

History 278: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Fall 2022

[Professor Lisa Lindsay](#)
with Teaching Assistant [Kaela Thuney](#)



Into Bondage (1936), by Aaron Douglas, National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection

Lectures: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30pm in Mitchell 005

How to contact Dr. Lindsay:

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Discussion Sections:

600 Thursday 5:00-5:50 New East 301

604 Friday 12:20-1:10pm Hanes Art 118

602 Friday 1:25-2:15 PMH/Hamilton 570

Additional information: The course website on Sakai contains the syllabus and information about assignments, as well as links to useful resources, ways to communicate with your instructors and classmates, and up-to-the minute announcements. Please consult it frequently.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course concerns one of the most tragic and horrifying phenomena in the history of the western world: the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Between the early 1500s and the late 1800s, more than 12 million Africans were forcibly torn from their homes and trafficked to the Americas; many more were captured and did not survive. Their labor and that of their descendants—extracted through violence and oppression—built much of the colonial Americas and generated enormous wealth for European and Euro-American colonizers. To make sense of what they were doing, Europeans and their descendants elaborated new ideologies, whose legacies are still with us. In short, the Atlantic slave trade fundamentally shaped the modern world—demographically, economically, politically, culturally, and more. But why would anyone want to spend 15 weeks studying such a grim topic?

Put simply, **studying the slave trade can fundamentally change your intellectual life**, in two ways.

Most importantly, it enables you to understand the origins of our modern economic, political, and racial order. If we want to understand how the US (and not only the South), Western Europe, parts of Latin America, and much of Africa got to be how they are now, we need to know something of the human commerce that profoundly shaped them. And once you are aware of this background, you will see the world in new ways and can perhaps even be inspired to change it.

A second reason for studying the Atlantic slave trade is that this topic makes us smarter. In terms of content, we have to grapple with the histories of four continents and roughly four centuries. Methodologically, we will confront both what historians have determined about the trade (and what is still in question) as well as how they have reached their conclusions. Our subject matter requires us to keep in mind that historical works are written in specific contexts that must be understood themselves. Finally, we will deal with some horrific truths about what people have done to others and how they have justified their actions. Thus, we have to see how people's understandings of morality have been influenced by their subjective positions and have changed over time.

By examining first-hand accounts by slaves and slavers, modern depictions, and analyses by historians, we trace the origins, expansion, and decline of the traffic in captive Africans in addition to its impact on four continents. We seek to answer, among others, the following questions: Why were Africans enslaved? Why did (some) African societies sell slaves? Which came first, racism or slavery? How many enslaved people were involved in this trade, where did they come from, and where did they end up? How were societies in Africa, the Americas, and Europe transformed by the trade? In what ways did enslaved people shape American cultures? And how did enslaved rebels and activist reformers bring about the abolition of the trade? Through interactive lectures, discussions, and a variety of written assignments this semester, you will have multiple opportunities to explore and debate the answers to these questions, learning about the slave trade while sharpening your critical thinking and communication skills.

In addition to treating the above questions, I intend to return often to three major content themes. First, in this class we treat Africa not as some undifferentiated point of origin, but as the home of varied and complex societies which must be understood on their own terms. Second, we trace the

historical contours of slavery, noting its similarities and yet important variations over time and place. Third, we explore the changing meanings of race and racism. I want you to end this semester knowing that race is neither an objective biological reality nor something fixed and certain. The slave trade and slavery have fundamentally affected western understandings of human variation, and these understandings—along with the relations and institutions that accompany them--have shifted over time.

To that end, this course is part of the [Institute of African American Research-Students Learning to Advance Truth and Equity](#) (IAAR-SLATE) initiative to engage UNC undergraduates in a critical understanding of race, racism, and racial equity, especially as they concern African Americans. All IAAR-SLATE courses include three shared reading assignments and two campus events to connect students across diverse classes. These readings are marked in the course schedule below; the events are to be announced.

