

History 3394
Fall 1998
Sex and Violence in the Old South



Professor: Eric Walther
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Room: SEC 205
Time: MW 2:30-4:00pm

Course Description:

Gentility, civility, and the affair of honor—the duel; the exalted but helplessness position of the “southern belle;” riverboat gamblers; masters raping slaves and “plantation justice;” slave breeding; slave insurrection. This is what many people want in a course on the antebellum South. In fact, there is more and more good scholarship coming out on sex and violence in the Old South. Given their place in a slaveholding society, what were the roles of men and women, white, black, and native American? For English, French and Spanish women and men? What were the definitions on masculinity and femininity, and how did they change over time, place, and circumstance? How did they compare with the North or western Europe? Why were men/sons/fathers supposed to behave a certain way? Why were women/daughters/mothers supposed to behave a certain way? What happened to those who deviated from the norm? What did slavery do to gender definitions of African American men and women? of free black men and women? Why was the South so violent? How did slavery tie into concepts of honor and manly behavior? and womanly behavior? Did slaves have honor, in their own eyes or in those of whites? These are the sorts of questions we will investigate in this course.

Classroom attendance is critical. This course will operate much like a graduate seminar, in that student presentations and discussions of individualized readings will form its core, but geared toward undergraduate students; my lectures will provide context.