

History 600: Black Abolitionists Spring 2011

Prof. Steve Kantrowitz
Mondays, 1:20-3:20
5255 Humanities

The Seminar

We are a community of scholars. You are not in competition with each other, and it is possible for everyone in the seminar to earn an A. Please help each other succeed.

Over the next 15 weeks you will:

- Learn how historians analyze, interpret, and write about primary sources
- Prepare for and participate in discussions of the common readings
- Turn in a series of short writing and research assignments
- Research and write a substantial, original work of historical interpretation

Two texts will be available at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, 426 W. Gilman: Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, and Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers* (7th edition, revised by Booth, Colomb and Williams). The rest of our readings will be available as pdfs via Learn@UW.

Written Work

All written work, even the very short essay assignments during the first half of the semester, should begin with a clear, well-considered thesis statement and should be organized into coherent paragraphs. Make every word count. Use simple, clear sentence structures and use quotation very selectively. All of the early assignments (up to but not including the outline of the final paper itself) should include a word count at the end of the document.

Unless otherwise specified (e.g. "Come to class with..."), all assignments are due via the learn@UW dropbox no later than the morning of class at 8 a.m.

Assignments turned in late will immediately lose 10% of their worth; they will lose another 10% for each additional day they are late.

Research

- Topics

For much of the semester, each of you will be working on a research paper. You will identify a topic, locate sources and the existing scholarship, and write several drafts.

The key to a successful research paper is to identify a *subject* of interest to you, and a *question* about that subject which you can reasonably expect to answer. This must be a question which is not adequately addressed by the *existing scholarly literature*, and for which there are appropriate, sufficient, and accessible *primary sources*. You will therefore be pursuing several related lines of inquiry simultaneously: asking yourself what interests you, framing a question about it, determining what has already been said about it, and locating the primary sources that will form the backbone of your evidence.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this, particularly for those undertaking a substantial work of historical research for the first time, is framing a workable question. Topics that are big, vague, and abstract will not work: “How did black abolitionists overcome racism?” for example, is general, vague, and ahistorical; it does not focus on a particular group, place, or network, and its keywords—“overcome” and “racism”—do not identify particular challenges, achievements, dilemmas, or problems. On the other hand, topics that are too narrowly framed—“How many people were rescued by the Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia?”—present other kinds of problems. Even if the sources enabled you to answer this question, why should anyone find the answer interesting? You should strive to find a compelling question that leads you to a rich base of sources and encourages you to make a well-framed argument that clarifies or redirects a scholarly debate.

Topic selection and refinement is perhaps the most critical phase of the project: a workable topic will help you at every step; a difficult one will frustrate you. You may not settle on a final topic until the middle of the semester, but you must begin the process of finding one almost immediately. Your task during many of the early weeks of the semester will be to jump off from our readings—primary or secondary—and explore questions that seem interesting and answerable. Some of these prospective topics will prove to be dead ends, either because they are already exhaustively covered, are too broad or too specific to yield an interesting argument, or cannot be effectively investigated with the resources available. Even topics that survive this gauntlet of tests will require considerable refining and focusing.

At some point before spring break, you **must** make an appointment to see me during my office hours to discuss your interests and brainstorm possible topics.

- Sources

While there are many important primary sources available for these projects, many of you will make extensive use of *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, available through the UW database library. This consists of two related parts: an electronic version of a previously published five-volume edited work, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, which provides selected documents on the United States, the British Isles, and Canada between 1830 and 1865, along with extensive and extremely useful introductions and explanatory notes; and the full document collection (more than 15,000 items), searchable by keyword. The published volumes are also on 3-hour reserve at the Wisconsin Historical Society Library (2d floor).

Many of you will supplement this resource with online searchable databases of 19th-century newspapers (particularly *America's Historical Newspapers*, which includes a substantial range of African American newspapers, and *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*, which includes the Boston white abolitionist weekly *The Liberator*). Online repositories such as Google Books and the Internet Archive also hold fascinating primary texts that are fully readable. But be warned: **Do not assume you can do all (or even most) of your research online.** Some crucial newspapers have not yet been digitized, especially the *New York Weekly Anglo-African*, arguably the most important black newspaper of the Civil War era (available only in microfilm), and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (available as a full-size printed facsimile). The Wisconsin Historical Society also has a huge range of printed and microform sources on various topics related to slavery and antislavery.

Scholarly articles (in peer-reviewed academic journals such as *The Journal of American History*, *Slavery and Abolition*, and a host of state and regional historical journals) are often but not always available online. More important, most of the relevant published scholarly books (single-author works on particular subjects, edited collections of essays, etc.) are only available in

preview or snippet view, which makes them nearly useless for purposes of understanding the author's argument and evidence. You will have to explore the WHS stacks, check out actual books, and read them on paper.

