

**HIS 715: Topics in Atlantic History**  
**The Atlantic Slave Trade**  
**Spring 2012**

**Time:** Tu 3:30- 6:20

**Classroom:** Moore HRA 3209

**Office hours:** Thursdays 10-12 and by appointment

**Professor:** Linda Rupert

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**Office:** 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.

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

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.

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.

**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 evaluating primary documents
- engaging in persuasive, thoughtful, and courteous discussion with their academic peers
- writing sophisticated academic prose that is clear and analytically rigorous

## **Requirements**

Graduate work requires the following, at a minimum: active, enthusiastic participation at all levels; deep understanding of the material; pointed but courteous engagement with classmates; 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. 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**

***Analysis of Source (two papers):*** 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 Donnan, from the material at Duke, and/or from another archive, and write a 5-7 page paper critically analyzing the potential and limitations of these documents. For both papers you will need to discuss your topic, sources, and approach with the professor. It may be possible to combine these two papers into one longer one. Both assignments are due in class no later than Tuesday, March 20. You are highly encouraged to complete at least one before spring break.

***Historiographic Analysis:*** Throughout the semester, two students will present the week's topic and lead the class discussion. They will research the relevant historiographic theme/debate in depth and do additional readings. Each student will also write a 5-7 page summary and analysis of the material. The written analysis is due in class at most two weeks after you lead the discussion.

***Pedagogical Reflection:*** Write a 4-6 page meditation on the challenges of teaching the Atlantic slave trade in a specific, clearly defined pedagogical context, and drawing on/referencing appropriate material, both from the course and from other sources. Be sure to discuss your topic with the professor first. Due Monday, April 23.

***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 for everyone in the class (two for the professor).

For all papers, please submit a hard copy and also deposit an identical copy in the Digital Dropbox of the course Blackboard site.

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

## **Major Themes and Readings**

**Week 1 (Tuesday, January 10): Course Introduction**

**Week 2 (Tuesday, January 17): Overview of Major Themes**

Reading: Lindsey, *Captives as Commodities*

**Week 3 (Tuesday, January 24): The Webs of the Slave Trade**

Reading: Harms, *The Diligent*

**Week 4 (Tuesday, January 31): The Numbers Controversy: From Curtin to the TSTD**

Readings: Articles; TSTD

**Week 5 (Tuesday, February 7): Mining the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database**

Readings: <http://www.slavevoyages.org>; articles

**Week 6 (Tuesday, February 14): Documents and Archives: Visit to Duke**

Readings: Articles; archival documents

**Week 7 (Tuesday, February 21): Which Came First, Enslavement or Racism?**

Readings: Articles

**Week 8 (Tuesday, February 28): African Agency and the Impact on Africa**

Reading: Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*

\*\*\*\*\* **Tuesday, March 6: Spring Break (no class)** \*\*\*\*\*

**Week 9 (Tuesday, March 13): The Middle Passage and Shipboard Life**

Reading: Rediker, *The Slave Ship*

**Week 10 (Tuesday, March 20): Creolization**

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

**Week 11 (Tuesday, March 27): Interpretation vs. Evidence**

Reading: Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*

**Week 12 (Tuesday, April 3): Abolition: Evaluating the Williams Thesis**

Reading: Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*

**Week 13 (Tuesday, April 10): Historical Memory and Legacies**

Reading: Saidya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

**Week 14 (Tuesday, April 17): Fiction as Fact?**

Reading: Unsworth, *Sacred Hunger*