GOALS

This course has **two basic goals**. The **first** is to help develop your knowledge about the origins, expansion, and decline of the Atlantic slave trade as well as its impact on four continents. By the end of the semester, you should be able to use historical evidence and knowledge gained from lectures, discussions, and readings to answer to the questions above. Specifically, you should be able to:

- identify and describe the significance of important events, individuals, and ideas in the history of the transatlantic slave trade;
- compare and contrast the similarities and variations in the slave trade and slavery over time and place; and
- explain how different societies and social groups in Africa, Europe, and the Americas participated in and were shaped by the slave trade.

The **second** major goal is to practice and refine the basic skills of historical analysis by (a) engaging directly with primary sources and (b) evaluating historical interpretations. You will have regular opportunities to explore how scholars have interpreted and debated different issues in the history of the slave trade, and you will regularly be asked to analyze the relationship between historical interpretations and primary sources. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- analyze primary sources and competing perspectives of the same event or phenomena;
- reflect on what a specific document can and cannot tell us;
- identify a historian's argument;
- critically evaluate a historian's reasoning, interpretive method, and use of evidence; and
- develop your own interpretation of historical events and change over time.

Additionally, as part of the IDEASs in Action General Education curriculum, History 278 can fulfill the following capacities:

Engagement with the Human Past

Students acquire knowledge through evidence about human experience in one or more eras of the human past and learn to evaluate, synthesize, and communicate that evidence, applying it to their lives in the present.

Questions for Students

1. What events, conflicts, and continuities shaped an era of the human past?
2. What distinctive kinds of evidence do we use to interpret and understand the human past?
3. How have people made decision and acted in light of historical knowledge?
4. How does the material and historical past survive in the present and affect our perception of both the past and the present?
5. What conditions and processes shape our approach to the human past?

Learning Outcomes

1. Develop knowledge of different spatiotemporal scales, patterns, ideas, figures, and events from the past.
2. Evaluate primary source material and/or other historical evidence of past conditions (e.g., behaviors, events, and social, cultural, economic, and/or political structures); assess divergent or complementary methods, materials, and/or methodologies in interpreting the human past.
3. Assess conflicting historical narratives based on evidence and methodologies.
4. Generate and evaluate arguments based the analysis of primary and scholarly sources.
5. Apply historical methods and knowledge to make informed judgments about the past and the present.

Global Understanding and Engagement

Students study and engage with global processes shaping the world and its peoples, including those beyond the North Atlantic region (United States, Canada, and Western Europe). They develop deep knowledge of historic or contemporary roles and differential effects of human organizations and actions on global systems.

Questions for Students

1. What forces connect and distinguish the experiences of peoples, societies, and human organization around the world?
2. How can I understand and compare differing worldviews?
3. What connections and differences exist between particular worldviews, experiences, societies, or power structures?
4. What ideas, approaches, and international sources allow scholars to compare societies?

Learning Outcomes

1. Classify and analyze diverse historical, social, and political exchanges that shape nations, regions, and cultural traditions of the world.
2. Translate among civic cultures, social values, and moral commitments that characterize peoples and societies, including those beyond the North Atlantic region.
3. Assess ways that political and economic institutions shape contemporary global relations.
4. Explain human and environmental challenges that transcend national borders.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

For most weeks of the semester, you can expect to attend two lectures (on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons) followed by a discussion section on Thursday or Friday. (Though these sections are officially labeled as “recitations,” I don’t intend for you to recite. Instead, considering them as “discussions sections” indicates that their purpose is discussion and reflection.) **Discussion section meetings will begin in Week 2.**

Lectures and discussion sections serve different but complementary purposes in this course. Inevitably, **lectures** will involve the presentation of facts and interpretations about the slave trade from your professor, although I will involve you in some discussion and activities as well. (In this COVID-era, I understand that students will occasionally have to miss class. For that reason, I intend to make an audio recording of every lecture, which I will post online along with the class PowerPoint.) Your **discussion sections**, led by the Teaching Assistant, will be even more interactive than lecture. Because people learn better when they involve more than one of their senses in processing information, discussion sections are designed to get you talking, writing, and moving as well as listening. They are also intended to involve you in the *practice* of history by interpreting primary sources (i.e. those produced at the time of the action by participants or observers) as well as assessing the various (and sometimes conflicting) interpretations produced by professional historians. To get the most out of both lectures and discussions, you must do the **reading assignments**. Please come to class meetings having done the readings listed for that day on the syllabus, and with access to a copy of the readings.

