University of Wisconsin--Madison
Department of History
Semester I, 1988-89

History 753
(Comparative World History Seminar) Afro-Americans and Slavery in Comparative World Perspective

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5105 Humanities
263-1841/263-1800

Course Description

Slavery has linked the histories of Africa, Europe, North America, South America, and the Caribbean. Its history and legacy are in this sense literally international. At the same time, its wide diffusion across diverse regions, cultures, and historical contexts has complicated the very definition of "slavery," and has made the institution a fruitful and controversial area of research and debate in comparative history.

This graduate seminar on Afro-Americans and slavery has several purposes: to introduce students to central issues in the historiography of slavery; to set the Afro-American experience of slavery in the wide perspective of world history; and to analyze specific case studies whose diversity enables us to develop, in our discussions especially, a comparative approach that actively utilizes insights and findings from "unfamiliar" settings to reinterpret the history of areas in which we specialize.

During the course of the semester, we will rely on student papers as well as published books and articles to advance our discussion of Afro-Americans and slavery. Most of the time, we will discuss published "core readings" assigned to the seminar as a whole. These readings will include case studies as well as overarching interpretations, anthropological as well as more conventional historical analyses, older classics as well as recent works. Occasionally, however, we will convene a "student forum" that will focus the discussion on student papers. (Background books will also be assigned for these readings, and may influence the discussion.)

Proposed Schedule


Organizational session. I suggest that we begin to organize the review-essays, and that students unfamiliar with the dimensions and geography of the Atlantic slave trade look at Philip D. Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census (Madison, 1969), and Herbert S. Klein, The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade (Princeton, 1978).
UNIT I. SLAVERY AND AFRO-AMERICA.

Week 2. The Shadow of Slavery. September 16.


Supplementary:


Supplementary: Hilary McD. Beckles, "Plantation Production and White Proto-Slavery: White Indentured Servants and the
Alexander Marchant, From Barter to Slavery: The Economic Relations of Portuguese and Indians in the Settlement of Brazil, 1500-1580 (Baltimore, 1942).


Supplmtry:


Week 5. The Master-Slave Relationship and the Interpretation of Slave Society: Brazil. October 7.


Supplmtry:

João José Reis, *Rebelião escrava no Brasil. a história do levante dos malês (1835)* (São Paulo, 1986).


c) Fernando Henrique Cardoso, *Capitalismo e escravidão no Brasil meridional* (São Paulo, 1962).


e) Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil, 1550-1888* (New Brunswick, 1986). [Note: Mattoso's analysis derives mainly from her research on the Northeast.]

Stuart B. Schwartz, "Recent Trends in the Study of Slavery in Brazil," *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 25:1 (Summer, 1988), 1-25. [Note: The entire Summer, 1988 issue of this journal is on slavery in Brazil.]

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SEE ALSO the readings listed under "Flight and Resistance" (Week 7).

**Week 7. Flight and Resistance/Forum #1: In and Out of Slavery. October 21.**


**Supplmtry:**

a) See the bibliographies in Price, ed., *Maroon Societies.*


FORUM #1: In and Out of Slavery. October 21.

Suggested paper topics:

1) Voices of Maroons: Cuba and the Guyanas.
   Sources: from supplem. list, Week 7, and José Luciano Franco entries in bibliography of Maroon Societies.

2) The Jamaican Slave Wars.
   Sources: from supplem. list, Week 7.

3) Free People of Color in Slave Societies.
   Sources: see Week 2 above, and:

David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., Neither Slave Nor Free (Baltimore, 1972).
Jerome Handler, The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados (Baltimore, 1974).
Karasch, Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro (Week 5 above), esp. Chap. 11.
Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class and Colour (see Week 15).

Week 8. FORUM #2: The Interpretation of Slave Societies in the Americas. October 28.

Background rdngs:

1/3 class: Genovese, World the Slaveholders Made, Part I.


**Suggested topics:**

   **Sources:** see supplementary list for Week 4.

2) Rethinking the Brazilian Northeast.
   **Sources:** see supplementary list for Week 5, and Mattoso, *To Be a Slave*.

3) The Sugar Islands.
   **Sources:**
      Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago, 1974). (Very important and wide-ranging essays.)

   b) Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, 1970).

      Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves* (cited in Week 3 above).

d) For sources on the French Caribbean, see Week 9.

4) Off the Beaten Track: The Variety of American Slave Settings.

Sources:

(Useful overviews of slavery in Spanish America have been written by Rolando Mellafe and by Leslie Rout.)

b) See the sources on Minas Gerais listed for Week 5.


UNIT II. SLAVERY AND ANTI-SLAVERY AS WORLD HISTORY.


Core rdng:


Supplementary:


Price, ed., *Maroon Societies*, Part II.


Week 10. FORUM #3: Slavery and Abolition in Capitalist Civilization. November 11.


Suggested topics:

1) Eric Williams and His Critics.

Sources:

Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944).


2) Slavery, Free Labor, and Hegemonic Discourse: The Odyssey of David Brion Davis.  

Sources:  
Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*.

3) Capitalism and Slavery in U.S. Perspective: The Problem of the Civil War.  

Sources:  
See the list of publications cited in Week 4 above, and:  

Barbara Jeanne Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, 1985).


Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery (does not analyze U.S. Civil War, but important for historical background and world context).

4) Capitalism and Slavery in Latin American Perspective: Brazil.

