

DRAFT SYLLABUS

HISTORY 600: SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN EARLY AMERICA

Professor Gloria Whiting | gwhiting@wisc.edu | 5108 Mosse Humanities Building
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-2:30 PM or by appointment



Titled *The Washington Family*, this portrait, painted by Edward Savage sometime between 1789 and 1796, features George Washington, his wife Martha, and two of Martha's grandchildren, George Washington Parke Custis and Eleanor Parke Custis. One of Washington's slaves stands behind Martha in the corner of the painting, almost part of the background. This man, who is not identified, may have been William Lee, Washington's personal servant, or Christopher Skeels, a waiter at Washington's Virginia plantation, Mount Vernon. The man's presence in the painting serves as a reminder that the foundations of Washington's great wealth rested on the labor of bound Africans: Mount Vernon's enslaved population numbered 318 at the time of Washington's death. In a similar way, the wealth of the young nation that Washington led was built on the labor of people in bondage, who toiled in Virginia's tobacco fields, planted wheat in Pennsylvania, heaved barrels in Boston's harbor, harvested rice in South Carolina's lowlands, and quarried the stone that was used to construct Washington's home in the District of Columbia—the White House. This course will grapple with how freedom and slavery were bound up together during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the region that would become the United States of America.

Course Description

In the nineteenth century, slavery would become an issue of national contention, leading to the Civil War, but it was much less controversial during the early period of American history; during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, every mainland American colony practiced slavery, and for much of that period there was little criticism of the institution by Euro-Americans. (Of course, slaves themselves were long critical of the practices that kept them in bondage.) In this seminar, we will consider together a variety of intersecting themes and processes, such as how early Euro-Americans came to embrace bound labor; how freedom for some came to depend on slavery for others; how systems of bondage varied over time and space; how the institution of slavery influenced the lives of Africans and Native Americans in the mainland North American colonies; how, in turn, those in bondage shaped the institution of slavery; and how anti-slavery thought developed in early America.

This is a research seminar, so there will be a heavy emphasis on actually *doing* history: asking questions about the past and answering those questions by gathering, analyzing, and arranging historical sources to make logical arguments. Primary sources—sources produced by the people who lived in the period we are studying—are crucial in this endeavor, but primary sources can be a challenge for those of us who study slavery, as relatively few written records created by people in bondage survive. In order to help you explore the wide array of sources that shed light on the lives and labors of people in bondage, I will introduce you each week to a different online database or archive of primary sources. You will use these databases to find primary sources that relate to our assigned weekly reading, and each week you will upload a source, along with a brief analysis, to our Learn@UW course page. This will create a mini archive of slavery-related sources for our class.

This seminar is structured to enable you to produce an original piece of historical scholarship: an extended research paper that uses both primary and secondary sources to make an argument about some aspect of slavery or freedom in early America. Throughout the semester, you will complete assignments to help you succeed on this final paper: brief weekly source analyses; a proposal of your final paper topic; a bibliography; an outline; and a rough draft. Participating in collaborative classroom activities like primary source workshops and rough draft exchanges will enable each of you to help your classmates along in this endeavor.

Objectives:

By taking this course, you will:

- 1) Understand how ideas about slavery and freedom shaped the history of the region that would become the United States.
- 2) Refine your oral and written communication skills.
- 3) Learn to plan and execute a major historical research project.

Format:

This course will meet in Van Vleck Hall, room B223 on Fridays from 11 to 12:55. In each meeting we will discuss the assigned reading as well as the questions and sources posted to the group blog that week, and I will regularly use the last ten or fifteen minutes of class to introduce you to following week's online primary source archive. Since we meet only once a week, it is crucial that you are present at each session.

Reading:

Reading will be assigned each week for the first half of the semester. The reading load is fairly heavy, as it is important for you to understand something of the interpretive frameworks that historians have used to understand slavery and freedom in early America before you write your papers—and there is a lot of ground to cover! The readings that are not from the required texts (listed below) will be included in the course pack. (Both the course pack and the required texts are on reserve at College Library.) Please complete all readings in full and spend some time each week before we meet thinking about how each reading relates to the other texts we have read. Starting in November, there will be no assigned reading in order to enable you to focus on your research papers.

Required texts are to be read in full (available at UW bookstore):

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (2000).

Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (2012).

Jared Hardesty, *Unfreedom: Slavery and Dependence in Eighteenth-Century Boston* (2016)

Selected articles, book chapters, and primary sources will be in our course pack.

Computer Policy:

I know this is very old-school, but I ask that you refrain from using computers during the discussion portion of class. The temptation to get distracted by things that are not related to class is simply too great. I promise that you'll get far more out of this course if you use just a pen and a pad of paper. The one exception to this policy: you may use a computer for the final 10 to 15 minutes of class while we explore the new primary source database. Cell phones should be silenced and put away. (If you are a McBurney student who needs accommodation, please come talk to me.)