The **readings** for this class come from a textbook that I wrote, *Captives as Commodities: The Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Prentice Hall, 2008) and David Northrup (ed.), *The Atlantic Slave Trade* 3rd ed. (Wadsworth, 2010). Unfortunately, the Northrup book has become very expensive to purchase, so I have put pdf versions of the assigned selections on Sakai. If you have the chance to purchase a cheap copy of it, though, it would be handy for you to do so. *Captives as Commodities* is available for purchase at Student Stores, and copies of both books have been placed on Reserve.

In addition to these books, we will read articles and book chapters that are available on the course website (sakai.unc.edu) as .pdf files. Other articles are available on the internet. You can get to these sites on your own (see the addresses listed below) or via links provided on the syllabus on the course webpage and also through “Resources” on Sakai. Copies of these materials will *not* be placed on Reserve.

While gathering your materials for this course, please register to use Poll Everywhere, an interactive format that allows you to use smartphones or laptops to participate more actively than usual in lecture. I’ll explain more in class, but if you are not already registered for Poll Everywhere, please go right away to poll.unc.edu for instructions and to get set up. All students should follow the registration instructions on this page. You should NOT sign up directly at polleverywhere.com. Registration is free of charge.

OFFICE HOURS

Like all UNC instructors, those in this class enjoy meeting individually with you to answer questions, provide guidance, and address issues as they arise over the course of the semester. To that end, we have scheduled regular office hours and are available at other times by appointment. We encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities for one-on-one consultation. **Email** has its uses, such as providing us a quick alert when there is a problem with the Sakai site. For more complex matters, we will typically ask you to consult with us in person during office hours.

GRADING

I am glad you are in this course and I will do everything I can to help you do well. To succeed, you will also have to do your part. The best strategy for earning a good grade in this class is to *show up* to lectures and discussion section meetings, *keep up* with your readings and other assignments, and *speak up* when you have a question or an idea to contribute. Expectations for this class are intended to be transparent, so if they are not, please let a member of the teaching staff know.

Your Teaching Assistant will do all of the grading in this course, in consultation with Professor Lindsay. They will base your course grade on effective completion of the following assignments:

- **Map** exercise, due August 23, worth 5% of your grade.
- **Quizzes:** To prompt you to do the reading and pay attention in class, there will be short objective quizzes given on Sakai before discussion section meetings. They will cover material from lecture and readings and will focus on big ideas, events, or personnel rather than details. They will be open-book but timed, and once they are posted, they will stay available on Sakai for one week. Altogether, the 10 quizzes count for 25% of your course grade.
- **Participation** in discussion section. This includes attendance, preparedness, and contributions to discussions and activities. Your TA can be more specific about how she will assess participation, but it counts for 10% of your overall course grade.
- **Poll Everywhere** participation in lecture. At unannounced intervals, I will open a poll in lecture, as an incentive for attendance and to enliven our discussions. Your participation in these polls earns you 5% of your overall course grade. You will not be able to make up missed polls, but I intend to drop at least one poll grade for the entire class.
- Mid-term **essay** of about 4-6 pages (1000-1500 words), due September 27, worth 15% of your grade. The point of this essay is to synthesize and demonstrate your mastery of the major insights from the class so far. Instructions will be posted on Sakai.
- A 6-8 page (1500-2000 word) **research paper** on a topic of your choice (approved by your TA). The paper should make use of at least one primary source, such as a memoir by a participant in the slave trade, informed by at least two secondary sources (which may be on our syllabus). Instructions are posted on Sakai. A brief prospectus outlining the sources you plan to use and the issues you plan to explore must be submitted to your TA by November 3. A rough draft is mandatory and must be brought to your discussion section in Week 14 (Nov. 17-18). The paper is due by **noon on Monday, November 21** and is worth 20% of your grade. Deadlines are firm:

lateness will result in a reduction of your grade. Also, please be aware that all suspected cases of plagiarism will be turned over to the Honor Court for assessment.

