Queer Studies: Theorizing Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Literature and Film

EGL 371.01 and CAT 391.01

Professor Jeffrey Santa Ana
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Office hours: Thursdays 1:00 – 2:30, 4:00 – 5:30, and by appointment.
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The class meets in Chemistry 126 at 11:30 – 12:50pm on Tuesday and Thursday.

Course description:
This course examines sexual orientation and gender identities with emphasis on contemporary queer cultural criticism. The word “queer,” in a political context, “denotes a political practice based on transgressions of the normal and normativity rather than a straight/gay binary of the heterosexual/homosexual identity” (David Eng and Alice Hom, Q&A 1). Many of today’s works in queer literature and film can be traced to the politics of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activism in the 1980s, as well as the writings of lesbians and bisexuals in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. In this course, we will read writings in the fields of LGBT studies, feminist criticism, and postcolonial studies to understand how these works express and challenge (or depart) from the cultural practices of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people of the past two decades.

To what extent, we will ask, do today’s queer writings and films theorize ways of both accommodating and resisting a normative gender and sexuality? Under what social and political conditions do these works challenge a cultural politics that relies on sameness and the exclusion of differences?

To address these questions, the course will explore a range of gender and sexuality issues primarily in recent U.S. literature and film, such as the simultaneous construction of gender, sexuality, ethnicity/race, culture and class; heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual projects; formations of gendered and racialized subjects in both domestic and transnational (global) contexts; ideological inscriptions on the body; gender and sexual transgressions; transgender subjectivity and identity; family relations (nuclear, extended, and affiliative); and inventions of matrilineal and patrilineal traditions, as well as resistance to these customs and norms.

We will also be locating queer studies as a field of knowledge production. The initial weeks will serve as an introduction and historical foundation for those students without prior experience in the field. By the end of the semester, we will be working at an advanced level with texts that use theory to open new ways of seeing—and representing—race, gender, sexuality, and queer modes of being in both a non-Western context and a globalized world.

This class is discussion focused. Although I will provide some brief lectures, our class will operate as a seminar in which you listen to others’ perspectives, ask productive questions, and articulate ideas with nuance and clarity. You must come to class prepared to discuss all readings on the days they are listed in the class schedule.

Note on subject matter:
This course centers on subject matter of current and controversial interest, and a primary objective is to have a classroom atmosphere that promotes full and free discussion, the aim of which is to provoke healthy intellectual discomfort and the critical inquiry that ought to be its consequence. The aim of
the course is consistent with the *Undergraduate Bulletin*. By enrolling in this course, you therefore understand and accept its requirements. You must submit every piece of written work in order to be eligible to pass the course. Moreover, academic policy and regulation at the university prohibits making any “special” arrangements with individual students who have problems with course materials (with the exception of a documented physical or learning disability). If any student in the course has a problem with any text or other course material, the student needs to drop the class before February 7, 2014, the last day to drop classes without a “W” (withdraw) on student records.

**Required books:**

*A Queer History of the United States*. Michael Bronski  
*Rubyfruit Jungle*. Rita Mae Brown  
*Transgender History*. Susan Stryker  
*Becoming a Visible Man*. Jamison Green  
*Angels in America: Part One, Millennium Approaches and Part Two, Perestroika*. Tony Kushner  
*Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Alison Bechdel  
*Funny Boy*. Shyam Selvadurai

**Films (to be viewed in class):**

*Paris Is Burning* (1991), a documentary film directed by Jennie Livingston  
*Southern Comfort* (2001), a documentary film directed by Kate Davis  
*Pariah* (2011), a contemporary drama film directed by Dee Rees  
*How to Survive a Plague* (2012), a documentary film directed by David France  
*Angels in America* (2003; clips to be shown in class), directed by Mike Nichols  
*Fire* (1996; clips to be shown in class), directed by Deepa Mehta

**Course website in Blackboard:**

I will post the syllabus and reading materials (articles, essays, and book chapters) in our course website on Blackboard. On occasion, I may include in our course website any visual materials or images for discussion in class.

The website for this class is located at:  
http://www.stonybrook.edu/~blackboard

**Work requirements:**

In this course, you will undertake a range of assignments that take several forms to bring course materials, media depictions, and everyday life into the class while you export your “book learning” and theoretical ideas outside, as you live in the world. This class provides you with a range of learning tools—through reading written texts, critically engaging with films, working collaboratively on a group project, and the option of assembling a creative visual project.

**Regular attendance and active participation in class: 10%**

As mentioned above, this class will mainly engage in vigorous class discussion. Your daily preparation and willingness to actively participate in discussion are central to the quality of the course. Come prepared to talk about the issues covered that day. If you are a shy or reserved person who does not speak in class, I may on occasion call on you to contribute to discussion. Class attendance is mandatory. Class attendance and posting a question on Blackboard are mandatory.
More than four absences will lower your participation grade; more than five will lower your overall course grade. Coming late to class repeatedly or leaving early will count toward absences. Attendance is required during all group presentations; see below.

