

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Department of History
Semester II, 1992-93

History 574: Undergraduate Seminar in World History

Steve J. Stern

Topic: RUNAWAY SLAVES AND THEIR DESCENDANTS IN THE AMERICAS:
 A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF A DIASPORA SAGA

Course Description

This seminar will explore the history of slavery and African diasporas in the Americas, with special focus on the runaway phenomenon and its social and cultural legacies. If you are interested in intense, focused work on the comparative history of race and power in the Americas, and in prolonged engagement with primary source materials, this is a course designed for you.

The United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean are all within the purview of this course, one of whose premises is that the "diaspora phenomenon" of the Americas means that for some analytical purposes, traditional national borders and cultural geography are profoundly misleading.

A highlight of the seminar is documentary analysis and teamwork. Although we will have considerable writing assignments, our key method of learning is to rely on oral discussion and debate to sharpen our understanding. In addition, we will not rely on lectures for information and analytical frameworks, and much of the documentary material may lend itself to widely varying interpretation and subject themes. All of this means that the success of the course very much depends on the quality and breadth of participation. Our collective success requires that as individuals, we all take seriously the duties of preparation, teamwork, and a will to voice and defend even contrarian opinions and insights. Our reward, if we embark on these tasks successfully, is that we discover together the multiple meanings of an amazing history, that we cultivate and sharpen analytical skills transferable to a variety of situations, and that we learn how to develop oral thinking and presentation skills in the give-and-take context of "critical teamwork."

For more on course assignments, see the section following the tentative course calendar.

Tentative Course Calendar

Week 1. Introduction: Course Orientation. Jan. 21.

Rdng.: none.

I. SLAVE SOCIETIES IN THE AMERICAS: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF AFRO-AMERICAN
SLAVERY, WORK, AND FREEDOM.

Week 2. Colonial Foundations of American Slave Societies. Jan. 28.

Rdng.:

GRP. A: Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York, 1975).

GRP. B: Steve J. Stern, "Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean," American Historical Review, 93:4 (Oct. 1988), 829-72.

Week 3. Afro-Americans as Culture Creators (I): Within Slavery. Feb. 4.

Rdng.:

GRP. A: Peter H. Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York, 1974).

GRP. B: Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective (Boston: Beacon Press ed., 1992).

ALSO AVAILABLE AS An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective (Philadelphia: ISHI ed., 1976).

Week 4. Afro-Americans as Culture Creators (II): Beyond Slavery. Feb. 11.

Rdng.: Richard Price, ed., Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas (2nd ed., Baltimore, 1979), 1-30, 149-226.

Stuart B. Schwartz, Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery (Urbana, 1992), 103-36.

Week 5. Slavery, Work, and Culture in "Hardened" Slave Societies. Feb. 18.

Rdng.:

GRP. A: Stanely J. Stein, Vassouras, A Brazilian Coffee County, 1850-1890: The Roles of Planter and Slave in a Changing Plantation Society (Cambridge, Ma., 1957), Parts I-III. ALSO AVAILABLE in Princeton University Press edition.

GRP. B: Schwartz, Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels, 39-63, 137-64 (65-101 optional).

Week 6. Slavery to Freedom: The Multiple Perilous Pathways. Feb. 25.

Rdng.:

ALL: Price, ed., Maroon Societies, 1-30 (review).

GRP. A: Eugene D. Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New World (Baton Rouge, 1979).

GRP. B: Lyman Johnson, "Manumission in Colonial Buenos Aires, 1776-1810," Hispanic American Historical Review, 59:2 (May 1979).

ALL: Clive Gammon, "Cradle of Champions," Sports Illustrated (Nov. 24, 1980), 86-100.

II. THE RUNAWAY SAGA IN DOCUMENTARY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RECORD:
THE QUEST FOR A LIFE BEYOND SLAVERY, BEYOND IMMOBILITY.

Week 7. Individual Sagas (I): The Social Networks of Escape. March 4.

Rdng.: Harriet A. Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl . . ., Jean Fagan Yellin, ed. (Cambridge, Ma., 1987).

Week 8. Individual Sagas (II): The Solitude of the Fugitive. March 18.
[March 11 = Spring Break.]

Rdng.: Esteban Montejo, Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, Miguel Barnet, ed. (London, 1968), 1-60.

Price, ed., Maroon Societies, 33-63.

Week 9. Dilemmas of Group Escape and Political Negotiation. March 25.

Rdng.: Price, ed., Maroon Societies, 227-92.

Schwartz, Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels, 59-63 (documents).

Week 10. The Guyana Wars in Living Memory (or, History as Now). April 1.

Rdng.: Richard Price, First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People (Baltimore, 1983).

Price, ed., Maroon Societies, 293-319 (optional).

Week 11. The Multiple Depictions of Maroon Life and War (I). April 8.

Rdng.: begin next week's reading;
no formal class meeting;
cluster groups meet informally to prepare for next week.

Week 12. The Multiple Depictions of Maroon Life and War (II). April 15.

Rdng.: Richard Price, Alabi's World (Baltimore, 1990).