- **Final exam** on Saturday, December 3 at 4:00pm, worth 20% of the course grade.

Writing is essential. The official policy of the College of Arts and Sciences specifies that “Instructors should help students realize the integral relationship between thinking clearly and writing clearly.... Faculty in all disciplines should require their students to write well.” Here’s how your TA and I will evaluate (i.e. grade) your writing:

- Focus (does the writing deal with the problem or question?)
- Evidence (does it support its position with adequate information?)
- Coherence (does the argument make sense logically?)
- Scope (does it deal with all aspects of the question?)
- Mechanics (is your writing clear and grammatical, so that your points can be understood?)

RESOURCES

The **UNC Learning Center** is a great resource both for students who are struggling in their courses and for those who want to be proactive and develop sound study practices to prevent falling behind. They offer individual consultations, peer tutoring, academic coaching, test prep programming, study skills workshops, and peer study groups. If you think you might benefit from their services, please visit them in SASB North or see their [website](#) to set up an appointment. The **Writing Center** is located in the Student and Academic Services Building and offers personalized writing consultations as well as a variety of other resources. You do not need a complete draft of your assignment to visit; they can help you at any stage! You can chat with someone in the writing center or set up an appointment on their [website](#).

UNC facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability, or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs, and activities. Accommodations are determined through the **Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS)** for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the [ARS Website](#) for contact information or email ars@unc.edu.

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their [website](#) or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

Any student who is suffering discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of **Title IX Compliance** (Adrienne Allison – Adrienne.allison@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

HONORABLE AND COURTEOUS BEHAVIOR

[THE HONOR CODE](#): *It shall be the responsibility of every student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to obey and to support the enforcement of the Honor Code, which prohibits lying, cheating, or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University, student, or academic personnel acting in an official capacity.*

I encourage you to study together; however, you are bound by the Honor Code in taking exams and in writing your essays. Please consult with me if you have any questions about the Honor Code.

THE CAMPUS CODE: It shall be the further responsibility of every student to abide by the Campus Code; namely, to conduct oneself so as not to impair significantly the welfare or the educational opportunities of others in the University community.

The Campus Code asks us to be courteous to each other.

Courtesy during Classes: Please be considerate of your classmates and instructors as best you can. This means doing what you can to minimize distractions and maximize attention. **Please turn off all cell phones and keep them off your desk.** Finally, you are on your honor not to open windows on your computer other than the Power Point, documents, and other materials associated with our class. In fact, I encourage you to take notes by hand, which has been correlated with better learning outcomes than typing notes (see a [summary](#) of this). I will post an outline of the lecture on Sakai before each class meeting; I will also post the class PowerPoints after class. It may be helpful to you to print the outline and write your notes directly onto your hard copy; you can also of course do this electronically.

Courtesy in Debate: Disagreement is an important part of intellectual discussion and a liberal education. Reasoned debate is a useful way of raising questions, evaluating evidence, and considering the validity of assumptions. Therefore, you should expect to disagree with the ideas or opinions of others, especially in your discussion sections. Please always disagree in a respectful manner and with an open mind, with the goal of developing more complete and compelling understandings of the issues at stake. Treat others as you would like to be treated; and if comments or dynamics in class make you feel uncomfortable or silenced, please let a member of the teaching team know.

Deadlines: In the event that you cannot turn in an assignment on the due date, you must request an extension your TA before the date of the assignment. Unexcused late papers will generally be marked down one grade increment (A to A- to B+, etc.) for each day past the due date.

SCHEDULE OF COURSE MEETINGS AND READINGS

Please note: Each "week" is conceptualized as "Tuesday lecture, Thursday lecture, and discussion section." The instructor reserves the right to change this schedule as necessary and with advance warning.

