

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of History
History 201, The Historian's Craft
Biography as History and the African Diaspora



Instructor: Dr. Justine Walden

Email: jwalden@wisc.edu

Fall 2020

1131 Mosse Humanities Building, 8:50-10:45am

Office Hours: 3-4pm Thursdays and by appointment (online via BlackBoard Collaborate)

Course Overview, Description, and Learning Goals

Historical sources are often difficult to navigate. Particularly in relation to peoples who were oppressed or denied freedoms, they can be fragmentary or difficult to locate or interpret. They are therefore an excellent point of departure from which to consider questions about historical methodology.

While there are many narratives written by individual slaves in the Americas—Frederick Douglass' being the most prominent example—there are comparatively few accounts written by individuals who were born in Africa and who experienced enslavement and the middle passage. In this course, we will read some of the best-known accounts of individual Africans both slave and free as well as some life histories that have only recently come to light.

We will use these documents to explore questions and problems in the use of evidence and in the writing of historical narrative. We will examine questions such as 'voice' and the construction of authorial identity, narrative reliability and memory, questions of 'representativeness' and microhistory, and the problem of archival silences. We will consider the creative ways in which historians wring meaning from a comparatively scarce documentary

record, and in doing so, we will engage with wider topics such as the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the global African Diaspora, and the Black Atlantic.

Each week we will read a primary autobiographical or biographical account along with supplementary secondary works that contextualize our firsthand accounts and that interpret these writings in different ways. On occasion, we will compare the life trajectories of different individuals. One week we will consider how to work with demographic records. Through learning to read these sources closely, you will learn to “think like a historian”. Throughout, we will work on the core skills involved in writing an academic history paper. You will learn to locate sources, to construct a bibliography, to evaluate and contextualize evidence, to consider and adjudicate variances in historical interpretation, to identify and summarize historical points and rhetorical subtleties, and to construct cogent, persuasive, and evidentiary-based historical arguments both oral and written. All of these skills are central to the craft of history.

Course Texts

Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet, Ed., *Biography and the Black Atlantic*.

Randy J. Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey*.

James Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*.

Sandra E. Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late-Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Ghana*.

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*.

Most of these readings will be made available to you online. Some are accessible online through the Memorial Library website. It is strongly recommended, however, that you purchase as many of the texts as you are able in hard copy format.

Course Assignments and Requirements

Participation. Participation in weekly discussion will constitute 20% of your grade. To participate effectively, you will need to read and thoroughly consider the assigned material BEFORE coming to class and engaging in discussion. You are encouraged and expected to raise questions, share your opinions, and to respond to each other's points. Your participation grade will also include participation in short research exercises in which you will use library and online resources. If you are shy or not accustomed to speaking in public or before your peers, know that you are not alone. Speaking in public is a skill developed over time and through practice, and our discussions are meant to provide a safe space where you can try out speaking in front of other people. If you find speaking in public difficult, please let me know so that we can work together on ways that will make it easier for you.

Grade Breakdown and Paper Assignments. In addition to your participation grade, 40% of your grade will consist of **two 5-page discussion papers that center on our weekly topic, and a five-minute oral report clearly summarizing the key ideas in your paper for group discussion.** Each of these papers must be submitted by **8am on Sunday before the week in which we discuss that topic, and one day before the day on which you deliver your oral report (and so the night before class).** To clarify: you will write two 5-page discussion papers, but you will only present on one of them orally. You will sign up for the day on which you will deliver an oral report. However the date on which you submit your second discussion paper is up to you. So please plan accordingly!

The final 40% of your grade will consist of an **8-page original research paper** that analyzes and compares the narratives of any three of the authors whose writings we discuss in this course. You may also consider other relevant primary sources in these papers, but these must be cleared with me first. In these papers, you must evaluate the sources as evidence and consider how the narratives reflect themes we discuss in class. The paper must have a bibliography, footnotes, etcetera, and we will devote course time to discussing how to formulate an argument. You will also have the opportunity (rare at the college level) of submitting a draft paper for critique and commentary prior to the paper's final due date.. I will provide you with additional suggestions for supplementary sources and published primary document collections that will help you in your research.

