THE CULTURE WARS:  
The Struggle Over Feminism, Abortion, and Queer Politics  
Since 1970

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The 1970s and 1980s were contentious decades. Anti-racist, queer, and feminist activists were changing the way people thought about love, sex, kinship, reproduction, and work. A growing evangelical Protestant movement used what it called “social issues” – their staunch opposition to abortion, feminism, and homosexuality – to recruit new members. And amid a new pushback against unions, against welfare, and against poor people, economic inequality was skyrocketing. This class takes an interdisciplinary look at the causes and consequences of this fight over the meaning love, sex, and family. But in doing so, it refuses the binaries that often follow this period – between “social” and “fiscal” conservatives, or between “red states” and “blue states”. Instead, the class takes a broad approach, studying the shifting position of the U.S. in the global economy, changes in art and knowledge production, the transformation of urban space, and new ideas about race and migration. In addition to considering scholarly texts on the cultural, political, and economic history of the period, students will travel to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to see the exhibit “This Will Have Been: Art, Love, and Politics in the 1980s”.

COURSE MATERIALS

3. Course materials accessed via Moodle site for WGSS 194-01
READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – SLOUCHING TOWARDS BETHLEHEM

Class meets September 5th and 7th

READ:

WB Yeats, untitled poem


Activities:

- Epigraph: The controversy over Andres Serrano’s “Piss Christ”
- Welcome and introduction to the course
- Introduce weekly response paper
- Point of departure: The Summer of Love

WEEK 2 – “ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES” PART 1: 1960s INFLUENCES

Class meets September 10th, 12th, and 14th

READ:


Activities:

- Finish discussing Joan Didion
- Watch and discuss clips of “At the River I Stand”
- Social movements and the politics of race, gender, and sexuality

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY***
WALKER ART CENTER TRIP ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT MONDAY

WEEK 3 – “ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES” PART II: 1970s SEXUALITIES

Class meets September 17th, 19th, and 21st

READ:


bell hooks, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression”

“The Combahee River Collective Statement”

Activities:

- Work through the foundations of gay liberation
- Work through the foundations of women of color feminisms

WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY

WEEK 4 – “ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES” PART III: THE CITY

Class meets September 24th, 26th, and 28th

READ:


Activities:

- Work through Delany’s argument about “contact”
- Understand Delany’s narrative about urban transformation
- View and analyze images of Times Square

WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY

WEEK 5 – “FAMILY VALUES” PART I: (RE) INVENTING SOCIAL ISSUES

Class meets October 1st, 3rd, and 5th
READ:


Activities:

- Monday: Discuss “This Will Have Been”
- Discuss the conservatisms of the 1960s
- Situate the emergence of “social issues” in their modern form

***WALKER ART CENTER PAPER DUE MONDAY***

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE FRIDAY***

**WEEK 6 – “FAMILY VALUES” PART II: SOCIAL ISSUES BEFORE THE 1970s**

Class meets October 8th, 10th, and 12th

READ:


Activities:

- Work through Baker’s argument about domesticity
- View and discuss clips of “Prohibition”
- Understand the shifting debate over birth control and abortion

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY***

***FINAL PAPER ASSIGNMENT SHEET HANDED OUT FRIDAY***

**WEEK 7 – “FAMILY VALUES” PART III: MARRIAGE PROMOTION**

Class meets October 15th, 17th, and 19th

READ:


Activities:

- Unpack the motivations for marriage promotion
- Understand how sexual desire works under the rubric of family values

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY***

**WEEK 8 – “FAMILY VALUES” PART IV: SEX PANIC!**

Class meets October 22nd and 24th

**READ:**


Newspaper coverage of the Jordan Sex Ring

Activities:

- Situate Lancaster’s work in the debate over “family values”
- Discuss 1980s sex scandals in Minnesota

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY***

**WEEK 9 – THE FAMILY VALUES ECONOMY PART I: FINANCIALIZATION**

Class meets October 29th, October 31st, and November 2nd

**READ:**


Activities:
-Understand Phillips-Fein’s argument about pro-business activism
-View and discuss clips of PBS Frontline’s “Money, Power, and Wall Street”
-Workshop on research methods for final paper