**Dramatic performance:** When we read Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, you will perform one scene in the play in front of the class. You will perform the scene with the class members in your group project (see below). You will meet with your group ahead of time to select a scene from the part of the play assigned for class on the day that your group is to perform (see class schedule). The dramatic performance is required and will be included in your participation grade.

**Quizzes: 10%**
Occasionally, I will give a quiz based on the reading assigned for class that day. These quizzes are to make sure that everyone is keeping up with scheduled readings. They will include questions about plot developments, characters, and style. Quizzes may also include questions about assigned secondary readings (articles and essays). There will be four quizzes. I will drop your lowest quiz grade when I calculate your average. I will not give make-ups for quizzes; you need to be in class to take them.

**Group project: 20%**
We will conclude the semester with class members giving a presentation in groups consisting of 4-5 members. Each group will arrange themselves according to a particular topic or theme pertaining to gender, sexuality, and/or queer modes of being. Each group will have about 25 minutes to present their project to the class. Each presenter should have a role and speak individually to the class for at least 5 minutes. I will pass around a sign-up sheet in class for you to choose a group project for your presentation. Plan carefully with your group to contribute your own part that supports and relates to your group’s overall topic or argument. It should be clear, in other words, that your effort is integrally part of your group’s work.

The group project leaves you room to explore those aspects of the class that most appeal to you. You may choose to make a film that touches on some aspect of the LGBT experience or you may choose to conduct interviews of family members to analyze the issues faced by LGBT people. Your group may want to focus on one of the five course units or your group might agree to choose a particular topic that interests all of you: for example, the sexualities of Asian Americans, Latinas and Latinos, or Native Americans; the sexualities of various religious identities and communities; working-class sexualities; LGBT youth and high school; representations of LGBT people in Hollywood film (Walt Disney and Pixar animation studios); influence of recent and ongoing popular television shows (such as Looking, Glee, Orange Is the New Black, Girls, True Blood, Modern Family, American Horror Story, Mad Men, and Downton Abbey) or the influence of LGBT celebrities (such as Laverne Cox, Frank Ocean, Anderson Cooper, RuPaul, Margaret Cho, Chris Colfer, Rachel Maddow, Wanda Sykes, Ricky Martin, Melissa Etheridge, Ellen DeGeneres, Neil Patrick Harris, and others) on American perceptions of LGBT people.

You will also be responsible for connecting your project to any of the texts, films, and readings in our class. Think of this connection as a way to discuss any of the readings and films that inspired you and helped generate the topic of your presentation. You can and should include digital media or visual materials and audio recordings available in the Internet and in Melville Library (e.g.,
PowerPoint slides, YouTube videos, music recordings, films, etc.). Use these materials and digital media to communicate your complex ideas, analysis, and argument about your topic. I am happy to help you acquire or prepare any media equipment you may need for your presentation. Just let me know ahead of time if you need such help.

After the presentation each member will turn in a written plan (2-3 pages) of the individual work or contribution to the group project. For the first part of your written plan, indicate the questions you ask, the arguments you make, or any other information you feel is important to your part in planning and contributing to the presentation. Your written plan must be typed in coherent narrative form. Do not turn in an outline or fragmentary notes.

The grade you receive will be based on your own performance in the group and the quality of your own written plan.

**Take-home midterm (close analysis of passages from books; 8 pages typed): 20%**

In the take-home midterm, you will select six of eight passages or images that I will list from our class books and discussions. You will write a close analysis of each of your selected passages or images. For each of your selected passages or images, you will analyze important details that are relevant to explaining the meaning of the passage or the image. In other words, explain the meaning of the passage or image by examining closely its language, literary or visual devices, style, narrative and rhetorical forms, symbols and/or metaphors that help explain its meaning. **In your midterm, write close analysis of details, not plot summary.**

In total, your close analysis of passages will locate, evaluate, synthesize and incorporate relevant primary and secondary source materials in an 8-page paper that comprises a thesis-driven, interpretive essay.

**Final project: term paper OR portfolio of quotes and images: 40%**

For your final project choose (A) or (B):

**(A) Term paper (8 – 10 pages) with prospectus**

Write a term paper on any one book or film in the course. You may come up with your topic, but your analysis of the book or film must include focus on themes pertaining to the subject matter of the course (gender, sexuality, and/or queer modes of being). You must refer to secondary material (i.e., articles, essays, book chapters) to support your analysis of the text or film. However, do not subordinate your analysis of the book or film to the secondary material that you include in your paper. For example, if you are writing your paper on sexuality and gender roles in *Rubyfruit Jungle*, the bulk of your writing should be analyzing Rita Mae Brown’s novel with only brief reference to secondary materials to support your analysis of her book. Include a bibliography or Works Cited section at the end of your essay. Your Works Cited section must properly cite your chosen text or film and the secondary materials you include in your paper.

