

## HISTORY 600: SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN EARLY AMERICA

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Office Hours: Mondays 1:30-3:30 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. Each of you will also have the opportunity to facilitate one of our seminar discussions as well as prepare a brief presentation on the primary sources used by one of the secondary sources we read.

### 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 on Thursday mornings from 8:50 to 10:45. 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 imperative that you are present at each session. If you must miss a course meeting, please let me know in advance, and we will work out an assignment for you to complete in lieu of attending class.

## **Reading:**

You will have reading assignments for the first nine weeks 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. There will be no assigned reading after spring break in order to enable you to focus on your research papers.

Required texts (to be read in full or nearly so):

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (2000).  
Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (2006).  
Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (2003).  
Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (2012).  
James Brewer Stewart, ed., *Venture Smith and the Business of Slavery and Freedom* (2010).  
David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (2005).

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

## **Requirements:**

Course attendance and participation: 40%

Please come to class ready to engage with the material, your peers, and me. If you read consistently, think through the assigned material prior to coming to class, and participate actively, you should get an "A" for participation. The effort you put into leading the class discussion and preparing a primary source presentation (both of which you will do once during the semester) will also influence this grade.

Online contributions: 15%

You will post various items on our Learn@UW site. Each week you will post 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. And, on the week you lead our class discussion, you will post a series of discussion questions related to the material assigned for that week. (These questions

should be uploaded by Monday so your classmates have time to think about them prior to our Thursday discussion.)

Assignments leading up to final paper: 15%

These consist of a paper proposal, a bibliography, an outline, and a rough draft. These assignments should be completed thoughtfully and on time.

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:**

### ***January 21: Introduction and Welcome***

### ***January 28: What is slavery? What is freedom?***

*Readings:*

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

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

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

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

*Online Sources:* Yale Slavery and Abolition Portal (<http://slavery.yale.edu/>)

### ***February 4: Native American Slavery***

*Readings:*

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

John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive* (1994), pp. 3-54

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

### ***February 11: The Context and Contours of Slavery in Early America***

*Readings:*

David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (2000), pp. 1-84

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/>)

### **February 18: Slavery and Freedom in the South**

*Readings:*

Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (2003)

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

*NOTE:* We will have a visit to the Wisconsin Historical Society this week outside of class.

### **February 25: Bondage and Liberty in the North**

*Readings:*

Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (2006)

*Online Sources:* The Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/antislaverypetitionsma>)

### **March 3: 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.

Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, pp. 31-56

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

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

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

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

*Online Sources:* Archives of Maryland Online

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

### **March 10: Venture Smith—A “Self-Made Man” in Slavery and Freedom**

*Readings:*

James Stewart, ed., *Venture Smith and the Business of Slavery and Freedom* (2010).

*Online Sources:*

Runaway Slaves in Connecticut (<http://runawayct.org/>)

*NOTE:* Your two-page paper proposal is due today. This should describe your topic, the central questions you are asking about this topic, and the primary sources that will help you answer these questions.

***March 17: Benjamin Franklin—Slavery, Servitude, and Another “Self-Made Man”***

*Readings:*

David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (2005).

*Online Sources:*

The Town Records of Boston

([https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Boston\\_Massachusetts\\_genealogy#town09](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Boston_Massachusetts_genealogy#town09))

*NOTE:* Your bibliography is due in class today. This should include both your primary and secondary sources.

***March 24: Spring Break***

***March 31: Individual Meetings with the Professor***

Your outline is due at this meeting.

***April 7: 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.

***April 14: Draft Exchange***

Your rough drafts are due at this meeting.

***April 21: Discussion of Rough Drafts***

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.

***April 28: Individual Meetings with the Professor***

***May 5: Formal Research Presentations***