

History 861: African Diaspora Peoples and History
Wednesday 7:45-9:40, 5255 Humanities

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 9:30-10:30 (Van Hise), Wednesday, 9:40-10:40 (Humanities)
and by appointment

Between 1492 and 1808, Africans represented the largest immigrant stream to the Americas, outnumbering European migrants by a ratio of 3:1. During this same period, Africans also traveled to Europe, India, and Asia. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to some of the major themes in the study of the African diaspora, from 1441, when the first Africans arrived into Europe via the Atlantic, until the end of the slave trade. Slavery, the slave trade, and memories of the slave trade figure prominently in the readings, but we will also examine the development of diasporic identities, religions, kinship structures, gender constructions, political expressions, and so on. The impacts of Africa on the Atlantic world, though often muted in the historical literature, were at least as profound as European influences. We will explore how and why.

Procedures and Requirements

- 1) The course will ask you to concentrate your efforts on weekly reading, writing, and discussion instead of regular exams or a lengthy research paper. As such, students will be expected to attend every session and to participate actively in class discussions.
- 2) Beginning in week 2, students will be required to write 3 page (750 word) reaction papers on each week's readings. Students will be required to write ten of these papers over the course of the semester. **Papers should raise questions and critically assess the readings, not merely summarize them.** Students are encouraged to use book reviews, historiographical essays, supplementary readings, and so on, to help them frame their questions and critiques. Please note that the "readings" for each week include a monograph, as well as a supplementary reading and/or source. Together, the monograph, article, and source constitute a bundle of ideas around a common theme that will form the basis of our discussions. Papers should be uploaded to Canvas as Word or PDF documents. You will also upload your response into the "Discussion" section of Canvas each week so your classmates can read and review prior to class.
- 3) Students will post their reaction papers to Canvas by 5:00 pm on the Monday BEFORE our class meeting on Wednesday. Each week, one student will be assigned to facilitate the main discussion. This student will have read all of the response papers and will lead the class discussion, concentrating on critiques and pertinent questions raised in the reviews. We will spend the first 1.25 hours of each class session discussing the readings.

- 4) We will devote the remaining 40 minutes of each class period to a discussion of sources. For most weeks, you will see a source listed on the syllabus. In some cases, the source is directly related to the week's readings; in other cases, the source may be more distantly related. Your challenge is to locate the source, explain the context in which it was created, judge the pertinence of the source to the week's topic, and analyze it as deeply as possible. Three of your papers over the course of the semester should respond solely to the primary sources on the syllabus. In these weeks, you can skip writing about the readings and concentrate only on your source analysis. In addition to leading the main discussion one time, each student will sign up to lead discussion for one primary source during the semester.
- 5) Final grades will be determined roughly as follows: 10 response papers at 8% each (80%) and oral participation, including the weeks that you lead class discussion (20%). Please note that your oral participation counts for a significant portion of your grade. If you choose not to write in a particular week, you will still be expected to take part in class discussion. Original contributions and quality intellectual engagement with other course participants will be rewarded.

Course Outline:

Week 1 Introduction: Readings and Sources

1/22—Go over syllabus. Sign up for discussion weeks. Defining and delineating the African diaspora. Relationship between the history of the African diaspora and modernity?

Intro to Historical newspapers, LDS Family History, TSTDB, Gallica, National Libraries, Google books, etc.

Reading: Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, "African Slavery as an Institution of Marginality," in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1977): 3-81 (I'm only asking you to read the first 25 pages); Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *The American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 1231-1249.

What is the definition of slavery? What is the relationship between slavery and kinship? Do the enslaved suffer a social death? When and how does slavery come associated primarily with Africans? What role does race play in this association?

Week 2 African Sovereignty

1/29--**Reading:** Herman Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Penn, 2019)

Supplementary Readings: James Sweet, “The Hidden Histories of African Lisbon,” in Jorge Canizares, Matt Childs, and James Sidbury, eds. *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade* (Penn, 2013), 233-247.

Source: “O Chafariz d’el Rei” painting.