Overview and Background of the Slave Trade

In the first two weeks, I will introduce the course and give a broad overview of the slave trade based on compiled statistics. Then we will examine worldwide slavery before 1492, what West Africa was like before the slave trade, the initial contacts between Europeans and Africans, and the emergence of the slavery-based “plantation complex.”

Weeks 1-2: Introduction and Background

Tu 8/16: Introduction to the Course

[Dizzy Gillespie, “Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac”](#)

Th 8/18: The Numbers and Overall Structure of the Slave Trade

- Read Lindsay, *Captives as Commodities* (hereafter “*Captives*”), pp. 1-10
- Explore the website, *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (<http://slavevoyages.org>). Begin with the introductory maps, to understand the volume of the slave trade, the primary African and American regions involved, and the trade’s overall patterns. Then, go to the database itself and use the various search features to explore different variables and ways of displaying the results. Conduct your own search and select an individual voyage to focus on. Finally, take a look at the “Estimates” section, noting how this differs from the listing of individual voyages. Be prepared to discuss your findings in class.
- Read on Sakai (under “Resources—Readings,” and hereafter noted as S) the 1-page excerpt from Randy M. Browne and John Wood Sweet, “Florence Hall’s ‘Memoirs’: Finding African Women in the Transatlantic Slave Trade,” *Slavery and Abolition* 37, 1 (2016): 206-21.

No Discussion Sections the First Week

Tu 8/23: European Slavery before 1492

- *Captives*, pp. 10-14
- **Map assignment due** to your TA by class time (find this assignment on Sakai, under “Resources” and then “Assignments”)

Th 8/25: Introduction to Western Africa

- S: Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch. 3: “Africa and the Slave Trade”

Th, F (8/25-26) Discussion Section #1: Early Modern Slavery

- Introductions
- Read on Sakai: Kathryn Walbert, “Reading Primary Sources: An Introduction for Students”
- Read, analyze, and be ready to discuss the following reading on Sakai: excerpt from Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*

Consider: What do you learn about 14th century slavery in different parts of West Africa from this account? What was Ibn Batutta’s attitude toward slavery? What do you think explains his attitude?

The First Two Centuries of the Slave Trade

The period from roughly 1500 to the early 1700s saw the foundation of the Atlantic slave system. Yet in many ways New World slavery during this era differed from our typical notions of plantation-style bonded labor. During the next four weeks, we will examine the emergence of labor demand in the Americas and the developments in Africa related to filling that demand. We will also look at the early years of the European slaving business. Finally, we will examine culture and resistance of the enslaved during these “charter generations.”

Week 3: Beginnings

Tu 8/30: The Maritime Revolution; or Christopher Columbus Goes to Africa

- *Captives*, pp. 14-21
- S: “The Pope grants to the Portuguese a monopoly of trade with Africa,” in *Africa and the West: A Documentary History from the Slave Trade to Independence*, ed. William H. Worger et al (2001), 13-16.

Th 9/1: How and Why did African slavery come to the Americas?

- *Captives*, pp. 22-30
- Explore the [images by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala](#) from his *First New Chronicle and Good Government* (1600-1615). (See some background [here](#).) What can you infer from these images about African slavery in early colonial Peru?

Th, F (9/1-2) Discussion #2: Early Portuguese Slaving in Africa

- S: Gomes Eannes de Azurara, “The Beginnings of the Portuguese-African Slave Trade in the Fifteenth Century, as Described by the Chronicler Gomes Eannes de Azurara,” in *Children of God’s Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*, ed. Robert Edgar Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 5–11.
- S: *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. and trans. G.R. Crone (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1937), 34-61.

Consider: Gomes Eannes de Azurara and Cadamosto provide two important chronicles of early Portuguese expeditions along the Atlantic coast of Africa. In their accounts, written in the 1450s, they both discuss the process of acquiring captives. Compare their strategies for acquiring captives and their justifications for slaving. To what extent are their observations about slavery and religion compatible with the papal bull we discussed on Tuesday? What might explain the differences among these texts? What do these documents suggest about the relationship between Christianity and slavery in the 15th century?