Sources:

See works cited in Week 5 above (esp. Viotti da Costa, Cardoso, Gorender), and:


Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery.


Seymour Drescher, "Brazilian Abolition in Comparative Perspective," Ibid., 429-460.

5) Capitalism and Slavery in Latin American Perspective: The Spanish Caribbean.

Sources:

See works cited in Week 8 above (Knight [Slave Society], Moreno Fraginals, Scarano), and:


Scott, "Exploring the Meaning" (topic #4 above).

Francisco Scarano, "Labor and Society in the Nineteenth Century," in Franklin W. Knight and Colin Palmer, eds., The Modern Caribbean (Chapel Hill, forthcoming). Steve Stern has a copy.
6) Afro-American Struggles in the Destruction of Slavery.
Sources:
See works cited in Week 9 above, and Scott, "Exploring" (topic #4 above).

UNIT III. NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SLAVERY.


Supplmtry:
  Frederick Cooper, Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa (New Haven, 1977).
  Frederick Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925 (New Haven, 1980).
  Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives (Madison, 1977), especially Part I.
  See also African works cited in Week 14.

b) Patterson, Slavery and Social Death (see Week 13).
  Davis, Slavery and Human Progress (see Week 10).
  M.I. Finley, "The Idea of Slavery," in Laura Foner and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., Slavery in the New World: A Reader in Comparative History (Englewood Cliffs,
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N.J., 1969), 256-261. This is a critique of the Davis volume listed below.

Week 12. Thanksgiving. No class meeting. November 25.


Core rdng: Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Ma., 1982).

Supplmtry: See works on honor and reputation cited in Week 15, and:
Finley, "Slavery" (Week 11).
Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy* (Week 14).
Miers and Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa* (Week 11).
Wright, ed., *Women in Peril* (Week 14).


Supplmtry: See works on honor and reputation cited in Week 15, and:


Week 15. FORUM #4: STRETCHING OUR HORIZONS.
(Date to be rescheduled since classes end Thurs., December 15.)

Background readings:

1/2 class: Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow:
Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to
the Present (New York, 1985), esp. 3-109, although
the whole book is highly recommended.

1/2 class: Miers and Kopytoff, eds., Slavery in Africa, 3-102. (I
recommend you sample other essays as well.)

Cooper, Plantation Slavery, 253-268.

Suggested topics:

   Sources: See citations in Week 11, Week 14.

2) The Gendered Cult of Honor and Reputation in Slave Societies.
   Sources:
   Steven M. Stowe, Intimacy and Power in the Old South:
   Ritual in the Lives of the Planters (Baltimore, 1987).
   Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and
   Behavior in the Old South (New York, 1982).
   Verena Martinez-Alier, Marriage, Class and Colour in
   Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial
   Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society
   (New York, 1974).
   "La Ultima Cena" ("The Last Supper"), 1977, Cuban
   film directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Steve
   Stern has a video copy with English subtitles, and
   will show the film for History 241 on November 2
   or 3.
   See also works cited in Week 14 list.

3) Women and Slavery.
   Sources: See citations in Week 14.

Assignments and Grading

This seminar will emphasize discussion and debate. The most important
assignment is to think through the issues, arguments, and implications of
the readings, and to contribute your critical thoughts and insights actively
and articulately in discussion. Collectively, we will strive to develop not
only the broad view associated with a comparative approach and a "world"
perspective, but also the sensitivity and attention to human struggle and
detail associated with in-depth looks at particular case studies.
During the weeks in which I coordinate the discussion, I may ask students to turn in a brief paragraph indicating their responses to the readings two hours before the seminar begins. I will review the student comments as I prepare for discussion.

Some of our learning and discussion will focus on student papers (15-25 pages) presented in several "forums" listed on the class calendar. The student essays will draw on a modest cluster of supplementary works (the equivalent of about four or five major books), and the relevant works in our list of "core readings," to enrich our understanding of Afro-Americans and the problem of slavery.

The main objective of the review-essays is to analyze a significant problem in the history of slavery, and to draw out explicitly the implications of the supplementary readings and topics for our understanding of the core readings and topics we are already discussing in the seminar. A secondary objective is to present clearly the interpretations, findings, and controversies at the heart of major works omitted from our core readings. In other words, we will digest some of the historiography through collaborative research and reading—a division of labor in a collective venture. It is in this context that I have organized the lists of suggested paper topics and supplementary readings.

Students working on a review-essay for a forum may choose to elect a "designated skip" on the core readings of one of the two or three weeks preceding the forum. The "designated skip" does not completely liberate the student from the core readings; I still expect the student to skim the core readings and to get a feel for the findings and argument. Students who choose a "designated skip" are requested to meet with me to discuss which week to target for a "skip," and should, in any event, write me a note confirming the "skip" two weeks in advance.

For each student forum, papers to be discussed on Friday will be due the preceding Monday at 3:00 p.m. to give ample time to all students to read them thoughtfully. We will probably organize the discussion around the comments of students serving as discussants of the papers.

All papers must be double-spaced, with the printed or typed letters dark and easy to read. We are all intellectuals, and we read tens of thousands of pages each year. Let us be courteous to our eyes. Draft mode dot matrix print-outs are for drafts, not for final copies of papers! I will return faint or fuzzy print unread.

Grading will be weighted roughly as follows: 50% written work, 50% class discussion.