- Bibliographic Resources

To locate useful secondary literature on specific topics, check bibliographies (e.g. the *Harvard Guide to African-American History*); shelf-read (identify a useful book, then search the shelves around it for other potentially useful items; this is how historians find a lot of their sources); and use electronic search tools such as those built into JSTOR and Project MUSE (archives of scholarly articles, available through the Database Library at the UW Libraries website).

- The Paper

The final product should be about 25 pages plus notes, approximately the length of a short article in a historical journal such as the *Journal of American History*.

Polished drafts of these research projects will be due **before** the end of the semester. You will comment on each other's drafts (and receive comments from me) before producing a final draft. The final version will be due Monday, May 9 (a week after our last seminar) at noon, in the learn@UW dropbox.

Attendance

Your success in this course will depend on consistent preparation and participation. We meet together only twelve times, so missing more than one seminar meeting, for any reason, will cause you to fall significantly behind and will therefore adversely affect your course grade. I suggest that you do not think of this policy as "I get to skip one seminar," but instead consider it your margin of safety in case of a medical or other emergency.

Grades

Your grade for the semester will be calculated as follows:

Preparation for and participation in seminar	25%
Early assignments (weeks 2-8, @5 points each)	35%
Seminar paper polished draft (due April 25)	15%
Seminar paper final draft (due May 9)	25%

Academic Responsibility

All work that you turn in must be your own. You are responsible for knowing what constitutes plagiarism; claiming ignorance will not help you after the fact. A few guidelines: If you repeat someone else's words, you must use quotation marks and must cite the relevant author, work, and page numbers (either in parentheses or in a footnote). Likewise, if you closely paraphrase another writer or rely on his or her ideas, you must acknowledge your debt with an appropriate citation. Appropriation of another author's work without citation—whether or not you use direct quotations—always constitutes plagiarism. I pursue all cases of possible academic misconduct. A more detailed set of guidelines is available at:

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Bring the week's readings with you to class **in hard copy**. You may arrange to cooperate with a classmate to share the printing responsibilities for the posted articles, but we will need at least one set of articles for each two students.

Readings marked with a * are posted under "Content" on learn@UW

Week 1: Jan. 24 - Introductions

Week 2: Jan. 31

Readings: Syntheses

- *Introduction to *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, v. 3
- Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*

Assignment:

How do the broad interpretations of black abolitionism offered in these works differ from one another? In an essay of no more than 250 words, identify a significant interpretive difference supported by two or three well chosen examples. **Due via dropbox, 8 a.m.**

Week 3: Feb. 7

Readings: Big Pictures

- *Hahn, "Slaves at Large"
- *Bay, "See Your Declaration, Americans!"

Assignment:

- 1) In two paragraphs of 25-50 words each, summarize each article's argument.
- 2) In an essay of no more than 250 words, make an argument about the relationship between the two articles' arguments. **Assignments 1 and 2 due via dropbox, 8 a.m., in a single Word file.**
- 3) Explore the *Black Abolitionist Papers* online by searching for one person mentioned in one of these articles and for one "keyword" (an idea, term, or other phrase) from the documents quoted or described in them. Bring in a photocopy/printout of one article that is by, about, or mentions that person **and** that connects interpretively with the articles for today. Come to class prepared to share it and explain how it is related to today's readings.

Week 4: Feb. 14

Readings: Class, Gender, and Respectability

- *Rael, "The Market Revolution and Market Values"
- *Harris, "Abolitionist Amalgamators"
- *Lapsansky, "Since They Got Those Separate Churches"

Assignment

- 1) In an essay of no more than 300 words, assess the degree to which the arguments of these essays are compatible with one another. **Due via dropbox, 8 a.m.**
- 2) Library boot camp: Come to class with the following:
 - A: The notes to Harris, p. 270, cite many primary and secondary works. Determine which of the sources mentioned on this page are and are not available in UW libraries, and in what form(s). Be aware that Madcat is not literally comprehensive: not every item on the university's

library shelves has an individual entry in Madcat; this is especially true of items that are part of longer series, and of government documents. It's possible that some items that appear to be available are in the catalog but checked out or missing, or that items not in Madcat are actually available under a more general title.

B: Create a bibliography of the works cited in these footnotes. Organize the works into two big categories--primary sources and secondary works—and, within those categories, into more specific sub-categories of your own devising. Note explicitly whether each item is or is not available at or through the UW library system.