Assess the following: “most scholars of Atlantic history and New World slavery have configured the African diaspora through modern formulations of culture or cultural engagement abstracted from the polis.... In asking for a fundamental reconsideration of the African intellectual enterprise, we stake new claims around the formulation of the African diaspora and by implication the very framing of power ascribed to the European past.” (29-30). Are the “cultural” and the “political” as mutually distinct as Bennett would have us believe? Where does “sovereignty” reside in early African polities? Can we really talk about African “sovereignty” outside of a European optic in the 15th and 16th centuries? If so, what were the ideas/structures that guided subjects of African sovereigns? How did those ideas impact Europe? How were those ideas enacted by the enslaved in the Americas? Beyond Bennett, in more concrete terms, why do we so often associate slavery with the Americas but not with Europe or Africa? Implications?

Week 3 Gender and Njinga

2/5—Reading: Linda M. Heywood, *Njinga of Angola: Africa’s Warrior Queen* (Harvard, 2017)

Supplementary Reading: Sweet, “Mutual Misunderstandings: Gesture, Gender, and Healing in the African Portuguese World,” *Past and Present* 203 (2009): 128-143.

Source: Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l’Amérique* (1722), volume 4, 138-141. (Gallica)

What was the relationship between gender and power in Africa? Who or what sanctioned Njinga’s rise to power in Angola? From where did her power derive—kinship, politics, religion, brute strength? Did the sources of power exemplified by Njinga extend to enslaved peoples in the Atlantic? How?

Week 4 Fugitive Modernities?

2/12—Reading: Jessica A. Krug, *Fugitive Modernities: Kisama and the Politics of Freedom* (Duke, 2018)

Source: *The Scots Magazine*, vol. 46, p. 406 (1785): Accompong Town Maroons, Jamaica (Google Books)

Describe the politics of runaway slave communities. Are they defensive? Offensive? What does it mean to be a “fugitive”? Are you persuaded by Krug’s argument for a

“Kisama meme” that circulated across the Atlantic world in the 17th century? Explain the salience of “Kisama” in the Americas versus Africa. Is there a risk of romanticizing “resistance” and “identity” in the making of ideas like “Kisama”? Do the politics of the present inform Krug’s rendering of Kisama’s past? What can other runaway or maroon histories tell us about the predicament of “fugitive” status?

Week 5 Islam and Embodied Knowledge

2/19—Reading: Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (UNC, 2014)

Supplementary Readings: Michael A. Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” *Journal of Southern History* 60 (1994): 671-710.

Source: Slave ship manifest from Liverpool (Posted on Canvas)

How is knowledge “embodied” in Islamic education? How important was literacy in Islam (or Christianity or Judaism)? Does the idea of the “walking Qu’ran” undermine the power of literacy or reinforce it? What are the implications of “walking Qu’rans” for the history of the slave trade in the Atlantic world?

Week 6 African Atlantic Warfare

2/26—Reading: Vincent Brown, *Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Belknap, 2020)

Supplementary Reading: Browse John K. Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500-1800* (London, 1999) and read chapter 6, “War, Slavery, and Revolt: African Slaves and Soldiers in the Atlantic World.” (online book at UW Libraries)

Source: Find “Tacky” in *Lloyd’s Evening Post* (London), June/July 1760. (Burney Newspapers Collection)

Was slavery synonymous with warfare? To what extent did the ideas and strategies of warfare in Africa translate to the Americas? Are there parallels between Brown’s arguments and those posed by Jessica Krug on “Kisama”? Similarities? Distinctions?

Week 7 The Haitian Revolution: An African Revolution?

3/4—Readings: David Geggus, “Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century: Language, Culture, Resistance,” *Jahrbuch Für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 28; Thornton, “I am the Subject of the King of Kongo: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181-214; Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the

French Atlantic,” *Social History* 31 (2006): 1-14; Sweet, “New Perspectives on Kongo in Revolutionary Haiti,” *The Americas* 74 (2017): 83-97.

Source: Baudry Lozieres, *Vocabulaire Congo* (Gallica), start p. 72, but see esp. pp. 108-146. See runaway ads from St. Domingue Newspaper *Affiches américaines* at website: Le Marronnage dans le Monde Atlantique: <http://www.marronnage.info/fr/corpus.php>

How might one summarize the African contribution to the Haitian Revolution? Was it a resistance movement built primarily on African principles? If so, which ones? Or, was it a movement built mostly on Western enlightenment principles of individual freedom? Is it methodologically possible to gain a full understanding of African contributions to the Haitian Revolution? How? Can the demographic makeup of the enslaved population provide us with clues?