Weeks 4-5: More Africans and More Europeans Enter the Trade

Tu 9/6: No Class – Well-Being Day

But take the time to look at this article, part of the IAAR-SLATE initiative: [“Historical Foundations of Race.”](#) This selection was made for the central narrative of the essay, not necessarily the videos, sidebars, links, discussion questions, etc. that accompany it. This is a quick overview of material that we will be dealing with all semester long in this class.

Th 9/8: Why did Africans sell slaves? General Answers

- S: John Thornton, “Africa and the Africans,” in *Slavery*, edited by S. Engerman, S. Drescher, and R. Paquette (2001), pp. 54-56
- John Hawkins, “Attempts to Raid for Slaves,” in *Captives*, 79-80

Th, F (9/8-9) Discussion #3: Slavery in Africa

- S: John K. Thornton and Linda M. Heywood, “The Treason Trial of Dom Pedro Nkanga a Mvemba against Dom Diogo, King of Kongo, 1550,” in *Afro-Latino Voices: Narratives from the Early Modern Ibero-Atlantic World, 1550-1812*, ed. Leo Garofalo and Kathryn J. McKnight (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 2-29.

Consider: What problems did Dom Pedro face and how did he respond? What can you infer from the challenges he faced about the opportunities and difficulties that the slave trade created for African leaders? How does this reading help us to understand why some African leaders participated in the trans-Atlantic slave trade?

Tu 9/13: Why did Africans sell slaves? Specifics

- *Captives*, pp. 54-65
- Letter from Afonso I of Kongo to João III of Portugal, 1526 in *Captives*, pp. 78-79

Th 9/15: Beyond Pocahontas: Servants, Slaves, and the Sugar Revolution in the English Colonies

- *Captives*, pp. 30-34

Th, F (9/15-16): Discussion #4: Why African Slaves?

- In anticipation of this week’s reading assignment and discussion, read <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/history/>, paying special attention to the parts about historiographical essays. Then read (and plan to use) https://history.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/historiography_template.pdf.
- S: Read selections by Williams, Eltis, and Davis in Northrup (ed.), *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 1-20, organizing your notes along the lines in the “historiography template.”
- *Captives*, pp. 41-47

Consider: What is the major question that these three historians attempt to answer? How do their answers compare to one another? What do you think accounts for the differences between their interpretations? Which reading do you find the most persuasive and why?

Week 6: Slavery, Race, and Culture in the New World

Tu 9/20: Cultures of Slavery in the “Charter Generations”

- S: Ira Berlin, excerpt from “Charter Generations,” in *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (2003), pp. 20-31 and 36-39

Th 9/22: Runaways and Resistance in the “Charter Generations”

- S: Richard Price, “Maroons and their Communities,” in Gad Heuman and James Walvin, *The Slavery Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 608-625

T, F (9/22-23) *Discussion #5: Cultural Transformations in the Colonial Americas*

- S: Sara Vincuña Guengerich, “The Witchcraft Trials of Paula de Eguiluz, a Black Woman, in Cartagena de Indias, 1620-1636,” in McKnight and Garofalo, eds., *Afro-Latino Voices*, 175-193.

Consider: What was Paula de Equiluz accused of doing? How did she respond to those accusations? What evidence is there about the extent to which the cultural traditions on which she was drawing were African, European or Indian in origin? To what extent does this trial record support or contradict Berlin’s claims about slavery and culture during the “charter generations”?

Weeks 7-8: The Plantation Generations

Tu 9/27: No Class – **midterm essay due by 5:00pm**

The Plantation Generations

We'll now devote three and a half weeks to studying the peak years of the Atlantic slave trade, roughly during the 1700s and into the 1800s. Far more enslaved people were brought from Africa to the Americas during this century than during the previous 200 years, and, as we will see, slavery during this period was at its most rigid and oppressive. We will look not only at the plantation system in the Americas, but at the vast commercial networks based in Europe and Africa that supplied millions of people to it. Primary sources from this period tell us of the conditions for the enslaved as well as how they coped with them.

