

**HIS 715: Topics in Atlantic History
The Atlantic Slave Trade
Fall 2014**

Time: Wednesdays 3:30- 6:20 pm

Classroom: Curry 331

Office hours: Wednesdays 1-2 pm and by appointment

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Course Synopsis

The transatlantic slave trade lasted for over four hundred years and was responsible for the largest migration of people in the early modern world. This course introduces students to the range of significant historical themes and issues that played out in this process, the major issues in the historiography, and the variety of primary sources that are available. We will analyze the transatlantic slave trade as part of a sophisticated economic system and as a powerful shaper of societies and cultures across the Atlantic world, as well as a brutal racialized form of human exploitation. We will also explore the pedagogical challenges of teaching this complex and highly-charged topic.

Readings

Equiano, Olaudah, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*. Various editions.

Harms, Robert. *The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade*. Basic Books, 2002.

Hartman, Saidya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. Farr, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.

Lovejoy, Paul. *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. Second Edition. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Mintz, Sidney, and Richard Price. *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. Beacon Press, 1992.

Rediker, Markus. *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. Penguin Books, 2008.

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Various editions.

Unsworth, Barry. *Sacred Hunger*. Doubleday, 1992.

All these books are available via a variety of online booksellers and have also been placed on reserve at the circulation desk of the UNCG library. Except for Equiano and Williams, please make sure you have the correct edition. Always bring with you to class a copy of the assigned weekly readings (book or articles).

Students who lack basic familiarity with the topic are encouraged to read one of the following early in the semester:

Lindsey, Lisa A. *Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Pearson, 2008.

Klein, Herbert. *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should have developed significant skills in:

- analyzing historical monographs for their conceptual framework, methodological approach, use of sources, and position in wider historiographic debates
- understanding seminal debates related to the study of the Atlantic slave trade
- critically reading and interpreting primary documents
- engaging in persuasive, thoughtful, and courteous discussion with their academic peers
- writing sophisticated academic prose that is clear, pointed, and analytically rigorous

Requirements

Graduate work requires the following, at a minimum: careful reading and deep understanding of assigned material; active, enthusiastic participation at all levels; pointed but courteous engagement with classmates; timely completion of assignments. As a graduate student you should make the most of every opportunity to develop your analytic abilities and to push beyond the limits of your current knowledge. Attendance is expected except in case of illness or extreme emergency.

Remember that, at the graduate level, you are reading primarily not for story or narrative, but rather for argument, approach, and sources. You should be able to identify the author's main argument; how s/he develops the argument; what kinds of sources s/he brings to bear; and how this work compares to other works in the field in all these areas.

All written work should follow rigorous standards of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and style. Every paper needs a clear argument/direction. Clear writing showcases clear thinking. Carefully edit and proofread everything you write. Rarely can a good paper be written in one draft. Graduate students should own, and consult often, the latest editions of:

Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. UCP.

Joseph M. Williams, *Style. Toward Clarity and Grace*. UCP.

Assignments and Grading

Papers: Students can follow two different tracks in this course: 1) writing a series of separate short papers; or 2) developing a full scale research paper. You should discuss the options and your interests with me early in the semester so we can decide the best track for you. Regardless, you must complete the following assignments:

Database analysis: Use the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) to research a specific problem or question and write up a 3-5 page critical analysis of what you find, including its implications and limitations.

Due in class on Wednesday, September 10.

Analysis of Primary Sources: Choose a small selection of primary sources from the material at Duke, and/or from one or more other collections of primary sources, and write a 4-6 page paper critically analyzing the potential and limitations of these documents for addressing a specific research question. **Due in class on Wednesday, October 8** (or 2 weeks after we visit Duke if the visit date changes.)

For both papers you will need to discuss your topic, sources, and approach with me. If you are following the research track you will address the same research question in papers 1) and 2).

Final paper: Students who select the multiple short paper option will write a 4-6 page meditation on the challenges of teaching the Atlantic slave trade in a specific, clearly defined pedagogical or public history context, drawing on/referencing appropriate material, both from the course and from additional sources. Students who are pursuing the research option will submit a final paper (approximately 15 pages) that continues to develop the primary source material they have been working with, complemented by appropriate historiographic material and analysis. **Due to my office by 4 pm on Tuesday, December 2.**

Presentations

Book Reviews: Each student will read one additional monograph related to the slave trade and present it to the class both orally and as a 2-3 page book review. Bring enough hard copies of the review for everyone in the class (two for the professor). The written review is **due in class on the day you present the book.**

Historiographic Analysis: Throughout the semester, during the weeks marked with an asterisk, one or two students will present the week's topic and lead the class discussion. You will do additional readings related to historiographic theme/debate covered in the reading. You will also write a 3-4 page summary and analysis of the material to distribute to your classmates. The written analysis is **due in class at most two weeks after you lead the discussion.**

Together, the written assignments are worth 75% of the final grade. Class participation and oral presentations will make up the other 25%.

Note: Due dates are the latest dates to submit written work. Professional historians who face multiple, conflicting deadlines often find that we must submit some things ahead of schedule. You are free to do so.

Schedule of Themes and Readings

(Please note that some scheduling adjustments may be necessary if the date of our Duke visit changes.)

Week 1 (Wednesday, August 20): Course Introduction

Week 2 (Wednesday, August 27): Overview of Major Themes

Reading: “New Perspectives on the Transatlantic Slave Trade,” *William and May Quarterly* 58:1 (January 2001): articles by Solow, Eltis, Nwokeji, Richardson, Klein et al, Austen, and Bailyn.

Week 3 (Wednesday, September 3): Mining the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database

Workshop. Bring laptops to class.

Readings: Spend several hours on <http://www.slavevoyages.org> to familiarize yourself with all the different aspects and features of the website. Run at least a couple of different queries to the database so you can bring specific questions to the workshop. You should devote at least as much time to this preparation as you would to reading a scholarly monograph for class. Following the workshop you will do additional work with the database to produce your first short paper.

Week 4 (Wednesday, September 10): Webs of the Atlantic Slave Trade*

Reading: Harms, *The Diligent*

Workshop with Kathryn Crowe about online sources 3:30-4:30. Bring laptops to class.

Week 5 (Wednesday, September 17): The Numbers Game*

Readings: Articles TBA

Week 6 (Wednesday, September 24): Visit to Duke (pending confirmation)

Readings: Articles TBA

Week 7 (Wednesday, October 1): Which Came First, Enslavement or Racism?*

Readings: Articles TBA

Week 8 (Wednesday, October 8): African Agency and the Impact on Africa*

Reading: Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*

Week 9 (Wednesday, October 15): The Middle Passage and Shipboard Life*

Reading: Rediker, *The Slave Ship*

Week 10 (Wednesday, October 22): Creolization*

Reading: Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*

Week 11 (Wednesday, October 29): Interpreting Evidence*

Reading: Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*

Week 12 (Wednesday, November 5): Evaluating the Williams Thesis*

Reading: Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*

Week 13 (Wednesday, November 12): Historical Memory and Legacies*

Reading: Saidya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

Week 14 (Wednesday, November 19): Fiction as Fact?*

Reading: Unsworth, *Sacred Hunger*

* Discussion to be student-led.