%) of your overall grade.

Question sets will be evaluated for **clarity**, **creativity**, and **relevance** and will be marked *high pass*, *pass*, or *fail*. Your questions should address major issues raised by the day’s reading and should strive to treat the historical material in light of its particular context. When you compose your questions, make sure that they focus directly on course readings – in other words, questions should not reference texts outside of class or necessitate further research (beyond our own historical and analytic imaginations), though you are welcome to reference previous class readings. The best questions address the given work in its own historical and/or scholarly context and delve deeply into analytic problems in a way that helps open up our ability to interpret texts – these kinds of questions are text-centered and/or conceptually-based. In other words, they should not be answerable by a quick glance at the text and should not simply be factual questions; they should be interpretive questions that open to discussion and even debate.

Your questions may address historical matters (i.e., what life was like for figures in colonial Jamaica or Puritan New England) or address issues of historiography and method (i.e., how Richard Rambuss shuttles between historical and contemporary examples to say something about religion and sexuality or how historical monographs, archival sources, and fiction offer different tools for examining religion and sexuality). A question may entail a few sentences, to show how you are grappling with an important issue. For example: “*Author X’s perspective seems very alien to his time, and I’m struggling to make sense of it. He seems to think about religion in Y way; what events led him to think about religion this way?*” Or: “*I can see that the issue of Y deeply matters to this author in a way that it did not matter to the author we discussed last week. Why? Did certain social or political crises – such as Z – provoke her sense of urgency?*” In short, aim for substantial questions that may contribute to a clearer understanding of the text itself and of religion and sexuality in American history. Questions should be concise – no more than half of a page.

Please submit your questions directly to Blackboard by 8pm the day before the class for which they are intended. An entry for the week's questions will appear under the menu heading "Assignments," and submissions can be made directly from there. Students will be asked throughout the semester to raise these questions in class so as to provoke further discussion of the day's readings. Late question sets will not be accepted.

3) Students will work towards submitting a **research paper** on a topic of their choice. This assignment will come in **three stages**:

- a) First, you should **make an appointment** with me early in the semester to discuss possible paper topics—the absolute latest you should meet with me is week 6.
- b) Second, a **midterm essay** will be due in week seven. This essay should be 4-5 pages long and analyze critically a source or theme that will be relevant to your final paper.
- c) Third, the final **research paper** (17-20 pages) will be due on the day of this course's scheduled final exam. Please note that writing a research paper does not entail merely presenting or summarizing the work of *other* people, but rather drawing upon the work of others, in the form of primary or secondary sources, to offer your own perspective on a carefully selected, narrow topic. Here are two very useful websites for advice about writing a research paper: <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/academic1/short-research-papers/> and <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/658/>

## GRADING

20% -- Participation

20% -- Question Sets

20% -- Midterm Paper

40% -- Final Research Paper

## GRADUATE COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Please consult with the instructor to determine appropriate requirements for completing this course.

## LATE WORK

Papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for every day late. Questions sets must be submitted on time or cannot count for that day.

## NOTE ON CELL PHONES AND LAPTOPS

The use of cell phones, laptops, and similar electronic devices is prohibited during class. We have much ground to cover collectively, and the temptations of the Internet are too great for us all. Let's view class time as an opportunity to unplug for an hour and fifteen minutes. I hope the absence of a laptop might also free students from the burden of viewing class lectures as extended dictation sessions. Rather than taking down everything I say, try to focus on key themes and figures that we discuss in class and encounter in our readings. Please make plans to bring hardcopies of all reading with you.

## A NOTE ON WRITING

Unless otherwise stated, all writing for this class must be rendered in formal, academic prose, with correct grammar and punctuation, attention to style, and proper citation. Ideally, this means that your writing will be free of basic spelling and grammatical errors and will also work toward eloquence in form and style. Should I find myself spending too much time copy-editing your work, I

will deduct a letter grade, return the paper without commentary, and allow you 24 hours to resubmit a revised version. Some common mistakes include the failure to capitalize proper nouns, subject-verb disagreement, misplaced modifiers, and improper use of punctuation. In addition, you should avoid using contractions in formal writing. It is acceptable to use personal pronouns – i.e., “In this essay, I will argue that...” – but they should be employed judiciously. For this course, you should very rarely employ personal pronouns to index the evidence of personal experience. Rather, evidence should come from readings (primary and secondary sources) and from observations during your site visits. Remember: your analysis is your own, but your evidence, which you use to support your analysis, is public.

When you write, assume that your audience is intelligent, but in no way an expert in your topic. Provide the proper background necessary to draw them in and allow them to follow your argument. Also, do not refer to our class in your formal writing (i.e., “Since we read chapter four this week, I think ...” – consider: how would the imagined reader know that you read chapter four or what that chapter was about?). Finally – and this is crucial – it is your responsibility to understand proper citation. This includes understanding the differences among paraphrasing, direct quotation, and the synthesis of several sources – AND how to cite each of these writing conventions. Improper citation usually results in (often unintended, but still unacceptable) plagiarism, which is grounds for immediate failure and for disciplinary action. For further direction, you can consult the Chicago Manual of Style at [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

### **POLICY ON PLAGIARISM / ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

You are responsible for knowing, understanding, and obeying the Academic Conduct Code and policies regarding plagiarism outlined here: <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>. If you have questions, please ask the instructor.

### **DISABILITY ACCOMODATIONS**

If you are a student with a disability and need accommodations, please see the instructor and contact the appropriate program under BU’s Disability Services: <http://www.bu.edu/disability/>.