**Essay format.** All writing assignments, including the midterm exam and portfolio, must be typed and double-spaced on 8-1/2” x 11” paper. Use **MLA style format** for both your analysis and your bibliography or Works Cited section. Number your pages and use 12-point Times New Roman font. Staple or clip your paper together.
Late paper policy. The analytical paper must be turned in by the due date. I’ll make exceptions in cases of medical or family emergency, but in general I’m holding fast to this rule. If you anticipate a problem, I need to hear about potential lateness before the due date. See the Brief Style Guide for English Papers in Blackboard.

The prospectus (written plan) is due on Thursday, April 24 in class. In your prospectus, cite the book title and the author (the director if you’ve chosen a film), and write your thesis (in 2-3 sentences). Then, give a quote from the book (or scene in the film) that you’ve chosen to analyze in your paper. Lastly, analyze some details in the quote (or scene in the film) in a brief paragraph.

The term paper is due on Tuesday, May 13 by 3pm in my mailbox in the English Department. Note: hand in a hard copy of your term paper. I will not accept your paper through email.

(B) Portfolio (analysis of 6 quotes and images spanning 8 - 10 pages) with prospectus
For the portfolio, you must choose six images based on six quotes (a couple of sentences or a brief paragraph) from any of our required books in class. At least three of the quotes must be from different books and all of the images must be from different sources.
1. For each image in the portfolio, begin by citing the author and the book, and then write the quote.
2. Under the quote, give the image and then cite your source for the image.
3. Under the image and citation, closely analyze the quote in relation to gender, sexuality, and/or queer modes of being (the topics of our class), and then explain how the image relates to the quote. Analyze details in the image to explain how it relates to the quote.
4. You must have at least 2 pages (double-spaced) of explanation and close analysis for each quote and image. Staple or clip your portfolio together, and include a cover page that states your name and the title of your portfolio. You do not need to put your portfolio inside a binder.

Possible sources: you can choose images from newspapers, magazines, advertisements, the homepage of corporations on the Internet, movies, television shows and commercials, hip-hop, rock or pop music, videos or still on YouTube, etc.) This is your chance to be creative! The goal of the portfolio is to engage with popular media in order to draw connections between theories and concepts we are using in class and visual culture materials circulating in the world outside the classroom.

The grade you receive will be based on the quality of the following in your portfolio:
1. The quote (its relevance in relation to our class and the quality of your analysis).
2. The image (the originality and quality of the image, its citation, and your explanation and analysis of the image in relation to the quote).

The prospectus (written plan) is due on Thursday, April 24 in class. In your prospectus, give a quote you’ve chosen to include in your portfolio. Cite the book containing the quote properly. Then, give an image that relates to the quote. Analyze some details in the quote, and also explain the image in relation to the quote.

The portfolio is due on Tuesday, May 13 by 3pm in my mailbox in the English Department. Note: hand in a hard copy of your portfolio. I will not accept your portfolio through email.
Academic integrity:
Plagiarism on one assignment may result in an F for the entire course. University guidelines on dealing with plagiarism will be followed. Although I encourage you to read websites, articles, and books about the course material, you must be careful to avoid plagiarism in your papers and midterm exam. Plagiarism is using others’ ideas and words without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. Plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, is considered academic dishonesty and all instances will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit whenever you use another person’s idea, opinion, or theory; any facts or any other pieces of information that are not common knowledge; quotations of another person’s actual spoken or written words; or paraphrase of another person’s spoken or written words. Citing all sources and putting direct quotations in quotation marks are required. For further information on the policies regarding academic dishonesty see http://ws.cc.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/

DSS assistance:
If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services at (631) 632-6748 or http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: http://www.sunysb.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities.shtml

Course etiquette:
The use of laptop computers and cell phones are prohibited during class meetings. However, you may bring your laptop computer to class only if you are using it for your group presentation or to read the course texts in electronic form. Inattentiveness during class discussions will negatively affect your grade. If you use your cell phone during class, you will be told to leave and your grade will be lowered. This includes class meetings when we view films.

Tentative class schedule
Be ready to discuss all readings on the days they are listed below. I may change some of these readings to recommended reading. I will inform the class of these changes in advance.

* This reading is available in pdf format in Blackboard under Articles, Essays, and Book Chapters. (R) This reading is recommended only.