Th 9/29: The Plantation Generations; or the Slave Trade at its Peak

- S: Berlin, “Introduction: The Plantation Generations,” in *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1988), pp. 93-108
- *Captives*, pp. 34-40

No Discussion Sections – Midterm Break

But take this opportunity to read, for the IAAR-SLATE Initiative, [“Legendborn + Ledgendmaking.”](#)

Tu 10/4: Slave Trading as a European Business

- *Captives*, 113-14

- Examine the document, locating the places named on your map from earlier in the semester: [“The Royal African Company Trades for Commodities Along the West African Coast”](#) (1672) (or the [transcript](#))

Th 10/6: Enslavement in 18th Century Africa

- *Captives*, pp. 65-74
- S: Mungo Park, “West Africa in the 1790s,” in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 28-34

Th, F (10/6-7): Discussion #6: Legacies of British Slave Ownership

- Read and make sure you understand the [Legacies of British Slave-Ownership](#) project, then experiment with the database until you come up with a search that produces results you find interesting.
- Background information and more is at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zw8dq6f>.
- Be prepared to describe the search you created and the results you found most significant. What about these results seems important to you? More generally, what can we learn from the database? Why is this kind of information important for understanding the trans-Atlantic slave trade?

Weeks 9-10: Ordeals and Strategies

Tu 10/11 and Th 10/13: The Middle Passage

- *Captives*, pp. 84-96
- S: Joseph C. Miller, “West Central Africa,” in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 39-45
- S: Herbert S. Klein, “Profits and Losses,” in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 76-81

Th, F (10/13-14): Discussion #7 on the Middle Passage

- S: Stephanie Smallwood, “The Living Dead aboard the Slave Ship at Sea,” from her book, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 122-152
- S: Baquaqua, “An African’s Ordeal,” and Buxton, “An Abolitionist’s Evidence,” in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 56-69

Consider: To what extent is Smallwood’s argument about the experience of the Middle Passage borne out, challenged, or complicated by Baquaqua’s and Buxton’s evidence? How might an organization like the United Nations commemorate those who endured the Middle Passage? What might such a commemoration look like and express?

Tu 10/18: Life and Death in the African Diaspora

- S: Stephanie Smallwood, “Life and Death in Diaspora,” from *Saltwater Slavery*, pp. 182-207
- *Captives*, pp. 96-106

Th 10/20: Confronting the Slave Trade in 18th Century Africa

- *Captives*, pp. 65-74

Th, F (10/20-21) Discussion #8: Culture and Survival in the Plantation Generations

- S: *Trial of a Slave in Berbice, for the Crime of Obeah and Murder*, British Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons (London, 1823).
- To help you interpret the trial, read S: Randy M. Browne, *Surviving Slavery in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 1-5 (part of introduction)

Consider: Describe the basic narrative in set forth in the trial of Willem. Who was he? Who summoned him? What problem was he called in to the plantation of Op Hoop van Beter to solve? What methods did he use? What went wrong? And importantly, what does the record of Willem's trial teach us about the experience and strategies of Africans in the diaspora during the "plantation generations"?

The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Revolution

The time period including the American Revolution and the European revolutionary movements of the mid-19th century has been called the "Age of Revolution." As we will see over the next four weeks, enslaved people also carried out revolutions during this period, sometimes in conjunction with other revolutions and sometimes on their own. Rebellions of the enslaved helped to propel the movements some Europeans and Americans launched against the slave trade and slavery itself. But paradoxically, the Age of Revolution also saw an expansion of slavery in those areas where it was not abolished and a further hardening of the white supremacy that underpinned it, as we will see in our treatment of 19th century slavery across the Americas. Moreover, even where slavery was abolished, what freedom would actually entail was very much an open question. Did freedom mean political citizenship, physical safety, and access to land, as many freedpeople hoped, or did it provide a new context for disfranchisement and subservience?