Weekly Themes, Readings, and Skills

Week 1 (Sep 14): The Craft of History; Course Introduction and Outline; The Challenges of Historical Evidence

- At our first course meeting, we will review the course structure, assignments, themes, and expectations. We will also get to know each other a bit and you will sign up for oral paper presentation dates.

Week 2 (Sep 21): Theoretical and Historiographical Frameworks: The Black Atlantic and the “Biographical Turn”

- Joseph Miller “A Historical Appreciation of the Biographical Turn” and Martin Klein “Understanding the Slave Experience in West Africa” in Lisa Lindsay and John Wood Sweet, Ed., *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, pp. 19-65.
- Pier M. Larson, “Horrid Journeying: Narratives of Enslavement and the Global African Diaspora,” *Journal of World History*, 19.4, 2008, pp. 431-464.
- Paul Lovejoy, “‘Freedom Narratives’ of Transatlantic Slavery,” *Slavery & Abolition*, 32.1, Mar 2011, pp. 91-107.
- **Exercise 1: Navigating libraries**

Week 3 (Sep 28): Narrative and Meaning: Colonial North America

Primary Source

- Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself*. New-London: Printed by C. Holt, at the Bee-Office, 1798.
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/venture/venture.html>

Secondary Sources

- James Brewer Stewart, Ed. *Venture Smith and the Business of Slavery and Freedom*, Ch 1-3, 5.
- **Exercise 1 due in section.**

Week 4 (Oct 5): Atlantic Creoles, Status, and Mobility

- Randy J. Sparks, *Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey*, pp. 1-148.

Week 5 (Oct 12): Equiano and Authorial Identity, Contextualizing and Adjudicating Sources

Primary Source

- Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*. Vol. I. [1789]
(<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/equiano1/equiano1.html>)

Secondary Sources

- Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-century Question of Identity", *Slavery & Abolition*, 20.3 (1999), 96–105.
- Paul E. Lovejoy, "Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, Alias Olaudah Equiano, the African," *Slavery & Abolition*, 27.3 (2006), 317–347.
- Vincent Carretta, "Methodology and the Making and Reception of *Equiano*," in *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, 172–191.
- **At-Home Exercise, Compiling an annotated bibliography. Due Sunday night.**

Week 6 (Oct 19): Muslim Diaspora

Primary Source

- Ayuba Suleiman Diallo. *Job, the son of Solomon, Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon the High Priest of Boonda in Africa Who Was a Slave about Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, Was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734*. London: Richard Ford MDCCXXXIV, 1734.

Secondary Sources

- "Ayuba Suleiman Diallo of Bondu" in Philip D. Curtin (ed.) *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, pp. 17–59.
- Reis, João José, Flávio dos Santos Gomes, and Marcus J.M. de Carvalho. "Rufio José Maria (1820s–1850s): A Muslim in the Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Slave Trade Circuit," in *The Human Tradition in the Black Atlantic*, 1500–2000, 59–67.

Week 7 (Oct 26): Intellectuals, Healers, and Inquisition Records

- James Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*, pp. 1–146.
- James Sweet, "Mistaken Identities? Olaudah Equiano, Domingos Álvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora" *The American Historical Review*, 114.2, 2009, pp. 279–306.

Week 8 (Nov 2): Women's Voices and Caribbean and Transnational Perspectives

- Rebecca Scott and Jean Hébrard, "Rosalie of the Poulard Nation: Freedom, Law, and Dignity in the Era of the Haitian Revolution", in *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, pp. 248–268.

