

Howard University

H389 Readings in African Diaspora: Slavery

Spring 2012 T 4:10-6:30

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Scope:

This graduate course introduces students to some of the major readings on slavery. It does not seek to be comprehensive. Instead, it focuses on some of the key debates and issues concerning the origins of slavery in Africa, the nature of transoceanic slave trading, the experiences of enslaved Africans in the Americas, and the ramifications of slavery globally. You are expected to be familiar with the classic arguments: Herskovits-Frazier-Price/Mintz on acculturation; Curtin-Inikori on slave numbers; "Williams thesis" on British abolition etc.

Requirements:

There are four requirements.

(1) Weekly reading and regular participation in class discussion. There is a lot to read. Graduates are expected to navigate their way through copious amounts methodically. One course object is to teach graduates how to organize a mass of written material in preparation for discussion and future research projects. Graduates can access the readings on campus, through public libraries especially the Library of Congress, as well as electronically (Amazon etc.)

(2) Four commentary papers. Graduates are expected to write one five-page response paper on a weekly topic for each of the four sections in the course. These should not be book reviews but thoughtful reaction papers. What is interesting, persuasive, contradictory, strange etc., about writings on the topic? Each paper is due at the conclusion of each of the four sections. At the end of the course, students should have written four commentaries on the four sections.

(3) Leadership of one weekly meeting. You are free to lead class anyway you would like. There are only two rules. (i) The discussion can be as narrow or as broad as you like as long as it pertains to the topic. (ii) It should not be tedious.

(4) A short final task that will be assigned toward the end of the course and is due April 24.

This is the guiding quote for the course. A special prize to the graduate who can identify the author of the following: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested."

Readings:

I: African Slavery:

1. (Jan. 17) Kinship or Commodification?

Suzanne Miers & Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1977); Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (Chicago, 1991)

2. (Jan. 24) Business as Usual?

Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 1992)

3. (Jan. 31) Kings or Merchants?

Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port' 1727-1892* (Ohio, 2004)

4. (Feb. 7) Revelation or Cosmology?

John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, chapter 9; James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill, 2003), Parts 2 & 3.

II: Atlantic Slave Trade:

5. (Feb. 14) "Now, what I want is, Facts."

Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (Emory, 2007); David Eltis and David Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Yale, 2010); Gwendolyn Hall's critique in the *American Historical Review* tba.

6. (Feb. 21) Victims or Agents?

Sylviane A. Diouf, ed., *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Ohio, 2003)

7. (Feb. 28) Were Ship Revolts Frequent and Significant?

Eric R. Taylor, *If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge, 2009)

III: Africans in Americas:

8. (Mar. 6) Black Rice.

Judith A. Carney, *The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Harvard, 2001); David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 112, No. 5 (December 2007).

9. (Mar. 20) Ethnicity and Creolization.

Gwendolyn Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, 1992); Idem., *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill, 2005)

10: (Mar. 27) Sisters or Victorians?

Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and Whites Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988)

11: (Apr. 3) Slave Societies.

Laird W. Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (Cambridge, 2007)

IV: Global:

12: (Apr. 10) Expropriation, Exploitation, and Modernity.

Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, Marcus Rediker, eds., *Many Middle Passages Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World* (Berkeley, 2007)

13: (Apr. 17) Colonial Slavery and Top Dog.

Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London, 1998)

14: (Apr. 24) Not All the Abolitionists were Christians.

William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford, 2006)