

Race Slavery and the Modern Historical Imagination (HNRS 230-10)

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TR 3-4:15pm

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Office Hours:

Office hours are Tuesdays from 1:30pm-2:30pm. If office hours conflict with class schedules, I am willing to set appointments with students. Feel free to speak to me before or after class should you have questions about the readings and/or assignments.

Class Objective:

What were the enduring effects of race slavery after abolition? This course explores the cultural trauma of slavery in American history from the perspective of its cultural effects and ongoing consequences. The historical research on American slavery has grown substantially in recent decades; and the class is concerned with the ways historical writers of various stripes (and across a wide span in time) reflect on the effects of the plantation regime in the progress of American culture and democracy. The order of readings is arranged as a dialogue between past and present critiques of white supremacy and antiblack racism—between current conversations on the consequences of racism and slavery in the United States and writings from black antislavery thinkers of the antebellum period. Any meaningful approach to our discussion must be mindful of the role black antislavery biography and black polemic played in advancing early critiques of an American slaveholding culture; and we consider how philosophers, legal historians, and other critics have employed both these critiques and their general knowledge of the past to think about our contemporary historical, political, and cultural moment. We will focus on how gender and class concerns intersect race, as key historical writers think through the effects of slavery and race in American culture. The work of the course will include the reading and discussion of primary texts and the writing of effective research papers on various themes and issues related to the literature.

Readings:

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2012. [Selections]

Wells-Barnett, Ida B. *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, New York: Penguin, 2014. [Selections]

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage, My Freedom*. New York: Modern Library Classics, 2003.

Glaude, Eddie S. Jr., *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*, New York: Crown Press, 2016.

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: WW Norton & Co. 2014.

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Rpt., Boston: Dover Thrift Editions, 2001.

Class Policy:

This class is a success **if and only if** students are present and consistently engaged with the reading materials. Bearing this in mind, class participation figures significantly in the final grade. There are two principal ways I assess class participation: first, I will call roll. Students are allowed no more than **two unexcused absences**. Three unexcused absences will result in the reduction of the student's grade average by one letter grade—**no exceptions**. **This means that with three unexcused absences, the highest grade the student can earn is a B+ even if papers, participation, and homework assignments are excellent. I will call roll every class period. An absence is considered excused only with a doctor's permit or in cases of bereavement only. The student must speak to me directly (that is, in person) concerning her/his absence. Also, late papers (papers turned in the day after the date) will be reduced one letter grade. The highest you can earn on the late paper is B+. Papers submitted beyond the one-day late submission period will not be graded.** Second, I will assess student participation through homework assignments and pop quizzes. Pop quizzes will be given randomly across the semester; and if you miss the quiz without a legitimate excused absence, your grade will be Zero. The pop quizzes pack a wallop! So, if you do excellently on essays and miss the quizzes, your grade will be reduced significantly by missing these quizzes. In short, come to class and be engaged actively in class responses to the assigned readings. You are being warned...

Class Requirements:

There are two papers (4 pages each), one essay and a revision, 60%; pop quizzes and homework assignments (mainly short writing assignments) 25%; and class presentations 15%. I will give special consideration to **my more energetic students by raising their averages by a letter grade, if (and only if) they are tilting between grade point averages**. Your papers should be typed, double-spaced, and in twelve-point font. The paper should include Your Name, Class, Date, and My Name in the top left-hand corner of your paper. **The two critical essays should include a Title for your paper placed at the top and center of your first page.** The papers constitute the bulk of the grade, so you should spend time fine-tuning the argument for your final. But be as vigilant in making sure you are present and engaged in class work.

In writing the essays, students should, in composition, emphasize the strength of a thesis in their writing, clarity in explanation, and cohesion in argument. I will assess the strength of the essays based on conciseness and provocative explanation. One should be clear and succinct with statements. Sentences with an overabundance of adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and clauses tend

to confuse the reader. Hence, succinct statements are those that emphasize clearly the subject, verb, and object with phrases and clauses that *complement* the subject, verb, and object. Also, you should choose quotes carefully and thoughtfully as I will also assess the strength in the interpretation of the passages you choose. While your interpretation need not follow my own understanding of the text, I do expect a forceful and provocative analysis of passages and their rhetorical function.

The team presentations constitute 15% of the final grade. The team I sign you up for will be your team for the semester. The teams have a two-fold responsibility. 1) Each team will from time to time be responsible for leading the class discussion on the work assigned. (Instructions to follow). And 2) toward the close of the semester, the team will be responsible for presenting a creative presentation on a theme or themes on any of the readings. The presenters have great latitude in whatever they choose to present. **Students should present polished oral presentations.** The team is graded collectively (not individually), so it is important that group presenters give serious care and attention to presentations. I will pay special attention to the force, clarity, and creativity of students' presentations. This will be your time to shine. So take charge! Teams will be determined after I have gotten an accurate count of the number of students in the class.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the citing or appropriation of another person's ideas without proper acknowledgement or documentation. Plagiarism is a serious offense and may result in legal action taken against students. Hence, it is good practice to document sources that are used in support of arguments in research papers.

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Class Schedule:

January 24th: Introduction and discussion of Syllabus.

Readings will be accompanied by weekly study questions.

Jan 26th-February 9th: Alexander.

Week 1: Introduction 1-20;

Week 2 and 3: Rebirth of Caste 21-59

Feb 14th-March 2nd: Douglass

Week 4: Chapters 1, 2, 7, 8

Week 5: Chapters 11, 12, 15-17

Week 6: Chapters 19-21; 23

March 7th:-9th: Wells-Barnett

Week 7: “Lynch Law in all its Phases” 96-114; and “Liverpool Slave Traditions and Present Practices” 160-63; and [Optional Reading] M. Alexander “The Lockdown”

Spring Break Recess: March 13th-19th

March 21st-April 6th: Brent/Jacobs

Week 8: Chapters 1-9

Week 9: Chapters 17-25

Week 10: Chapters 34-51

April 11th-20th: Glaude

Week 11: “A Thick Fog of Unreality,” “The Great Black Depression,” “The Value Gap” 1-50.

Week 12: “Racial Habits,” and “White Fear.” 51-92

April 25th-27th: Student/Teacher conferences

Schedule for Assignments:

March 2nd: First Essay Due

May 4th: Final Revised Essay Due

(Instructions to follow on both essays).

Note: I will indicate over the course of the semester where we are in the readings. The papers and presentations are due on the date assigned, no exceptions. Group presentations should be based on sections *already discussed* in class.

Note: I reserve the right to make any changes to the schedule. Otherwise, the papers, exams, and oral presentations are due on the day assigned. Late papers will be reduced by one letter grade. No exceptions. **Also, no incompletes except in extenuating circumstances.**