

Advanced Seminar in Masculinity Studies: Embodiment, Identity, and Power

“Cheer up, Sandy, cheer up!” he would say when Sandy seemed most depressed. “Go into my room and get yourself a good drink of liquor. The devil’s church has a bigger congregation than theirs, and we have the consolation of knowing that when we die, we’ll meet all our friends on the other side. Brace up, Sandy, and be a man, or, if you can’t be a man, be as near a man as you can!”

~Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)

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Course Description: Far from a biological essence built in to male embodiment, masculinity is an inherently historical and social phenomenon. Diverse expressions of masculinity come into existence in particular times and places, and are conditioned by a larger structure of gender. According to masculinity studies historian R. W. Connell: “the concept [of masculinity] is inherently relational. ‘Masculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity.’ A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European or American culture” (*Masculinities* 1995). Connell’s thoughts on the mutually exclusive relationship between masculine and feminine gender point to one of the central concerns of this course. Throughout the semester, we will contextualize the cultural belief that there are solely two, oppositional sexes as a colonial invention, created in the context of Anglo-European empire. Our class will thus track the development of hegemonic American masculinity from the early twentieth century to the contemporary moment. We will question the concept of separate spheres, or rigid, non-overlapping social gender roles, and analyze how American racial hierarchy has structured the modern gender binary. Ultimately, this course will challenge the notion of a single, self-evident masculinity and rather explore a multiplicity of female masculinities, BIPOC masculinities, and queer masculinities.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize masculinity as a configuration of social practice
- Critique essentialist accounts of masculinity and maleness
- Identify the intersectional differences across diverse representations of masculinity
- Analyze aesthetic representations of male embodiment
- Identify the racial commitments of gender essentialism in terms of Western colonization and chattel slavery

Required Texts:

- Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)
- Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (1993)
- Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (1995)
- Judith Kegan Gardiner, *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* (2002)
- Marlon B. Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (2004)
- Nolan Cabrera, *White Guys on Campus: Racism, White Immunity, and the Myth of ‘Post Racial’ Higher Education* (2019)
- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)

Required Viewings:

- *Rosewood* (John Singleton, 1997)
- *Joker* (Todd Phillips, 2019)
- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (George Wolfe, 2020)

Course Assignments:

- Midterm Paper: 20%
- Final Research Paper: 30%
- Museum Assignment: 15%
- Sakai Quizzes: 10%
- Class Participation (synchronous and asynchronous): 10%
- Final exam: 15%

Midterm Paper (20%)

The midterm paper will be **3-4 double spaced pages** and will feature a close reading/literary analysis of a film or text (or both). You will be expected to make an argument about some element of the cultural text and provide extensive evidence drawn from the text to support your claims. Expectations, criteria, and due dates will be detailed in a separate handout. Overall, the purposes of these assignments are for students to critically and deeply engage with course content and make an argument regarding the significance of their particular insights and observations.

Final Research Paper (30%)

The final research paper will be **5-6 double spaced pages** and will also primarily feature a close reading of a particular literary text or film. Although this paper is chiefly a close reading of a primary text, it will also require you to integrate the voices of other scholars into your essay. As such, you must conduct outside research and identify at least two reputable, scholarly sources that are relevant to your paper. Read these sources carefully and closely, and determine how you might draw their conclusions into your paper. Then, properly cite these sources with MLA style citation and include them in a Works Cited page at the end of the paper.

Museum Assignment (15%) [see appendix for more details]

This assignment will require you to select a work of art from a local museum and conduct an in-depth visual analysis. As you make your selection, consider our central class themes related to gender, race, sexuality, and embodiment. Then, write a thoughtful, evidence-based essay that conveys your interpretation of how masculinity is being represented. Your essay should be **3-4 double spaced pages** and make a clear argument about the significance of your observations.

Sakai Quizzes: (10%)

Almost every week, you will be asked to complete a short quiz that will assess the material discussed in the readings and lecture. The purpose of these short quizzes (**10 in total**) is for students to practice close reading and close viewing, slowing down as they make their way through course content and actively processing the material. All quizzes will be open note with the lowest grade being dropped.

Class Participation (15 %)

Your final course participation grade will be based on three central elements: attendance, discussion, and preparation:

- *Attendance:* You are permitted **two absences**, no questions asked, without penalty. Absences may be excused only with timely, official documentation from the appropriate university office. For each subsequent absence, you will lose 1 percentage point from your class participation grade. Seven or more absences may be grounds for failure in this course. If you miss class for any reason, you are not excused from the assignments due or completed during that class period. Finally bear in mind that class will start on time each day; habitually entering the (virtual) classroom late is disruptive and will negatively impact your participation grade, as will repeated absences;
- *Preparation:* Preparation is not an abstract ideal but a series of concrete steps. Mark up your books: jot notes in the margin of the text, circle key words, look up words you do not know, scan interesting lines, brainstorm connections and questions. In other words, **read actively**, generating ideas for class discussion and your personal essays as you go. Adequate preparation means you can describe the situation, speaker, and basic argument for any given passage we cover in class; the basic plot and thematic developments in a segment of a novel or play; and the central cinematic devices and themes present in a film.
- *Meaningful Participation:* Active discussion in this classroom is absolutely dependent on adequate preparation. Coming to class with your books thoroughly marked and ideas/questions ready will help facilitate a more stimulating and intellectually exciting learning environment and assist you in confidently articulating your thoughts to a diverse audience. Everyone has 'off' days here and there, but I expect you to be ready and contribute to class each period.