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY***

WEEK 10 – THE FAMILY VALUES ECONOMY PART II: WELFARE REFORM

Class meets November 5th, 7th, and 9th

READ:


Activities:

- Understand Murray’s theory of race
- Understand Murray’s theory of labor
- View and Discuss clips of “Take it from me”

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY***

WEEK 11 – THE FAMILY VALUES ECONOMY PART III: THE STRUGGLE OVER HIV/AIDS

Class meets November 12th, 14th, and 16th

READ:

David Wojnarowicz, selections from *Close to the Knives*


Activities:

- View and discuss video of ACT-UP demos
- Work through Wojnarowicz’s critique

***RESPONSE PAPER DUE MONDAY***
WEEK 12 – PAPER WORKSHOP WEEK

Class meets November 19\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st}

NO READING FOR THIS WEEK

Activities:

- Academic Writing Workshop on Monday

***FINAL PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE WEDNESDAY IN CLASS***

WEEK 13 – THE FAMILY VALUES ECONOMY PART IV: TOWARDS A NEW HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

Class meets November 26\textsuperscript{th}, 28\textsuperscript{th}, and 30\textsuperscript{th}

READ:


Activities:

- Place Moreton’s argument in context of the culture wars
- View and discuss clips of “Farmingville”

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY IN CLASS***

WEEK 14 – THE FAMILY VALUES ECONOMY PART V: THE CULTURE WARS AND CONTEMPORARY LGBT POLITICS

Class meets December 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 5\textsuperscript{th}, and 7\textsuperscript{th}

READ:


Angela P. Harris, “From Stonewall to the Suburbs: Toward a Political Economy of Sexuality,” *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 14 (April 2006).

Activities:

- Finish discussing Moreton
-Understand Harris’ argument
-Analyze contemporary debate over same-sex marriage

***WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY IN CLASS***

WEEK 15 – RECONSIDERING THE CULTURE WARS

Class meets December 10th

NO READING REQUIRED FOR THIS WEEK

Activities:

- Summary: building a critical framework for the culture wars

***FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14th at 5PM***

ASSIGNMENTS

CLASS PARTICIPATION
(10% of FINAL GRADE)

This is a seminar style class. Being a colleague – listening to and talking with your peers – is a primary learning method for the course. Therefore, you will be evaluated on the skill and effort you put toward being an active participant. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every meeting, and coming to class regularly is a foundation of success in the class. You should push yourself to contribute once class begins. Many of the texts we read are difficult, and none of us – including the professor – are expected to have all of the answers about the topics. Thus, you will be evaluated not for getting the right answer, but for merely contributing to the best of your ability. Discussions will take place in different formats – in pairs, in small groups, and as an entire class – to accommodate a variety of different learning and personal styles.

WEEKLY RESPONSE PAPERS
(30% of FINAL GRADE)

You will write a brief essay each week that engages with the written materials for the course. The purpose of the weekly response papers is twofold. First, they encourage you to be an active reader, one who identifies the core concepts in each essay and connects those ideas to the arguments in previous selections. Second, response papers allow you to be a generous discussant with your peers, as they help you begin to understand and process the readings before you arrive in class. Each response paper should include three elements:

1. A one- or two-sentence summary of the core argument of a text
2. A short paragraph that explains the one or two most important concepts in the text
3. A brief evaluation that either raises a question about something that needs clarification, or that connects the text to another reading from the semester

Your response papers should be no more than 1 double spaced page long, and follow all the guidelines for written submissions to the course. The due dates are listed in the weekly schedule above, but are subject to change. I will confirm in advance when each week’s response paper is due. For weeks where we have multiple readings, I will indicate which reading should be the focus of the response paper.

**WALKER ART CENTER VISIT AND RESPONSE**
(20% of FINAL GRADE)

During the first month of the course, you will need to visit the exhibit “This Will Have Been: Art, Love, and Politics in the 1980s” at Minneapolis’s Walker Art Center. A travelling curated show hosted by the premier contemporary art gallery in Minnesota, “This Will Have Been” uses a host of media to develop the core themes of this class. The show will not only help you shift focus away from academic writing and towards other ways of understanding the culture wars, but it will allow you to venture off campus and into the city.

