

History 278: Africans in the Americas, 1441-1808
TTH 9:30-10:45
1131 Humanities Building
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Between 1492 and 1808, Africans represented the largest immigrant group in the Americas, outnumbering European migrants by a ratio of roughly 3:1. The purpose of this course is to increase the student's knowledge of the African presence in the Americas until 1808, when the English outlawed the Atlantic slave trade, sharply curtailing African arrivals in North America and the British Caribbean. The course does not simply emphasize the structure and demography of the slave trade. While these topics are important, more vital are the multiple ideas and cultures that shaped and defined Africans as they were transported across the Atlantic world. From the perspectives of the Africans themselves, social, cultural, and political issues were far more important to their sense of self than were the economic imperatives that preoccupied their European masters. Thus, after a brief introduction of the demographic and economic aspects of the trade, the course will concentrate primarily on the continuities and transformations of African structures and belief systems in the Atlantic world. In the final week of the course, we will consider the contemporary politics of slavery in memorials, monuments, and questions about reparations.

Learning Outcomes

In accordance with the goals of the UW History major, you will learn to define important questions related to the history of Africans in the Americas and explain their academic and public implications. The contemporary implications of many of the questions we will be discussing should become manifest as the semester unfolds. I would invite you to draw these connections as often as possible.

In addition, you will evaluate the evidentiary and theoretical bases of various historical conversations in the making of the modern African diaspora. Drawing upon a diversity of primary- and secondary-sources, you will synthesize the most pertinent evidence to make persuasive arguments and draw innovative conclusions. History is NOT about names, dates, and places; it's about researching tough questions, synthesizing evidence (i.e. LOTS of reading), drawing novel conclusions, and communicating your findings in a clear, accessible manner.

How the Credit Hours are Met

This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the course of the semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying) for about 3 hours out of the classroom for every class period.

Procedures and Requirements

- 1) The course will ask you to concentrate your efforts on weekly readings and discussions instead of regular exams or a lengthy research paper. As such, students are expected to attend every class session and to participate in weekly discussions. Excessive absences will result in a deduction of points from the student's final grade.
- 2) Most Tuesdays will be devoted to lectures and other content delivery (videos, audio recordings, etc.). At least some portion of every Thursday class will be devoted to discussion. Students will be expected to have read all of the week's readings BEFORE Thursday discussions. For example, readings for Week 2 should be completed by Thursday, September 16. The readings will be crucial in the completion of your weekly assignments (see below). They will also be the catalyst for our discussions. Quality contributions to class discussions will be rewarded at the end of the semester.
- 3) In most weeks, you will receive a prompt in Canvas under the Assignments tab. These prompts will usually take the form of questions, though in some weeks I will ask you to perform a research task or solve a problem. Your responses to these prompts should be posted on Canvas by no later than 8 am on the day they are due. Pay careful attention to answer ALL of the questions in the assignment. Support your arguments with evidence from the assigned readings and class lectures. In most cases, you should be able to answer the prompts in no more than 2-3 paragraphs. You can earn up to 10 points for each of these assignments.
- 4) In addition to the weekly assignments, there will be a midterm and a final exam. Final grades will be determined roughly as follows: weekly assignments (100 points), Midterm Exam (100 points), Final Exam (100 points).

Readings

James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (UNC, 2011)

Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (UNC, 1998)

Zora Neil Hurston, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"* (Amistad, 2018)

Links to all other readings—journal articles, book chapters, etc.—can be found on Canvas.

Week 1

Introduction

9/9

Introduction to the course. Lecture: Defining the African Diaspora: Perspectives and Methods

Week 2

The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas: Why Africans?

Reading: John K. Thornton, "Slavery and African Social Structure," in *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge, 1998): 72-97; James H. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *William and Mary Quarterly* LIV (1997), 1-24; Colin A. Palmer, *The First Passage: Blacks in the Americas 1502-1617* (Oxford, 1995), 11-41.

9/14

Lecture: African Slavery and Economies Prior to European Arrivals. Impacts: Senegambia, Bight of Benin

Was there slavery in Africa before Europeans arrived? How was it the same/different than European forms of slavery? Was European trade destructive to African societies? How?