- J. C. Curto, "The story of Nbená, 1817-1820: unlawful enslavement and the concept of 'original freedom' in Angola", in P. E. Lovejoy and D. V. Trotman, Ed. *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora*, pp. 43-64.
- **In-class exercise: working with data and databases**

Week 9 (Nov 9): Brazilian Diaspora. Vital Statistics: Baptisms and Godparentage; Family Life

Primary Sources

- Baptism records for free and enslaved 'black and brown people':
- <https://slavesocieties.org/about> (Brazil>Transcriptions)
- *Iglesia Espiritu Santo Libros Sacramentales* (1737-1826), Havana. (British Library)

Secondary Sources

- Stuart Schwartz, 'Cleansing Original Sin: Godparentage and the Baptism of Slaves in Eighteenth Century Bahia', in *Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America*, Ed. Raymond Smith. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Stuart Schwartz, 'Opening the Family Circle: Godparentage in Brazilian Slavery' in *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992, pp. 137-160.
- **In-class + at home exercise: transcribing and analyzing demographic data; family history**

Week 10 (Nov 16): Fictive Kinship in the Age of Emancipation: Alienation and Epistolary Sources

Primary Sources

- 'Kale'. [Letter to John Quincy Adams, 4 January 1841](#). Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society

Secondary Sources

- Benjamin Lawrance, "'Your Poor Boy No Father No Mother': 'Orphans,' Alienation, and the Perils of Atlantic Child Slave Biography", *Biography* 36, no. 4, 2013, pp. 672-703.
- Olatunji Ojo, "Amazing Struggle: Dasalu, Global Yoruba Networks, and the Fight Against Slavery, 1851-1856," *Atlantic Studies*, 12:1, 2015, pp. 5-25.
- **YOUR FINAL PAPER OUTLINE IS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON NOV 16**

Week 11 (Nov 23): LAST WEEK TOGETHER IN PERSON. West Africa: Post-Abolition, Missionary Mediation, and Memory

Primary Sources

Aaron Kuku. "Enslavement Remembered", and "The Life History of Aaron Kuku"
Lydia Yawo and Yosef Famfantor

Secondary Sources

- "Aaron Kuku: The Life History of a Former Slave" and "The Biographies of Lydia Yawo and Yosef Famfantor: Life in Slavery/Life after Abolition".
- Edward Alpers, "The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century East Africa," in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, Ed. Claire Robertson and Martin Klein, pp. 185-200.
- * All readings are in *West African Narratives of Slavery*, pp. 21-138.

Week 12: (Nov 30) ONLINE; Eurafricans, Women and Agency, Slave Traders and Masters

- Pernille Ipsen, "The Christened Mulatresses': Euro-African Families in a Slave-Trading Town," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 70.2, pp. 371-398
- Robin Law, "Francisco Felix da Souza in West Africa, 1820-1849," in José Curto and Paul Lovejoy, Ed. *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of African and Brazil during the Era of Slavery*, pp. 189-213.
- **1st DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER IS DUE ON DEC 3 BY MIDNIGHT, ONLINE.**

Week 13 (Dec 7). ONLINE; FINAL COURSE MEETING. Genealogy, Memory, Archival Silences

- Lisa Lindsay, "Remembering His Country Marks: A Nigerian American Family and Its 'African' Ancestor", in *Biography and the Black Atlantic*, pp. 192-206.
- "Paul Sands' Diary: Living with the Past/Constructing the Present and the Future" and "A Kidnapping at Atorkor: The Making of a Community Memory" in Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery*, pp. 139-221.
- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2015. Chs. 1 and 2
- Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013, Prologue, pp. 1-18.
- **Course Wrap-up and Final Presentations**

The final and revised version of your paper will be due during finals week on a date to be announced.

Covid Policies

While on campus all employees and students are required to correctly wear appropriate and properly fitting face coverings while present in any campus building. Therefore please arrive in class with your hands washed and your face properly masked. In addition, the History Department has directed instructors to halt class and, if necessary, evacuate the classroom if anyone in the room is not wearing a properly fitted mask. We will be observing social distancing and I will make disinfectant wipes available. If you feel any symptoms of illness, do not come to campus. Additional policies concerning Covid-19 follow.