### **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

Consistent with the BU’s commitment to inclusivity, I promise to do my best to run class in a manner that is respectful of difference, which includes, but is not limited to, physical and mental ability, age, socio-economic status, religious identity, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, and veteran status. You are expected to be respectful of these differences in your conduct in class and on campus. As a sign of this respect, you should write in a way that recognizes diversity. In other words, you should at the very least strive to be mindful of metaphors that may have problematic religious, racial, ethnic, class, sexual, or (dis)ability connotations. Attention to the diversity of your audience will also make your writing stronger.

### **OFFICE HOURS**

I am happy to meet individually to discuss any matters relating to the course or other academic questions and concerns. My office hours are by appointment; to book a time, please go here: <http://www.appointmentquest.com/scheduler/2210030322>.

## REQUIRED READINGS

Eleven required texts have been ordered at the BU Barnes and Noble; these books are also available (new or used) from numerous online sellers. Additional assigned readings, marked (Bb), are available on Blackboard.

**Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini**, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (NYU 2003) ISBN: 978-0807041338

**Donna Freitas**, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses* (Oxford, 2009) ISBN: 978-0199747610

**Richard Rambuss**, *Closet Devotions* (Duke 1998) ISBN: 978-0822321972

**Richard Godbeer**, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Johns Hopkins, 2004) ISBN: 978-0801878916

**Lawrence Foster**, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Illinois, 1984) ISBN: 978-0252011191

**Mark Rifkin**, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (Oxford University Press, 2011) ISBN: 978-0199755462

**John Rustin Pagan**, *Anne Orthwood's Bastard: Sex and Law in Early Virginia* (Oxford University Press, 2002) ISBN: 978-0195144796

**Daniel Boyarin**, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (University of California Press, 1997) ISBN: 978-0520210509

**Joshua Gamson**, *The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music, the Seventies in San Francisco* (Picador, 2006) ISBN: 978-0312425692

**Amy DeRogatis**, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford, 2014) ISBN: 978-0199942251

**Tony Kushner**, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (Theatre Communications Group, 2013) ISBN: 978-1559363846

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week One

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Tuesday:

#### **Between Religious Studies and the History of Sexuality**

The Family Leader, "The Marriage Vow" (Bb)

Lofton, "Sexuality and American Religion," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia in American History* (forthcoming 2015) (Bb)

Jakobsen and Pellegrini, "Getting Religion," in *Love the Sin*, 19-44

Shteir, "When Pornography Pays for College," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*,

<http://chronicle.com/article/When-Pornography-Pays-for/147987/>

*Recommended:* Fessenden, Radel, Zaborowska, "Introduction," in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex*, 1-20 (Bb); Taves, "Sexuality and American Religious History" in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, 27-56 (Bb)

### Week Two

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Tuesday:

#### **Growing (Up) into Religious and Sexual Identities**

Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*

**Week Three**

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Tuesday:                   **Or Growing Sideways ...**  
 Jordan, "Degenerating Youth," in *Recruiting Young Love*, 1-27 (Bb)  
 Baldwin, "The Threshing Floor," from *Go Tell It On the Mountain* (Bb)  
 Halperin, "How to Do the History of Homosexuality," in *GLQ*, 87-123 (Bb)

*Recommended:* Stockton, "Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal," in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Bb)

**Week Four**

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Tuesday:                   **Thinking Sex / Sexuality / Religion**  
 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1-50 (Bb)  
 Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, 1-32 (Bb)  
 Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" in *Pleasure and Danger*, 267-293 (Bb)

**Week Five**

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Tuesday:                   **Catholic Genealogies of the Erotic**  
 Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*

**Week Six**

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Tuesday:                   **Jewish Genealogies of the Erotic**  
 Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, part one

**Week Seven**

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Tuesday:                   **Passionate Pilgrims**  
 Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 1-118  
 Excerpt from the Diary of Wigglesworth (Bb)

**Week Eight**

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Tuesday:                   **Sex and Civility, Take One**  
 Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 119-226  
 Fessenden, "The Other Woman's Sphere: Nuns, Prostitutes, and the Medicalization of Middle Class Domesticity," in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex*, 169-190 (Bb)

**Week Nine**

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Tuesday:                   **Sex and Civility, Take Two**  
 Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?*, 3-98, 233-316  
 Puar and Amit, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag," in *Social Text*, 117-148 (Bb)

**Week Ten**

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Tuesday:                   **Sexual Experiments: Shakers, Mormons, and the Oneida Community**  
 Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*



**Week Eleven**

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Tuesday:                   **Religion, Sexuality, and American Law, Take One**  
 Pagan, *Anne Orthwood's Bastard*

**Week Twelve**

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Tuesday:                   **Religious, Sexuality, and American Law, Take Two**  
 Pellegrini and Jakobsen, *Love the Sin*, 45-152  
 McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 216-281 (Bb)

**Week Thirteen**

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Tuesday:                   **Sexual Salvations**  
 DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*  
 Boteach, selections, *Kosher Sex* (Bb)

**Week Fourteen**

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Tuesday:                   **(Sexual) Liberation Theology**  
 Gamson, *The Fabulous Sylvester*  
 Johnson, "Church Sissies," in *Sweet Tea*, 182-255 (Bb)

**Week Fifteen:**

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Tuesday:                   **Post-secular American Utopia**  
 Kushner, *Angels in America*  
 Savran, "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How 'Angels in America' Reconstructs the Nation," in *Theatre Journal*, 207-227 (Bb)