9/16

Lecture: The European Background to the African Slave Trade: Why African labor? Or, why didn't Europeans do their own work? Fifteenth-century European slavery. Video: "The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross. Episode 1: The Black Atlantic (1500-1800)"

Was the decision to enslave Africans in the Americas purely an economic one? Did race play any role in this?

Week 3

Enslavement, the Middle Passage, and the Politics of the Slave Trade

Reading: Stephanie Smallwood, "Turning African Captives into Atlantic Commodities," in *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard, 2007): 33-64.

9/21

Lecture: Who is to blame for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade? And does it matter? Social death?

9/23

Video: “Wonders of the African World: The Slave Coasts”

Students should consider the following questions in response to the video: How does Gates approach the issue of slavery in Africa, before and during the era of the Trans-Atlantic trade? What are Gates’ biases? Who is the implied audience for the video? Based on your understanding of African history leading up to the Atlantic slave trade, is Gates’ rendering of African history balanced/accurate? Using earlier readings, assess Gates as a historian.

Week 4

Africans in the Markets of the Atlantic

Readings: Palmer, 43-61; Stuart Schwartz, “Sugar Plantation Labor and Slave Life,” in *Slaves, Rebels, and Peasants* (Illinois, 1992), 39-63; William Dusinberre, “Mothers and Children,” in *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Georgia, 2000): 235-247; Walter Johnson, “The Chattel Principle,” in Johnson, *Soul by Soul* (Harvard, 1999): 19-44; Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *The American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 1231-1249.

9/28

Lecture: Worlds of Labor—Urban v. Rural. Comparing Jamaica, South Carolina, Brazil, etc.

9/30

Lecture: Markets, Chattel, and Social Death?

To what extent were slave lives defined by the market and by work? How prevalent were disease, death, and social alienation? Did slaves generally suffer “social death”?

Week 5

Gender and Sexuality in Africa and the Diaspora

Reading: Sasha Turner, “The Nameless and the Forgotten: Maternal Grief, Sacred Protection, and the Archive of Slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition* 38 (2017): 232-250; James H. Sweet, “Mutual Misunderstandings: Gesture, Gender, and Healing in the African Portuguese World.” *Past and Present* 203 Supplement 4 (2009): 128-143.

10/5

Video: Schoenbrun/Kearsley film on Krobo beads.

10/7

Lecture: Gender and Sexuality in Africa and the Diaspora. Male and female roles, importance of women, various gender expressions, etc. Motherhood?

How were African ideas about gender challenged by enslavement in the Americas? How did Europeans ignore their own gender conventions in their application of African slavery?

Week 6

Kinship, Lineage, and Family

Readings: Palmer, 63-87; James Sweet, “Defying Social Death: The Multiple Configurations of African Slave Family in the Atlantic World,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 70 (2013): 251-272; 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.

10/12

Lecture: Family and Kinship in Africa

10/14

Lecture: Family and Kinship in the Americas. Warrior societies, secret societies, ship mates, runaway communities, etc. Sexuality.

How useful is the concept of “family” in understanding the interior lives of African slaves in the Americas?

Week 7

Africans and Islam in the Diaspora

Reading: Michael Gomez, “Ladinos, Gelofes, and Mandingas,” in Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2005): 3-46; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 59-87.

10/19

Lecture: Islam in Africa and the Early Modern Atlantic World—North Africa, Portugal, Santo Domingo, Peru

10/21

Islam in British North America and the US. Bolsas, slave ship manifest Mandingo books.

Islamic diaspora or African diaspora?: Islamic consciousness among slaves in the Americas. Was Islam divisive in slave communities?

Week 8

Spirituality, Religion, and Healing in Africa

Readings: Sweet, pp. 1-122

10/26 Lecture: What is religion? How does one distinguish religion from “spirituality”? Pre-European examples: Senegambia (Islam?), Bight of Benin (vodun), Central Africa (nature, ancestors).

