How have socially constructed categories of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality changed over time? What roles have popular, literary, and visual culture played in constructing Americans’ attitudes toward gender and sexuality? And how have Americans mobilized notions of gender and sexual difference to justify (and challenge) inequalities of power?

In this class, students will begin to answer such questions by examining the history of gender and sexuality in American culture. Focusing on a wide range of cultural artifacts and social practices, students will trace the transformation of American gender roles from the colonial period to the present day. In doing so, students will explore the complex relationship between gender/sexuality and social discourses of race, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, and embodiment.

Required Books: Sabrina Strings, Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia; Michael Kimmel, Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era; Mary Louise Roberts, What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France; Martha Hodes, The Sea Captain’s Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the 19th Century; Samantha Allen, Real Queer America: LGBT Stories from Red States