Quarantine and Isolation

We will make every effort to accommodate your academic progress if you become ill or are asked to isolate or quarantine. Your progress and grade will not be put at risk by staying out of class because of experiencing possible-COVID19 related symptoms. Should you be unable to attend class, we may be able to utilize Canvas to communicate. Alternately, you may wish to consider dropping the course or to discuss the possibilities of taking an incomplete grade with your instructor. See [additional guidelines and resources](#) for how to continue academic progress if the need to isolate or quarantine arises.

COVID Test Results

If a positive case of Covid-19 is identified within this course, I will be alerted of it, but will not be told of who it is. I will then follow university directives concerning Protective Health Information (PHI) and contact tracing. Unless I hear from the contact tracers, there is no reason to believe that any course members require isolation for quarantine. See further campus guidance on [test results and what to do if you test positive for COVID-19](#).

Other Covid Instructions

- Monitor your symptoms using the [COVID-19 Symptom Tracker](#) daily. If you have any symptoms, stay home and immediately get tested. Free testing is available to everyone on campus. For testing locations and more [information on testing](#) and test results, click here.
- Seating will take place according to signs placed in the classroom.
- Limit the sharing of materials (papers, books, writing utensils, etc.) with others in class. Any materials brought to class must be taken with you when leaving the classroom.
- No food or beverages are allowed in classrooms. If you need access to food or beverages during class for medical or other reasons, you may do so while wearing face coverings. If this will be a recurring situation, you should discuss the situation with your instructor.

- Carefully observe and follow all health and safety signs posted inside and outside the classroom
- Course start and stop times are not staggered, so we may start or end class a few minutes early or late so as to avoid congestion in the halls.
- You should clean desks and seats before and after class with supplies that will be provided, and wipe your hands with disinfectant wipes. Gloves will not be needed. Here see [guidance for cleaning classrooms](#).
- Exit classrooms as quickly as possible to allow the next section to transition in safely
- Please continue to be aware of and sensitive to others around you, particularly those who may be struggling or having difficulties.

Additional Course Requirements, Policies, Assessment, Grading, and Paper Writing

Attendance. Course attendance is mandatory. You may miss class up to two times without an excuse and without it directly affecting your grade. Beyond these two absences, you must provide documentation for missed class, whether for illness, emergency, or religious holidays. If you will miss a seminar for religious reasons, you must clear this with myself or your TA two weeks in advance.

Paper Instructions and Formatting. Paper topics must be cleared in advance with your TA or myself. Final papers must be submitted in hard copy (no email), and all papers must possess an annotated bibliography. Final papers must be no less than ten and no more than twelve double-spaced pages including notes and bibliography. Papers must possess a title along with numbered pages and your name on every page. They must be double-spaced using a standard 12-point font. Pages must be stapled together, and all papers must have an annotated bibliography.

Late Papers and Assignments. Papers are due no later than 5 pm on their final due date. For each day that an assignment is late, your grade will go down by one-third of a grade, beginning with the day on which they are due until I hold them in my hands. For example, an A level paper will receive an A- if I receive it on the day the paper is due after 5 pm. If I receive the same paper the following day, it will receive a B+. If I receive the day after that, it will get a B, and so on. No responses will be accepted more than one week after the date on which they are due.

Plagiarism and the Rules of Academic Paper Writing. If you draw on someone else's ideas, you must identify that source in footnotes. If you repeat the words of another source, you must enclose them in quotation marks and identify the source in endnotes or footnotes. The first time you refer to a source, the note should include full bibliographical data, meaning the name of the author, the journal or book title, place and date of publication, date of publication, with the relevant page numbers cited. Subsequent references to the same source can consist of a more abbreviated reference. I do not accept quotations from the Web if there is a scholarly alternative in print. Whatever form of citation you use, you must append a bibliography to your paper listing the full bibliographical data for all sources upon which you relied in writing your paper, arranged alphabetically by authors' last names and divided into separate sections for primary and secondary sources.