How does one characterize the religious beliefs of Africans in zones of enslavement? Were there any “pure” or orthodox ideologies? Video: “A Reasonable Man”

10/28 MIDTERM EXAM

Week 9 African Healing in the Diaspora

Readings: Sweet, pp. 123-233

11/2 Lecture: Transformations in African Healing in Brazil, St. Domingue, and New York: Calundu, Calenda, Lundu, Batuque, Candomble, Ring Shout

11/4 Lecture: African Healing in Dahomey’s Diaspora: Gbo, Sakpata, Asen

1) How did African healing change from Africa to the Americas? What was gained? What was lost? 2) How might one best characterize slave resistance in Brazil? Was it covert, overt, some combination of the two? 3) What is intellectual history? Did Africans make contributions to the intellectual history of the modern world? How?

Week 10 Runaways, Rebellions, and Revolution

Reading: Palmer, 89-107; John Thornton, “‘I am the Subject of the King of Congo’: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181-214; Michel Rolph Trouillot, “An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event,” in Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Beacon, 1995): 70-107.

11/9 Lecture: Resistance, Runaways, and Maroon Communities--Yanga, Benkos Bioho, Cudjoe, Palmares, etc. Film Clip from “Quilombo.”

11/11 Lecture: The Haitian Revolution

Where does slave resistance begin and end? Was everything resistance? How should we assess peace treaties signed by African

runaway communities, esp. when they often agreed to return future runaways? How important was the African influence on the Haitian Revolution, particularly compared to American and French influences of “fraternity, liberty, and equality”? How should we assess the return to subsistence farming in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution? What does Trouillot mean when he describes the Haitian Revolution as a “non-event”?

Week 11

Language, Names, and Oral Traditions

Readings: Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 154-185; Olabiyi Yai, “Texts of Enslavement: Fon and Yoruba Vocabularies from Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Brazil,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed. *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (Continuum, 2000): 102-112. Sweet, “New Perspectives on Kongo in Haiti.”

11/16 Lecture: African Languages in the Americas. Video: Palenque San Basilio, Bolivar, Maroon Community in Colombia

11/18 Lecture: African American Vernacular, Proverbs, Tales, and Names. Audio: WPA slave narratives

How important was language in the maintenance of culture, history, and tradition? What were the psychological impacts of losing language and names? To what extent were Africans able to maintain elements of language and oral tradition?

Week 12

Social Hierarchies: Africans v. African Americans

Reading: Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 186-243

11/23 Lecture: Social Hierarchies in Slavery—Differential treatments of Africans and African Americans, occupation, religion, age, gender

11/25 THANKSGIVING

11/30 Lecture: Slavery in the US v. Latin America: Was slavery in LA more “benign”? Frank Tannenbaum, castas, the Catholic Church, manumission.

Was there a strict social hierarchy in slave communities of the Americas? Did this hierarchy differ across time and space? How? Was the hierarchy sharper in North America, Latin America, the Caribbean? Why?

Week 13

Africans Become African Americans: The Processes of Creolization

Reading: Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Beacon, 1992), 1-37; Thornton, “African Cultural Groups in the Atlantic World,” in Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 183-205; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 244-292; João José Reis, “From Slave to Wealthy African Freedman: The Story of Manuel Joaquim Ricardo,” in Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet, *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Penn, 2013), 131-145.

12/2

Lecture: African, Ladino, or Creole?: Slavery in the Atlantic World.

12/7

The End of the Slave Trade: Its Impact and Importance? Illegal slave trade, Clotilde

Did Africans in the Americas recreate specific African cultural institutions, or did they weave together a variety of cultural traditions to create distinctly new African-American cultures? What is the difference between an African, a Ladino, and a Creole?

Week 14

Memory, Monuments, and Reparations

Readings: Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”* (Amistad, 2018); NPR—“Black Portuguese Plan Monument to Honor Enslaved Ancestors”

12/9

Lecture: Memories of Slavery? Ethnography, “Roots,” Genetics

12/14

Lecture: Monuments and Reparations: Lee, Jackson, Colston. Reparations?

12/22

FINAL EXAM 7:45-9:45