Week 13. Final Due Date for Documentary Essays: No Class Meeting. April 22.

Rdng.: none.

III. BREAKING AWAY IN POST-SLAVERY TIMES: FROM RUNAWAY TO MIGRANT.

Week 14. Urban Migrations, Social Migrations. April 29.

Rdng.:

Grp. A: Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration And How It Changed America (New York, 1991), 1-107, 223-353 (109-221 optional).

Grp. B: George Reid Andrews, Blacks and Whites in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988 (Madison, 1991).

Week 15. Looking Back. May 6.

Rdng.: none;

final observations on semester's work as a whole;

final due date for completed journal-essays unless class agrees at start of semester to set an alternative date.

Course Assignments

There are four major course assignments. These are oral participation in class discussion and analysis, prompt and consistent preparation of weekly journal comments, an historical essay based on analysis of documentary materials in Part II of the course, a journal-essay analyzing the evolution of your own thought over the course of the semester. Since this is a seminar, there is no final examination in the course.

Oral participation implies coming prepared to voice your views and insights, to defend them when appropriate, and to contribute to the teamwork implied in discussion that is simultaneously critical and collaborative. Obviously, the success of our seminar depends greatly on the quality and breadth of our oral discussions. This requires serious and focused reading of the assigned works, and forthright contributions to oral discussion--even, for example, when one's views are unpopular, or even when one has to postpone temporarily an insight on a theme when a somewhat different one is still an active line of class discussion. For more discussion of the importance and potential rewards of meaningful class discussion, see the introductory section of the syllabus above.

The weekly journal assignment requires that you write and turn in a brief commentary on the week's assigned readings and topic. One or two substantive paragraphs, amounting to perhaps a page, should be sufficient. Two pages should be considered a maximum. The journal is to record your personal and intellectual response--insights, critiques, implications, etc.--to the reading and topic. (Commentary on the weekly topic alone is insufficient: you must focus on the "dialogue" between the reading and the weekly topic, or on the reading itself.) The journal is due at the start of each class meeting, and I will hand back the previous week's journal at the end of each class meeting. The journal's purpose is three-fold: first, it will serve as a means of recording key insights and reactions that you may wish to contribute to class discussion; second, it will serve to refresh one's memory about key insights at the start or during class; and third, it will serve as "raw material" for the journal-essay due at the end of the semester. The journal also serves as a means of advising me of your thoughts and views if these do not come through clearly in the oral discussion. You are allowed one unexcused "skip" in your weekly journal obligation. Excused skips are unavailable except in cases of dire and unforeseen family or medical emergencies.

The historical essay requires that you write a focused analysis of a specific theme or historical problem illuminated by documentary material in Part II of our seminar. You become the historian, and your essay or think-piece should be marked by precise and cogent argumentation accompanied by standard scholarly source citation and verification. Although your main source material should be a selection of pertinent documentary sources from Part II, you should also incorporate, with proper citations, any relevant knowledge or insights gained from secondary sources we have read. Your historical essay should be of medium length (ca. 6-9 pages). I will hand out pointers on writing history papers during the semester. NOTE THE WEEK 13 DUE DATE FOR THE ESSAY.

The journal-essay uses your journal entries as "raw material" with which to write an essay analyzing your intellectual evolution, on the problem of slavery, runaways, and freedom quests in the African-American diaspora experience, during the course of Weeks 1-14. Compile your journal, and append a medium-length essay (ca. 6-9 pages) analyzing your intellectual journey. Try to reach some general conclusions or insights about your intellectual evolution, and the substantive themes of the course (slavery, runaways, and freedom quests in the diaspora experience). Within the limits of the humanly possible, view your own journal entries with the rigorous analytical eye you would bring to the analysis of other documents and writings. NOTE THE WEEK 15 DUE DATE NOTICE ON THE SCHEDULE ABOVE.

Journal entries may be handwritten or printed. Handwritten entries should take care to insure easy legibility. The historical essay and the essay part of the journal-essay must be typed or printed. Use dark, easy-to-read print as a courtesy to my aging eyes. You want me to focus on your ideas and analysis, not on the quality of your dot matrix printer or photocopy service! I will reject any essays whose print is faint.

I do not grant Incompletes or extensions except under the rarest of circumstances--truly dire and unforeseen emergencies. Late papers without an extension receive a one-grade penalty. If you have an academic overload and will need an Incomplete in one of your courses, get it in another one. You'll have little luck from me!

Grades

The grading system is roughly as follows: one-third based on oral participation (quality and consistency); one-third based on the historical essay analyzing documentary material; one-third based on the journal-essay (particularly the essay section).

To avoid unnecessary and self-defeating stress about the oral participation grade, I will use the following ground rule. Anyone who attends class and writes meaningful and timely journal entries about the readings with reasonable regularity receives at least a "B" for oral participation. ("Reasonable regularity" follows the "one unexcused skip" rule mentioned above.) "AB" and "A" evaluations require more affirmative and forthright oral participation. The quality of our class discussion depends on broad participation, so I very much want everyone to participate on at least the "AB" level, and to aspire higher. Enough said.