

The Lives of the Enslaved

Professor Daina Ramey Berry

Spring 2021

Course Description

This course is a study of enslaved people. It is a course about the ways human beings coped with captivity. It is also a course that listens to their voices through audio files, diaries, letters, actions, and silences. Centering the people of slavery rather than viewing them as objects shifts the focus to their commentary on slavery. In addition to listening to enslaved people, students will have the opportunity to engage some of the most cutting-edge scholarship on the subject. Although the early literature objectified enslaved people and hardly paid attention to their experiences, work published since the Civil Rights Movement and into the twenty-first century offers rich accounts of enslaved life. By approaching the institution of slavery in the United States from the enslaved perspective through firsthand accounts of their experiences, students will have the opportunity to engage a variety of sources, including narratives, plantation records, podcasts, short films, and other media. Some of the specific themes addressed include gender, sexuality, region, labor, resistance, pleasure, love, family, and community among the enslaved.

Course Readings

1. Berry, Daina Ramey. *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017.
2. Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs*. New York: Oxford, 1988. (For younger readers: Lyons, Mary E. *Letters from a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs*. New York: Scribner, 1992.)
3. Schermerhorn, Calvin. *Unrequited Toil: A History of United States Slavery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
4. Williams, Heather A. *American Slavery: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1-2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page research paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives

1. To consider the diversity of the enslaved experience based on region, sex, crop, and other factors
2. To develop strategies for studying slavery without compromising the experiences of the enslaved
3. To study a host of primary documents relating the slavery and slave testimony

Class Schedule

Week 1: February 4: Course Introduction: Understanding Soul Values and the Process of Studying the Enslaved

Readings

- Williams, Introduction and Chapter 1 ("The Atlantic Slave Trade")
- Schermerhorn, Introduction and Chapter 6 ("Life in the Quotidian")
- Berry, Introduction and Chapter 3 ("Adolescence, Young Adulthood, and Soul Values")
- Cite Black Women Podcast: Daina Ramey Berry, Season 1, Episode 5, February 2019 (a link can be found in Week 1 module)

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
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Week 2: February 11: Engaging Slave Narratives

Readings

- Ted Koppel, *Nightline*, "Found Voices: The Slave Narratives" (Watch before class; a link can be found in the Week 2 module)
- Library of Congress, "An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives" and "The Limitations of the Slave Narrative Collection" (Links to these readings can be found in the week two module)
- John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *The Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 4 (November 1975), 473–492. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two

- Short Paper One due February 17
 - Write a response paper - You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor, or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session One: Monday, February 15 - 8:00-9:30 PM ET

Week 3: February 18: Slavery in the Chesapeake

Readings

- Williams, Chapter 2 ("Putting Slavery into Place")
- "An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves, 1705," Encyclopedia Virginia (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module)
- Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 85, no. 1 (February 1980), 44-78. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.)
- Jamestown City, Virginia 1624 census (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
 - Final Paper/Project Question due February 24
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final project or paper will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing.
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Week 4: February 25: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's University

Readings

- Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868), 1–90 (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.)
- Maurie D. McInnis, "How the Slave Trade Built America," *New York Times*, April 3, 2015 (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
- Short Paper Two due March 3

- Write a response paper - You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor, or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Two: Tuesday, March 2 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 5: March 4: Slavery in the North

Readings

- Sojourner Truth, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850). (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.)
- Leslie Harris, "Slavery, Emancipation, and Class Formation in Colonial and Early National New York City," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 3 (March 2004): 339–359. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 5 module.)
- Ben Franklin's World Podcast: Episode 170, Wendy Ann Warren, "New England Bound: Slavery in the Early New England." (A link can be found in the Week 5 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
 - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due March 10
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your Section Professor's feedback, AND
 2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project
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Week 6: March 11: Slavery in the North, continued

Readings

- Schermerhorn, Chapters 1 and 2 ("Counterrevolutionaries" and "Slow Death for Slavery?")
- Daniel Horsmanden, *A Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy* (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC04205.01; a link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three due March 17
 - Write a response paper - You can respond to the prompt created by your

section professor, or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Three: Monday, March 15 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 7: March 18: Slavery in the Deep South

Readings

- Schermerhorn, Chapters 3 and 4 ("Cotton Empire" and "Black Insurgency")
- William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* (1825), Documenting the American South (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - Short Paper Four due March 24
 - Write a response paper - You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor, or to one of your own design.
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Week 8: March 25: Slavery in the Deep South, continued: Auctions and Markets

Readings:

- Williams, Chapters 3 and 4 ("The Work of Slavery" and "Struggles for Control")
- Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (all)
- Maurie D. McInnis, "Mapping the Slave Trade in Richmond and New Orleans," *Building & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 20, no. 2 (fall 2013), 102–125. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Eight module)
- Maurie D. McInnis, "Slave Pens, Slave Jails, and Slave Markets," from *World of a Slave: Encyclopedia of the Material Life of Slaves in the United States* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), 463–468. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.)

Assignments:

- Paper/Project Preview due March 31
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine with your Section Professor an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in.

Q&A Session Four: Tuesday, March 30 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 9: April 1: Slavery in the West

Readings:

- Daina Ramey Berry and Nakia D. Parker, "How Westward Expansion Breathed Life into Slavery" (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.)
- William Hillhouse, "The Crisis, No. 1 or Thoughts on Slavery, Occasioned by the Missouri Question." (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.)
- "Interview with Silvina Williams Thompson Jones," Indian Pioneer Papers, The University of Oklahoma Western History Collection (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.)

Assignments:

- Discussion Board Eight
 - Short Paper Five due April 7
 - Write a response paper - You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor, or to one of your own design.
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Week 10: April 8: Resistance and Resilience in Urban and Rural Environments

Readings

- Schermerhorn, Chapter 8 ("Industrial Discipline")
- "Nelson Allyn to Joseph Allyn" describing events following Nat Turner's rebellion (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05655; a link to this reading can be found in the Week Ten module.)
- The *Confessions of Nat Turner* and *David Walker's Appeal* (A link to these readings can be found in the Week 10 module.)

Assignments

- Rough Draft due April 14
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your Section Professor.

Q&A Session Five: Monday, April 12 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 11: April 15: Gender and Sexuality in Slavery Studies

Readings

- Schermerhorn, Chapter 7 ("Landscape of Sexual Violence")
- Thomas A. Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men Under Slavery." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (September 2011), 445–464. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.)
- Daina Ramey Berry and Nakia D. Parker, "Women and Slavery in the 19th Century." from *The Oxford Handbook of American Women and Gender History*. Ellen Hartigan O'Connor and Lisa G. Materson, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine
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Week 12: April 22: Synthesizing Slavery Studies

Readings

- Schermerhorn, Chapter 12 ("No Justice, No Peace")
- James Oliver Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue" in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006). (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)
- Deborah Gray White, *Telling Histories: Black Women Historians in the Ivory Tower*. Introduction and Chapter 5 "My History in History" (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)

Assignments

- Final Draft due April 28