Week 8 Toward an Intellectual History of the African-Atlantic

3/11—Reading: Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (Verso, 2019)

Supplementary Reading: Tom Bartlett, “An Underground Sensation Arrives: The three-decade saga of a revered manuscript,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 2, 2018. James Sweet, “Reimagining the African-Atlantic Archive: Method, Concept, Epistemology, Ontology,” *Journal of African History* 55 (2014): 147-159.

Source: Excerpt from Antonio da Costa Peixoto, *Obra Nova de Língua Geral de Mina* (1741) (1944), esp. pp. 13, 18, 19, 23, 29, but also others (Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal)

How should we characterize the intellectual history of Africa and the African diaspora? Did ideas travel coherently across space and time? Generally speaking, are there differences in “African” and “European” ways of being in the world? If so, how are these differences reconciled? Have various African languages, epistemologies, and ontologies impacted the so-called “modern” world? If so, why are African ways of being so often considered “backward”? Don’t ideas about progress, science, humanism, and revolutionary change often emanate most strongly from the very systems of thought that people in the West believe to be irrational? How might “Western” ideas look from an “African” perspective?

Week 9 Language and Creolization

3/25—Reading: Pier Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge, 2009)

Source: St. Domingue letter (Posted on Canvas)

How did the slave trade impact identity formation in Madagascar? Gender roles? How convincing is Larson's critique of historians of African slavery in the Atlantic world? How comparable are the social, economic, and cultural trends of African slavery in the Indian Ocean versus the Atlantic Ocean? Is it useful to "think" the Indian and Atlantic Oceans together, or are the histories too different? How might Larson's advocacy for "social memory" transform our understanding of African slavery? Is such an approach necessary to capture the history of Africans in the Indian Ocean more broadly?

Week 10 Women and Children

4/1—Reading: Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* (Penn, 2018)

Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database. Using the database, answer the following questions:

- 1) According to the database (and Sasha Turner), how did slave traders define "child"?
- 2) Between 1514 and 1790, how many slave ships included at least 50% children?
- 3) Between 1791 and 1866, how many slave ships included at least 50% children?
- 4) What explains the change over time?
- 5) Where did the majority of these African children arrive?
- 6) Briefly consider the social and cultural implications for the children onboard these ships, as well as for the communities they left behind and those where they arrived.

(As you complete this exercise, feel free to peruse the results of individual slave ships. You will find some ships consisting of more than 2/3 or even 3/4 children.)

How did the end of the slave trade impact the daily lives of women and children in the Caribbean? Did slave owners now have an interest in protecting women's and children's health in ways they hadn't in the past? Or did the imperative for continued profit guide their choices? How did enslaved women respond to the new realities? To what extent did enslaved women maintain or gain control over their bodies after 1808? Is there such a thing as a "maternal instinct" or is it a social construction? "Maternal resistance"? (202)

Week 11 Commodifying Africans

4/8—Reading: Daina Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved from Womb to Grave in the Building of a Nation* (Beacon, 2017)

Supplementary Reading: John Clegg, "How Slavery Shaped American Capitalism," *Jacobin*, August 28, 2019: <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/08/how-slavery-shaped-american-capitalism>

Source: Image: M. Chambon, *Le commerce de l'Amérique par Marseille....* (Avignon, 1764), vol. 2, plate 11, facing p. 400: *Marché d'esclaves*.

What are the different registers of “value” applied to enslaved peoples in the United States? Does Berry’s book privilege one definition of value over others?

Week 12 African Atlantic Aquatic Culture

4/15—Reading: Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Penn, 2018)

Supplementary Reading: Ryan Quintana chapter?

Week 13 The Last Africans in the US

4/22—Reading: Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon*

Supplementary Reading: Charles J. Montgomery, “Survivors from the Cargo of the Negro Slave Yacht Wanderer,” *American Anthropologist* 10 (1908): 611-623.

Source: Face vessel (Posted on Canvas)

Week 14 Reverse Sail?

4/29—Reading: Lisa Lindsey, *Atlantic Bonds: A Nineteenth-Century Odyssey from America to Africa* (UNC, 2018)

Supplementary Reading: Walter Hawthorne, “Being Now, as it Were, One Family”: Shipmate Bonding on the Slave Vessel Emilia, in Rio de Janeiro and throughout the Atlantic World,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 45 (2008): 53-77.