Weeks 11-12: The Age of Revolution in the Black Atlantic

Tu 10/25: Slavery and the American Revolution

- *Captives*, pp. 114-118
- S: Ira Berlin, "Introduction: The Revolutionary Generations," in *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 217-227

Th 10/27: The Haitian Revolution

- *Captives*, pp. 123-128
- S: "The Haitian Declaration of Independence" (1804) in Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2006), 188-191.
- Also take a look at Catherine Porter, Constant Méheut, Matt Apuzzo and Selam Gebrekidan, ["The Ransom: The Root of Haiti's Misery: Reparations to Enslavers,"](#) *New York Times* (May 22, 2022), and also on Sakai.

No Discussion Sections this Week—but you must meet with your TA or professor about your paper topic

Meanwhile, you should also complete this short IAAR-SLATE Initiative reading: "[How to Continue Activism in a Racist Country.](#)"

Tu 11/1: The Strategies, Successes, and Setbacks of Antislavery Activism—and lessons for today

- S: Adrian Hastings, "Black Abolitionists" in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 153-160
- *Captives*, pp. 118-123

Th 11/3: The Suppression, Expansion, and End(!) of the Atlantic Slave Trade

- S: Osei Bonsu and Eyo Honesty II, "African Opponents of Abolition" in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 160-63
- *Captives*, pp. 128-132
- **Paper prospectus due to your TA**

Th, F (11/3-4) Discussion #9: Why did lawmakers abolish Britain's slave trade?

- S: Eric Williams, "Slavery, Industrialization, and Abolition" and David Brion Davis, "Morality, Economics, and Abolition," in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 132-146
- S: Seymour Drescher, "The Williams Thesis After Fifty Years," in Northrup (ed.), *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2nd ed., pp. 141-149

Consider: If British lawmakers abolished the slave trade largely because they determined that it was immoral, why hadn't they done so twenty, fifty, or a hundred years earlier? What was new in the early 19th century that facilitated slave trade abolition?

Weeks 13-14: The Expansion and Collapse of the Atlantic Plantation Complex

Tu 11/8: Slavery Abolition—and what replaced slavery—in the British Colonies

- S: Michael Craton, "Slave Revolts and the End of Slavery," in Northrup, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 164-175

Th 11/10: Slavery in the Americas after the Slave Trade

- S: Ira Berlin, "The Migration Generations," in *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (2004), pp. 160-209

Th, F (11/10-11) Discussion #10: The Politics of the Illegal Slave Trade

[Amistad](#), directed by Stephen Spielberg (Dreamworks Productions, 1987): Watch the video on your own and be ready to discuss the film and its historical context in discussion section. For some guiding questions, see the worksheet on Sakai (which will not be collected or graded).

Tu 11/15: Emancipation in the US, Cuba, and Brazil

- *Captives*, pp. 149-160
- DeNeen L. Brown, "[Frederick Douglass delivered a Lincoln reality check at Emancipation Memorial unveiling](#)," *Washington Post* (June 27, 2020)

Th 11/17: No Class – Work on your papers

Th, F (11/17-18) Discussion #11: Writing Workshop

- Come to discussion section meeting with a rough draft of your paper for peer editing
- Your rough draft and peer edits must be attached to your final draft when it is submitted

Legacies of the Slave Trade

For the last part of the class, we will assess the effects of the slave trade in Europe, the Americas, and Africa. To do so helps us to come to grips with African agency in the trade. Although African individuals and groups participated in and benefited from the trade, overall Africa suffered losses while Europe and Euro-America gained. Do you think these differential effects warrant reparations in the contemporary era? Finally, we will link the slave trade to the racism and imperialism of the nineteenth century as well as lingering effects today.

Weeks 15-16: Aftermath

Monday, 11/21: PAPERS DUE by NOON

Tu 11/22: Effects of the Slave Trade on Africa and Europe

- *Captives*, pp. 74-77 and pp. 144-49

Th 11/24: Thanksgiving – NO CLASS

No Discussion Sections – Thanksgiving Break

Tu 11/29: Aftermaths: Imperialism, New Slave Trades, and Wrapping Up

- S: Curtis Keim, "The Origins of 'Darkest Africa'," ch. 3 of his *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, pp. 35-49

FINAL EXAM: Saturday, Dec. 3, 4pm