Week 5: Feb. 21

Readings: Thinking Beyond the United States

- *Hinks, "We Are Now Getting in a Flourishing Condition"
 - *Gosse, "As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends"
 - *Sinha, "To 'cast just obliquy' on Oppressors"
 - *John S. Rock, "Unity of the Races"
- A Manual for Writers, 3-11*

Assignment:

- 1) Write "x, y, z" statements (as described in *A Manual for Writers*) that fit the essays by Hinks, Gosse, and Sinha.
- 2) To what degree did pre-Civil War black activists identify as "Americans"? In an essay of no more than 300 words, draw on the arguments and evidence in these works to craft an argument of your own. **Assignments 1 and 2 due via dropbox, 8 a.m., in a single Word file.**

Week 6: Feb. 28 -

Readings: Free Blacks and Slave Revolt

- *Horton, "Kidnapping and Direct Action," in Blight, *Passages to Freedom*
 - *Kantrowitz, "Fighting Like Men"
 - *1858 New Bedford debate from *The Liberator*
- A Manual for Writers, 5-23, on topics and hypotheses*

Assignment:

- 1) Identify 2 possible topics for your final paper, phrased as "x, y, z" statements.
- 2) Using the online *BAP* or another primary source (newspapers online or on microfilm; published primary documents; etc.), locate at least one primary source that would be directly relevant to this topic; copy it, print it out, or take detailed notes on it, and bring it to class.
- 3) Using keyword searches, shelf-reading, and all the other clever research strategies at your disposal, produce a bibliography of at least three scholarly works that would be important on each area of research. **Assignments 1-3 due via dropbox, 8 a.m.**
- 4) In addition to submitting the above via the dropbox, bring a copy to seminar; be prepared to present your ideas and answer questions about them.

Week 7: March 7

Readings: Evaluating Sources

*Painter, "Representing Truth"

A Manual for Writers, 24-35, on finding and evaluating sources

Assignment:

- 1) Pick the topic that seems most interesting and promising.
- 2) **Skim** the scholarly works you assembled for the bibliography on that topic.
- 3) Brainstorm a list of possible questions and arguments that could shape this topic into a paper, as well as any potential problems you can foresee.
- 4) Using the notes and bibliographies in the scholarly works, as well as your own intuition, determine whether appropriate primary sources are available; investigate these for no less than one hour.
- 5) Come to class with a brief written summary of your progress, including:
 - A: A revised x, y, z statement
 - B: A one-paragraph summary of what the existing scholarship has to say about it.
 - C: A bibliography of at least five specific primary sources (e.g. newspaper articles, published proceedings, etc.), each with a one-sentence synopsis of how it relates to your topic.

Spring break – March 14-18

Note: Since our class meets on Monday, you may want to complete the next week's assignment *before* leaving for Spring Break.

Week 8: March 21

Reading:

A Manual for Writers, 36-47, on engaging sources and taking notes

Assignment:

- 1) Spend AT LEAST four more hours reading through the primary sources and prior scholarship, refining both your topic and your bibliography as you go.
- 2) Come to class with a brief written summary of your progress, including:
 - A: A revised "x, y, z" statement
 - B: A one-paragraph (ca. 100 word) summary of how the existing scholarship relates to this topic
 - C: A one-paragraph (ca. 100 word) overview of what you are finding in the primary sources and how it is shaping your topic.
 - D: Your most pressing questions, concerns, and dilemmas.

Week 9: March 28

Reading:

A Manual for Writers, 48-61, on working toward an argument

Assignment:

By now, you should be able to formulate your topic as a hypothesis or argument. Come to class with a revised version of the assignment from Week 8, reflecting your progress since then.

Week 10: April 4 **NO CLASS MEETING**

Read:

A Manual for Writers, **re-read** pages 36-47

Assignment:

read independently and take notes on your sources.

Week 11: April 11

Read:

A Manual for Writers, 62-70, on planning a first draft

Assignment:

Write a revised thesis statement and an outline of how you will make this argument. Come to class with 3 printed copies.

Week 12: April 18 – **PASSOVER – NO CLASS MEETING**

Read:

A Manual for Writers, 71-81, on drafting

Assignment:

Write, write, write.

Week 13: April 25

Assignment:

Polished drafts are due in the dropbox by Monday morning, April 25, at **9 a.m.** At the same time, you will exchange drafts with your writing partners (to be determined) via email.

In class today we will discuss writing problems and strategies based on your experiences over the last two weeks. I will distribute response sheets for your comments on each other's drafts.

Please remember to fill out the on-line course evaluation.

Week 14: May 2 **FINAL CLASS**

Read:

A Manual for Writers, 98-119, on writing and revision

Assignment:

Come to class with

- 1) The polished drafts submitted by your writing partners last week, with completed response sheets.
- 2) Your own most vexing writing problem.

If you have not already done so, please fill out the on-line course evaluation!

FINAL PAPERS DUE MONDAY, MAY 9, BY NOON VIA THE DROPBOX