

HIS 715: Topics in Atlantic History

The Atlantic Slave Trade

Spring 2009
W 3:30- 6:20
Classroom: Moore HRA 3207

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Office hours: Thursdays 10-12 and by appointment (Moore HRA 2106)

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 Atlantic world. This course introduces students to the range of significant historical themes and issues that played out in this process, the major trends 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.
- Lindsey, Lisa A. *Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Pearson, 2008.
- 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.
- Northrup, David, ed., *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. Second Edition. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
- Rediker, Markus. *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. Penguin Books, 2008.
- Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Various editions.
- Unsworth, Barry. *Sacred Hunger*. Doubleday, 1992.
- These and other books will be on physical reserve at the library circulation desk. There will also be some articles on e-reserves, accessible via the course Blackboard site.

Learning Outcomes

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

- analyzing historical monographs for their conceptual framework, methodological approach, use of sources, and role in historiographic debates
- understanding seminal debates related to the study of the Atlantic slave trade
- critically reading and evaluating primary documents

Grading

Written assignments: approximately 75%
Class participation and presentations: approximately 25%

Unit 1: The Big Picture

Week 1 (Wednesday, January 21): Course Introduction

Reading: Lindsey, *Captives as Commodities*

Week 2 (Wednesday, January 28): The Webs of the Slave Trade

Reading: Harms, *The Diligent*

Week 3 (Wednesday, February 4): The Middle Passage

Reading: Rediker, *The Slave Ship*

Unit 2: Primary Sources

Week 4 (Wednesday, February 11): Crunching the Numbers

Readings: <http://www.slavevoyages.org>; articles on e-reserves

Week 5 (Wednesday, February 18): Documents and Records

Readings: Selected primary documents (on reserve at the library); articles on e-reserve

***** Visit to Duke Special Collections on Monday, February 16 *****

Week 6 (Wednesday, February 25): Autobiography

Readings: Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*; articles on e-reserves

Week 7 (Wednesday, March 4): Critically Evaluating Primary Sources

Readings: articles on e-reserves

***** Wednesday, March 11: Spring Break (no class) *****

Unit 3: Major Historiographic Debates

Week 8 (Wednesday, March 18): The Williams Thesis

Readings: Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*; articles on e-reserves

Week 9 (Wednesday, March 25): Which Came First: Enslavement or Racism?

Readings: Articles on e-reserves

Week 10 (Wednesday, April 1): African Agency and the Impact on Africa

Readings: Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*; articles on e-reserves

Week 11 (Wednesday, April 8): Creolization

Readings: Mintz and Price. *The Birth of African-American Culture*; articles on e-reserves

Unit 4: Pedagogical Challenges and Popular Representations

Week 12 (Wednesday, April 15): Teaching the Slave Trade

Readings: Northrup, ed., *The Atlantic Slave Trade*; Lindsey, *Captives as Commodities*

Week 13 (Wednesday, April, 22): Visual Depictions

Readings: <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/>; articles on e-reserves; films

Week 14 (Wednesday, April 29): Fiction as Fact?

Reading: Unsworth, *Sacred Hunger*

Requirements

Graduate work requires active, enthusiastic participation at all levels, deep understanding of the material, engagement with classmates, and careful, 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.

All written work should follow rigorous standards of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and style. Clear writing showcases clear thinking. Carefully edit and proofread everything you write. Graduate students should own, and consult often, the latest editions of:
Wayne C. Booth, et al. *The Craft of Research*. University of Chicago Press (UCP).
Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. UCP.
Joseph M. Williams, *Style. Toward Clarity and Grace*. UCP.

Assignments

Comparison: Write a short paper (7-10 pages) comparing and analyzing the three books we read in Unit 1. Consider the strengths and weaknesses of their very different approaches and critically evaluate their overall effectiveness as overviews of this complex, highly charged topic. The paper is due in class on Wednesday, February 11.

Analysis of Sources: 1) Use the slave trade database to research a specific problem or question which relates to your broader research interests and write up a 3-4 page analysis of what you find. 2) Choose a small selection of primary sources from the material on reserve at the library, and/or from the material at Duke, and write a mini paper (5-7 pages) critically analyzing the potential and limitations of these documents. For both papers you will need to discuss your topic and approach with the professor. These two assignments are due in class no later than Wednesday, March 18, but you are highly encouraged to complete at least one before spring break.

Analysis of Debates: Each student will research one of the historiographic debates and lead the class discussion that week, reading and presenting additional material as appropriate. You will also write a 4-6 page summary of the debate for your fellow students. The written summary is due in class the week after you lead the discussion.

Pedagogical Reflections: Write a short paper (7-10 pages) meditating on the challenges of teaching the Atlantic slave trade in a specific, clearly defined pedagogical context, and drawing on/referencing appropriate course material. This paper is due Monday, May 4.

Book Reviews: Each student will read two additional monographs related to the slave trade and present them to the class both orally and as a 2-3 page book review.

Each week one student will present orally a brief intellectual biography of the author whose work we are reading, and another will summarize how the work has been received.

For all papers, please submit a hard copy to the professor and also deposit an identical copy in the Digital Dropbox of the course Blackboard site. For all handouts, please bring enough copies for the entire class (2 for the professor). Plan to meet individually with the professor at least once during each unit.