Help with Writing Academic Papers. Academic paper writing is never easy. Its style and its requirements may take some getting used to, and even the best paper requires multiple drafts, revisions, and stages of editing. In addition to using course readings as models for standards of writing, there are many resources available to help you learn how to write more clearly and persuasively and how to construct an argument and support it with evidence. For example, you are always welcome to make an appointment to speak with me or your TA about your paper argument and the sources you are using to support it. Your TA can also help you with paper formatting and citation instructions. If you need assistance with drafting your paper beyond the stages of revision that are part of this course, the UW campus Writing Center offers a variety of services, tutors, and workshops at <https://writing.wisc.edu/>.

A Few Readings and Resources to Use in Your Research Papers

- Anderson, Richard. "Uncovering Testimonies of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Missionary Sources: The SHADD Biographies Project and the CMS and MMS Archives for Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gambia," 38.3 (2017): 620-644.
- Austin, Allan D. *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland, 1984).
- Bailey, Anne. *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Beacon Press, 2005).
- Bellagamba, Alice, Sandra E. Green, and Martin Klein, eds., *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade: Volume 1, the Sources* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- Bellagamba, Green, and Klein, *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade: Vol 2: Essays on Sources and Methods* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- Brown, Randy M. and John Wood Sweet, "Florence Hall's 'Memoirs': Finding African Women in the Transatlantic Slave Trade," *Slavery & Abolition* 37.1 (2016): 206-21.
- Byrd, Alexander X. "Eboe, Country, Nation, and Gustavus Vassa's *Interesting Narrative*," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63.1 (Jan. 2006), 123-148.
- Carretta, Vincent. *Equiano, The African: Biography of a Self-made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).
- Fyfe, Christopher. "Four Sierra Leone Recaptives," *Journal of African History* 2:1 (1961), 77-85.
- Handler, Jerome. "Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in Barbados," *Slavery and Abolition* 19:1 (1998), 129-141.
- Lindsay, Lisa. *Atlantic Bonds: A Nineteenth-Century Odyssey from America to Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
- Lovejoy, Paul E. "Biographies of Enslaved Muslims from the Central Sudan in the Nineteenth Century," in H. Bobboyi and A.M. Yakubu, eds., *The Sokoto Caliphate: History and Legacies, 1804-2004* (Kaduna: Arewa House, 2006), vol. 1, 187-216.
- Lovejoy, Paul E. "Mohammed Ali Nicholas Sa'id: From Enslavement to American Civil War Veteran," in Dorothy Hodgson and Judith Byfield, eds., *Global Africa* (University of California Press, 2016).
- Lovejoy, Paul E. "Narratives of Trans-Atlantic Slavery: The Lives of Two Muslims, Muhammad Kabā Saghanaghu and Mahommah Gardo Baquaqwa," in Naana Opoku-Agyemang, Paul E. Lovejoy, and David Trotman, eds., *Africa and Trans-Atlantic Memories: Literary and Aesthetic Manifestations of Diaspora and History* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2008), pp. 7-22.
- Lovejoy Paul E., "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa – What's in a Name?", *Atlantic Studies*, 9.2 (2012), 165-184.
- Reis, João José *Divining Slavery and Freedom: The Story of Domingos Sodré, an African Priest in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- SHADD Project: Studies in the History of the African Diaspora (online documents)
- Sweet, James H. "Mistaken Identities? Olaudah Equiano, Domingos Alvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora," *American Historical Review* 114:2 (2009), 279-306.
- Ogude, S E. "Facts into Fiction: Equiano's Narrative Reconsidered." *Research in African Literature* 13.1 (1982): 31-43.
- Wright, Marcia. *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life Stories from East/Central Africa*. (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1993).