Week 1:
Tu, 1/28 Unit 1. Foundations: Queer History and Theory of LGBT People
Course mechanics and syllabus
Video in class: Paris Is Burning (begin watching film)

Th, 1/30 Paris Is Burning (finish watching film)
Nikki Sullivan, “Performance, Performativity, Parody, and Politics”*
Jonathan Culler, “Chapter 7: Performative Language” (from Literary Theory)*
Judith Butler, “Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion” (R)*

**Week 2:**

**Tu, 2/4**  
Michel Foucault, “We ‘Other’ Victorians” and “The Repressive Hypothesis” (from *History of Sexuality*, Volume I: An Introduction)*  
Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2; pp. 1-35)

**Th, 2/6**  
Sullivan, “Queer: A Question of Being or A Question of Doing”*  
Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Chapter 7)  
Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle* (up to p. 54)  
John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (R)*

**Week 3:**

**Tu, 2/11**  
Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Chapter 9)  
*Rubyfruit Jungle* (up to p. 177)

**Th, 2/13**  
*Rubyfruit Jungle* (have finished the book)  
Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”*

**Week 4:**

**Tu, 2/18**  
*Unit 2. Gender and Transgender People*  
Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (up to p. 89)  
Film in class: *Southern Comfort*

**Th, 2/20**  
*Southern Comfort* (finish watching film)  
*Transgender History* (up to p. 121)

**Week 5:**

**Tu, 2/25**  
*Transgender History* (up to p. 139)  
Jamison Green, *Becoming a Visible Man* (up to p. 88)

**Th, 2/27**  
*Becoming a Visible Man* (up to p. 122)  
Video in class: *Fight Against Discrimination: Transgender Rights Activist at UN*

**Week 6:**

**Tu, 3/4**  
*Transgender History* (have finished the book)  
*Becoming a Visible Man* (up to p. 197)

**Th, 3/6**  
*Becoming a Visible Man* (have finished the book)  
Johanna Vasquez, “Why the Transgender Community Needs Immigration Reform” (from *Gay City News*, 16-19 October 2013)  
http://issuu.com/downtownexpress/docs/101613_gcn?e=3532773/5289157#search

**Take-home midterm exam handed out in class**

**Week 7:**

**Tu, 3/11**  
*Unit 3. The Sexual Politics of Loss, Grief, and the AIDS Epidemic*
Film: *How to Survive a Plague* (begin watching film)
Video clip of Tony Kushner on *Angels in America* and *How to Survive a Plague*

Th, 3/13  **Take-home midterm due in class** (8 pages typed)
*How to Survive a Plague* (finish watching film and discussion)

**Week 8:**

March 17-23 (Monday to Sunday): Spring Recess

**Week 9:**

Dramatic performances (Groups 1 and 2)
Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Chapter 10 and Epilogue)
Michael Warner, “The Politics of Shame and HIV Prevention” (R)*

Th, 3/27  *Angels in America. Part One: Millennium Approaches* (Acts Two and Three, up to p. 125)
Dramatic performances (Groups 3 and 4)

**Week 10:**

Tu, 4/1  *Angels in America. Part Two: Perestroika* (Acts One, Two, and Three up to p. 212)
Dramatic performances (Groups 5 and 6)

Th, 4/3  *Angels in America. Part Two: Perestroika* (Acts Four and Five, Epilogue, and Afterword)
Dramatic performances (Group 7)

**Week 11:**

Tu, 4/8  Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (up to p. 86)

Th, 4/10  *Fun Home* (have finished the graphic memoir)
Ann Cvetkovich, “Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*” (R)*

**Week 12:**

Tu, 4/15  **Unit 4. Queer Race: Being Black and LGBT in America**
Film: *Pariah* (begin watching film)
Irene Monroe, “A Sister Outsider in *Pariah***

Th, 4/17  No class.

**Week 13:**

Tu, 4/22  *Pariah* (finish watching film and discussion)
Darnell L. Moore, “Black, Gay, and American” (from *The Advocate*)*
Sullivan, “Queer Race”*

**Unit 5. Postcolonial Modes of Being Queer**
Shyam Selvadurai, *Funny Boy* (up to p. 97)
Jim Marks, “An Interview with Shyam Selvadurai”*
Wednesday, April 23 at The Charles B. Wang Center
Marvels & Monsters: Unmasking Asian Images in Comics and Graphic Novels Symposium
The symposium will examine visual images of Asians in a variety of cultural forms (manga, film, video, social media).

Th, 4/24 Prospectus (written plan for analytical paper or portfolio) due
Funny Boy (up to p. 203)
Gayatri Gopinath, “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion”*
Film: Fire (clips to be shown in class)

Week 14:
Tu, 4/29 Funny Boy (have finished the book)

Th, 5/1 Group Presentations (1 and 2)

Week 15:
Tu, 5/6 Group Presentations (3, 4, and 5)

Th, 5/8 Group Presentations (6 and 7)

Tuesday, May 13: Portfolio or Term Paper due by 3pm in my mailbox in the English Department Mail Room (2095 Humanities)