Optional Asynchronous Participation: If you would prefer to participate asynchronously in class discussions, you have the option of completing **forum posts** on the assigned reading and submitting them by midnight before class. Each post should be roughly between **250-500 words** and offer your informal meditations on the assigned reading for that class period. Your forum post will then be integrated into class discussion during our regularly scheduled synchronous sessions.

Your participation in class is of utmost importance to me. If there are any issues I should be aware of in order to ensure your success in the class, please contact me at your earliest convenience so we can devise strategies to make the class accommodating for all.

Final Exam: (15%)

The final exam will consist of three sections: analysis and identification of specific quotes, short answer questions, and a long essay. The final will be cumulative and will cover all texts discussed in class.

Classroom Environment

Creating a classroom environment that makes all students comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas is critical. I value the opinions and perspectives of individuals from all diverse backgrounds. My goal is that all students' needs are addressed in this course and all perspectives are valued. I broadly define diversity to include race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation and physical and learning ability. I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all minority student groups. I value your input to improve the climate of my classroom.

Due Dates:

All papers and revisions are due by midnight on the assigned deadline and must be submitted to the proper place on Sakai. All class readings and screenings must be completed before the day they are listed on the course schedule, before the synchronous session. Finally, you are able to request one-**three-day extension** over the course of the semester, no questions asked. Students requesting multiple extensions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Grading Scale:

A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D+ (67-69); D (63-66); D- (60-62); F (<60).

I will use traditional rounding to determine grades that fall between whole values. Any mixed number with a decimal value of five tenths or higher will round up to the next whole number. (For example, 92.5 will round up to an A as a 93, but 92.4 will not.)

Unit 1: Masculinity, Violence, and Social Power

Week 1: “Affirmative Reaction”: White Male Privilege and Higher Education

- Nolan Cabrera, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: White Male Racial Immunity in Higher Education,” in *White Guys on Campus* (2019)
- Nola Cabrera, “‘The Only Discrimination Left Is That Against White Men’: The Campus Racial Politics of ‘Reverse Racism’” in *White Guys on Campus* (2019)
- Nolan Cabrera, “‘I Almost Lost My Spot to a Less Qualified Minority’: Imagined Versus Real Affirmation Action” in *White Guys on Campus* (2019)
- Hamilton Carroll, Introduction to *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (2011)

Week 2: New Media, Misogyny, and Anti-Feminism

- Debbie Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere” (2019)
- Kate Manne, “Threatening Women” in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (2018)
- Angela Nagle, “The Leaderless Digital Counter-Revolution” and “The Online Politics of Transgression” in *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (2017)
- *TFW no GF* (Alex Lee Moyer, 2020)

Week 3: Masculinity and Violence

- Nancy Chodorow, “The Enemy Outside: Thoughts on the Psychodynamics of Extreme Violence with Special Attention to Men and Masculinity” in *Masculinity Studies* (Gardiner 2002)

- Kate Manne, “Taking His (Out)” in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (2018)
- *Joker* (Todd Phillips, 2019)

Week 4: “Angry White Men” Past and Present

- Michael Kimmel, Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (2013)
- Gail Bederman, “Remaking Manhood through Race and ‘Civilization’” in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (1995)
- Gail Bederman, “Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and ‘Civilization’” in *Manliness and Civilization* (1995)

Unit 2: “Be as near a man as you can”: Race and Masculinity

Week 5: Race, Gender, and Sexuality at the Turn of the Century

- Marlon B. Ross, Introduction and Chapter 1: “Un/Sexing the Race: Modernizing and Marketing the New World Negro” in *Manning the Race* (2004)
- Michael Awkward, “Black Male Trouble: The Challenges of Rethinking Masculine Differences” in *Masculinity Studies* (Gardiner 2002)

Week 6: Jim Crow and “Unmanned” Black Masculinity

- Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)
- Marlon Ross, “Migratory Mobility and the Sexually Assertive Race Tract: Chesnutt and Pickens” in *Manning the Race* (2004)

Week 7: The Erotic Life of Lynching

- Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)
- Gail Bederman, “‘The White Man’s Civilization on Trial’: Ida B. Wells, Representations of Lynching, and Northern Middle-Class Manhood” in *Manliness and Civilization* (1995)

Week 8: Frontiers Masculinity and the American South

- *Rosewood* (John Singleton, 1997)
- Claire Dutriaux, “Racial Violence at the Crossroads of West and South in *Rosewood* (John Singleton, 1997)”, *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, vol. XVI-n°1. 2018.
- Sharon Patricia Holland, “Introduction: The Last Word on Racism” in *The Erotic Life of Racism* (2012)

Unit 3: Feminist Masculinity Studies and Female Masculinity

Week 9: Women's, Gender, and Masculinity Studies?

- Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Introduction" to *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* (2002)
- Robin Wiegman, "Unmaking: Men and Masculinity in Feminist Theory" in *Masculinity Studies* (Gardiner 2002)
- Judith Newton, "Masculinity Studies: The Longed for Feminist Movement for Academic Men?" in *Masculinity Studies* (Gardiner 2002)

Week 10: Female Masculinity, or, Masculinities Without Men

- Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (1993)
- J. Jack Halberstam, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity" in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* (2002)
- Bobby Noble, Introduction to *Masculinities Without Men* (2004)

Week 11: Lesbian Gender and Transmasculinity

- Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (1993)
- J. Jack Halberstam, "Lesbian Masculinity: Even Stone Butches Get the Blues" in *Female Masculinity* (1998)

Week 12: "B.D" Women and Black Butch Cultural Traditions

- K. Allison Hammer, "Just like a natural man?: The B.D. styles of Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, no. 23, vol. 2, 2019.
- Jack Halberstam, "Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper: Gender, Race, and Masculinity in the Drag King Scene." *Social Text*, no. 52/53, Autumn - Winter, 1997.
- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (George Wolfe, 2020)

Unit 4: "Let's Talk About Sex": Masculinity and Sexuality

Week 13: Queer Identity and Desire

- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)
- Leo Bersani, "Loving Men" in *Constructing Masculinity* (1995)

Week 14: Mothers and Sons

- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)

- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Gosh, Boy George, You Must Be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity!” in *Constructing Masculinity* (1995)

Week 15: Diasporic Identities

- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)
- Richard Fung, “Burdens of Representation, Burdens of Responsibility” in *Constructing Masculinity* (1995)

Appendix A:

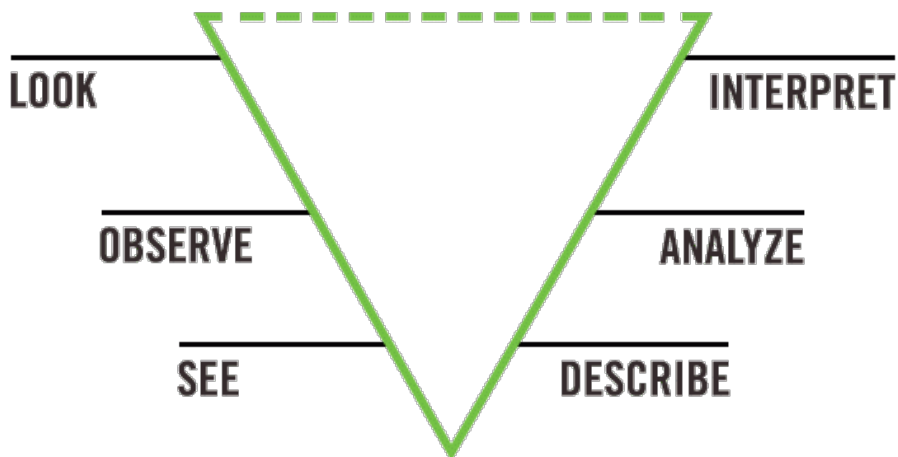
The Art of Seeing Art¹

The average person spends 17 seconds looking at a work of art in a museum. It usually takes much less time to identify an image. But understanding it? That requires slowing down and taking the time to see the details. This kind of thoughtful, close-looking helps us to see that things are not always as they appear at first glance.

The Art of Seeing Art is a process for looking carefully and exploring a work of art on a deeper level. Developed by the Toledo Museum of Art, Art of Seeing Art™ is a series of six steps:

1. **Look:** Looking may seem pretty obvious. But it is so important that it is worth calling special attention to. Allow yourself to take the time to slow down and look carefully.
2. **Observe:** Observation is where close looking comes into play. Observation is an active process, requiring both time and attention. It is here that the viewer begins to build up a mental catalogue of the image's visual elements.
3. **See:** Looking is a physical act; seeing is a mental process of perception. Seeing involves recognizing or connecting the information the eyes take in with your previous knowledge and experiences in order to create meaning. This requires time and attention.
4. **Describe:** Describing can help you to identify and organize your thoughts about what you have seen. It may be helpful to think of describing as taking a careful inventory. What figures, objects and setting do you recognize?
5. **Analyze:** Analysis uses the details you identified in your descriptions and applies reason to make meaning. Analysis is also an opportunity to consider how the figures, objects and settings you identified in your description fit together to tell a story.
6. **Interpret:** Interpretation, the final step in the Art of Seeing Art™ process, combines our descriptions and analysis with our previous knowledge and any information we have about

the artist and the work. Interpretation allows us to draw conclusions about the image.



¹ This material is taken from the Toledo Art Museum's program in Visual Literacy. They have developed a method called *The Art of Seeing Art*; source: <https://www.toledomuseum.org/education/visual-literacy/art-seeing-art>