Requirements:

Course attendance and participation: 30%

Please come to class ready to engage with the material, your peers, and me. I expect you to read consistently, think through the assigned material prior to coming to class, and participate actively. Since we meet only once weekly, missing a single course meeting is equivalent to missing an entire week of class. It is therefore imperative that you be present at every course meeting.

Primary source expert: 5%

Once during the semester you will prepare a short presentation about how the author of the book we read that week used primary sources. What kind of primary sources did the author use? How did these sources enable the author to make certain arguments? As part of your presentation, you need to find one (or more) of the primary sources that the author used and bring it to class with you. (If the source you find most interesting is a manuscript that cannot be removed from a library or archive, then you may bring an image of it.)

Online contributions: 10%

Each week you will post on our Learn@UW site a primary source along with a brief analysis of that source. You will also read your classmates' postings and comment on at least one of them.

Assignments leading up to final paper: 25%

These assignments, which consist of a paper proposal, a bibliography, an outline, and a rough draft, should be completed thoughtfully and on time. Each of these will be worth 5% of your final grade. You will also receive a grade on the quality of the feedback that you provide your peers in the draft exchange (also 5% of your final grade).

Final Paper: 30%

This paper (15-20 pages long) will be graded on its coherence (does it have a clear argument?), use of sources (does it utilize both primary and secondary sources?), originality (does it say something new and interesting?), relevance (does it engage with ideas related to slavery and/or freedom in early America?), and polish (is it well-written and carefully edited?). Of course, we will discuss this paper, as well as the other course assignments, in more detail throughout the semester.

Course Schedule:

September 9: Introduction and Welcome

September 16: What is slavery? What is freedom?

Readings:

Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (1998), Introduction and Chapter 1 (course pack)

Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country* (2012), Introduction

Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Introduction (course pack)

Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *American Historical Review* (2009): 1231-1249 (course pack)

Online Sources: The Geography of Slavery in Virginia (<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/>)

September 23: Native American Slavery

Readings:

Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country* (2012)

Online Sources: Newspaper Databases (America's Historical Newspapers, Proquest Historical Newspapers, Accessible Archives Newspapers) via UW's library webpage

September 30: The Context and Contours of Slavery in Early America

Readings:

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (2000), pp. 15-216

Online Sources: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (<http://www.slavevoyages.org/>)

October 7: Shades of Servitude

Readings:

Jared Hardesty, *Unfreedom: Slavery and Dependence in Eighteenth-Century Boston* (2016)

Online Sources: The Town Records of Boston

(https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Boston_Massachusetts_genealogy#town09)

October 14: Early Anti-Slavery—People, Print, Movements

Readings:

Katharine Gerbner, “Antislavery in Print: The Germantown Protest, the ‘Exhortation,’ and the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Debate on Slavery,” *Early American Studies* (2011): 552-575 (course pack)

Kirsten Sword, “Remembering Dinah Nevil: Strategic Deceptions in Eighteenth-Century Antislavery,” *Journal of American History* (2010): 315-343 (course pack)

Mark A. Peterson, “The Selling of Joseph: Bostonians, Antislavery, and the Protestant International, 1689-1733,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* (2002): 1-22 (course pack)

Gloria Whiting, “*The Selling of Joseph*: Slavery, Freedom, and Black Family Life in Samuel Sewall’s Neighborhood at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century.” (course pack)

Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* (1700) (course pack)

Online Sources: Archives of Maryland Online

(<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/html/index.html>)

October 21: No Class—individual meetings with professor this week to finalize plans for paper proposal

October 28: The Revolution and its Legacy *PAPER PROPOSAL DUE*

Readings:

Francois Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse,” *Journal of American History* (2003): 1295-1330 (course pack)

Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, pp. 279-312 (course pack)

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone* (2000), pp. 217-365

Online Sources: Africans in Nova Scotia (<https://novascotia.ca/archives/africans/default.asp>)

November 4: Primary Source Workshop *BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE*

November 11: Individual Meetings with the Professor *OUTLINE DUE*

Your outline is due at this meeting.

November 18: Oral Presentations

You will very briefly present on your final paper (5 minutes or so), discussing the sources you are using and the arguments you will make.

November 19: No Class—Thanksgiving Break.

December 2: Rough Draft Discussion

You will meet with the students in your draft-exchange group and together discuss each of the circulated drafts. Please note that you need to have prepared written comments for each of the students in your group prior to this meeting.

December 9: Final Research Presentations

December 23: Final Papers Due in Dropbox