Get together with two or three other students and make your way to Minneapolis’s Loring Park neighborhood. You may attend at any time you chose, but Thursdays are recommended, as the gallery is open until 9PM and admission is free. Bring a notebook to jot down ideas about individual pieces of art, about the whole show, and about your trip off campus.

Once you return to Macalester, write a brief, 2-3-page essay that focuses on one piece – or perhaps a couple of related pieces – from the show. Work on connecting the given work of art to the themes we have begun to develop in the course. Given that you will be visiting the Walker toward the beginning of the semester, the purpose of this assignment is to raise questions and curiosities and not to provide airtight answers. Questions you raise about an artist or a work of art will motivate you to read materials with more thought and interest as the semester progresses. A detailed supplementary handout – distributed during the second week of class – will help guide your trip to Minneapolis, will help you ask generative questions as you look at the show, and help you pull your thoughts together as you prepare to write the paper. A HARD COPY OF YOUR ESSAY IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON MONDAY, OCTOBER 1st.

**FINAL ESSAY PROJECT**
(PROSPECTUS 10% of FINAL GRADE; PAPER 30% of FINAL GRADE)

A final, comprehensive essay will help you draw out the core themes of this class. Your paper should focus on an object that interests you and that is related to the culture wars –
broadly conceived. That object could be a book or a film or a work of art. It could be a political organization or social movement. It could be a building or an urban space. Or it could be a historical event. Once you identify an object, go to the library and do some research on it, finding primary documents and/or scholarly secondary documents that deepen your understanding of your topic.

Then begin writing. Immediately before Thanksgiving break, submit a detailed prospectus for your final paper. The prospectus should identify the argument you hope to make about your object, include background section that describes the context of that object, and offer an annotated bibliography with two or more new, outside sources that provide information about your object. I will return your prospectus immediately after Thanksgiving with comments to help you sharpen and focus your final essay. One you get your comments back, begin working on your final essay. That essay should reference at least two outside sources, as well as at least two texts from class. A detailed assignment sheet for the project will be handed out in class on Friday, October 12th in class. A two-page prospectus is due in class on Wednesday, November 23rd. The final draft of your final paper is due via Moodle on Friday, December 14th at 5PM. The paper should be 6 pages long.

CLASSROOM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Attendance is required for successful completion of this course. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class every day. If you miss class more than twice, your grade will be lowered.

The role of the professor in this course is to provide a thought provoking, intellectually stimulating learning environment that will encourage you to take your scholarly experience in new directions. The professor is not a clerical worker, therapist, or police detective. Therefore, doctor’s notes, funeral programs, and elaborate excuses for missing class are unnecessary. All people get sick, incur strife in their personal lives, and have family emergencies. With this in mind, all students are required to regularly come to class, and to actively participate in class. Frequent absences, or class attendance without preparation, will have a significant negative impact on your final grade.

All written submissions for the class must be typed, and in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins. Do not add additional spaces between paragraphs, shrink or stretch the margins, or add extra spaces below the title. When submitting papers electronically, papers must be in Microsoft Word “.doc” or “.docx” format, or as a PDF. No other electronic formats are accepted.

Students absent from class should not expect the professor to review course content missed during the absence. If you miss class, contact one of your peers and ask for class notes from the day you were gone.
All assignments must be on time. If you turn in papers late, they will be lowered by 1 full letter grade for each 24-hour period they are late. No late response papers are accepted.

Academic dishonesty is strictly forbidden. Academic dishonesty includes the use of other students’ or previously published ideas or data without citation. All students are required to present any course document electronically if the professor or another student suspects dishonesty. Any incident of academic dishonesty will be referred directly to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Chair Lin Aanonsen as well as the Dean of Students office. Consequences may include failure of the course and expulsion from Macalester. If you have any questions about Macalester’s policies on academic dishonesty and integrity, follow this link: http://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/integrity.html

Accommodations for students with disabilities will absolutely be made. If you have a documented disability or think you may have one, contact Disability Services during the first two weeks of the semester. Disability specialists will establish particular policies for both the professor and the student to facilitate success in the class. For more information about services for students with disabilities, please visit: http://www.macalester.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices/

Out of respect for your peers and to make our learning environment as productive as possible, please turn off all electronic devices, including laptops, tablets, and phones for the duration of the class period.