

## African American History to Emancipation

### Professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham

Spring 2026

#### Course Description

This course recounts the story of Blacks in America from their beginnings in Africa, through centuries of enslavement in the United States, and during the Civil War years' promise of freedom. We will span centuries filled with momentous events, heroic voices, and social movements, as well as cultural beliefs and creative forms expressive of everyday life—all of which contributed to and transformed along the way the larger American nation. The course will reveal no monolithic Black community, but instead myriad ways Blacks themselves perceived and even debated the Black "experience" and path to racial equality. In identifying complexities as well as commonalities, the course will provide an opportunity to reflect on the ways historical scholarship has changed over the years, to ponder the multiple meanings of a time period called an "era," and to become acquainted with a variety of written, digital, visual, and sonic primary sources representative of the Black past.

#### Course Readings

Students are responsible for purchasing any readings below that are not available online. All other readings in the syllabus will be provided. Readings not linked in the syllabus will be uploaded to the learning management system.

1. Basker, James G. and Nicole A. Seary, eds. *Black Writers of the Founding Era, 1760–1800*. Foreword by Annette Gordon-Reed. The Library of America, 2023.
2. Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Oxford University Press, 1999. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
3. Jones, Martha S. *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
4. Smallwood, Stephanie E. *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. Harvard University Press, 2008. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
5. Willis, Deborah. *The Black Civil War Soldier: A Visual History of Conflict and Citizenship*. New York University Press, 2021. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

## Course Requirements

- Watch all course lectures.
- Complete all course readings.
- Submit five short papers (500 words each).
- Contribute to nine discussion boards.
- Participate in at least three Q&As.
- Complete a 15-page (~3,750 words) research paper or project of appropriate rigor.
- Complete a course evaluation. (A survey link will be sent to your Gettysburg email during week eleven of the semester.)

## Learning Objectives

1. To identify key themes, individuals, and movements in African American history as integral to the history of the United States.
2. To utilize a range of primary sources for a fuller examination of Black culture and consciousness.
3. To understand the importance of historiography and changing interpretations of the past.
4. To appreciate a diversity of historical subfields, for example, intellectual history, gender history, political history, environmental history, social history, legal history, etc.
5. To recognize the “zigzag” of history—the progress and setbacks—in pursuit of Black freedom and racial equality over the years.
6. To respect and practice a balanced engagement with the social differences, values, and ideological debates occurring within Black communities in the past.

## Class Schedule

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**Week One:** February 5: Introduction: Perspectives on Early Iterations of Black History

### Readings

- Dickson D. Bruce Jr., “The Ironic Conception of American History: The Early Black Historians, 1883–1915,” *Journal of Negro History* 69 (Spring, 1984): 55–62. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- John Hope Franklin, “The New Negro History,” *Journal of Negro History* 42 (April 1957): 89–97. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Stephen G. Hall, “‘A Search for Truth’: Jacob Oson and the Beginnings of African American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 139–148. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Robert L. Harris, “Coming of Age: The Transformation of Afro-American

Historiography," *Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 107–121. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

- Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, "Mapping the World, Mapping the Race: The Negro Race History, 1874–1915" *Church History* 64 (December 1995): 610–626. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

### Assignments

- Discussion Board One
    - First post due: Sunday, February 8
    - Second post due: Wednesday, February 11
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### **Week Two:** February 12: Africa and Slavery

#### Readings

- Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–64. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Linda M. Heywood, "Slavery and Its Transformation in the Kingdom of Kongo: 1491–1800," *Journal of African History* 50, no. 1 (2009): 1–22. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, "In Search of the 1619 African Arrivals: Enslavement and Middle Passage," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 127, no. 3 (2019): 200–211. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

#### Suggested Reading

- John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Tenth Edition (McGraw Hill, 2020), Chapter 1.

### Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
    - First post due: Sunday, February 15
    - Second post due: Wednesday, February 18
  - Short Paper One due: Wednesday, February 18
    - 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 Three:** February 19: The Atlantic Slave Trade: Diasporic Destinations in the Old World and New World

Readings

- Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America," *The Americas* 57 (2000): 171–205. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 65–122. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

Suggested Reading

- Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Chapter 2.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
    - First post due: Sunday, February 22
    - Second post due: Wednesday, February 25
  - Final Project/Paper Question due: Wednesday, February 25
    - 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 Four:** February 26: Enslavement in Colonial North America: The Different Settings

Readings

- 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. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Jane Landers, "Gracia Real De Santa Teresa De Mose: A Free Black Town in Spanish Colonial Florida," *American Historical Review* 95, no.1 (1990): 9–30. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Margot Minardi, "The Boston Inoculation Controversy of 1721–1722: An Incident in the History of Race," *William and Mary Quarterly* 16, no.1 (2004): 47–76. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

## Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
    - First post due: Sunday, March 1
    - Second post due: Wednesday, March 4
  - Short Paper Two due: Wednesday, March 4
    - 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 Five:** March 5: Revolutionary Times

### Readings

- James G. Basker and Nicole A. Seary eds. *Black Writers of the Founding Era, 1760–1800*. Foreword by Annette Gordon-Reed. (The Library of America, 2023).
  - Foreword and Introduction, xxvii–lix.
  - Wheatley Letter to the Rev. Samuel Occum, 96–97.
  - Lemuel Haynes, 126–146.
  - Benjamin Banneker, 362–374.
  - Africanus, 375–379.
  - African Society of Boston, 468–471.
  - Richard Allen, 504–507.
  - Prince Hall, 534–542.
  - Lemuel Haynes, 593–605.
  - Petition of the Free People of Colour in Philadelphia, 616–620.

### Suggested Reading

- Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Chapters 5–6.

## Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
    - First post due: Sunday, March 8
    - Second post due: Wednesday, March 11
  - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due: Wednesday, March 11
    - Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
    - 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 project/paper.
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## **Week Six:** March 12: Portraying Slavery: Why Historians Change Their Minds

### Readings

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Oxford University Press, 1999). ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

### Suggested Further Reading

- Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Chapter 7.

### Assignments

- Discussion Board Week Six
    - First post due: Sunday, March 15
    - Second post due: Wednesday, March 18
  - Short Paper Three due: Wednesday, March 18
    - 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 Seven:** March 19: Anti-Slavery Thought and Action

### Readings

- Frederick Douglass, *The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered: An Address Before the Literary Societies of Western Reserve College, at Commencement, July 12, 1845* (Rochester, NY, 1854). ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))
- David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))
- Henry Highland Garnet, *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens Held at Buffalo on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1843 For the Purpose of Considering Their Moral and Political Condition as American Citizens* (New York, 1843). ("Address to the Slaves" and Frederick Douglass's Disagreement). ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))
- "1843 National Convention," *Colored Conventions Project*, coloredconventions.org. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))
- "Henry Highland Garnet's 'Address to the Slaves' and Its Colored Conventions Origins," *Colored Conventions Project*, coloredconventions.org. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))

### Suggested Further Reading:

- Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Tenth Edition, Chapter 9.

## Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
    - First post due: Sunday, March 22
    - Second post due: Wednesday, March 25
  - Short Paper Four due: Wednesday, March 25
    - 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 Eight:** March 26: Free Black Communities

### Readings

- Eric Ledell Smith, "The End of Black Voting Rights in Pennsylvania: African Americans and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837–1838," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65, no. 3 (1998): 279–299. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Mark Boonshoft, "From Property to Education: Public Schooling, Race, and the Transformation of Suffrage in the Early National North," *Journal of the Early Republic* 41, no. 3 (2021): 435–470. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

### Suggested Reading

- Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Chapter 8.

## Assignments

- Project/Paper Preview due: Wednesday, April 1
    - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
    - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper
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## **Week Nine:** April 2: The Debate over Emigration

### Readings

- Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, 1–49, 59–70, 89–107.
- *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, the 24th, 25th, and 26th of*

*August, 1854* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1854), all. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Nine module.](#))

### Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
  - First post due: Sunday, April 5
  - Second post due: Wednesday, April 8
- Short Paper Five due: Wednesday, April 8
  - 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 Ten:** April 9: Gender Perspectives

#### Readings

- Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830–1861," *Journal of Southern History* 68 (August 2002): 533–572. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Thavolia Glymph, "'Invisible Disabilities': Black Women in War and in Freedom," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 160, no. 3 (2016): 237–246. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Margaret Washington, "Frances Ellen Watkins: Family Legacy and Antebellum Activism," *The Journal of African American History* 100, no. 1 (2015): 59–86. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

### Assignments

- Rough Draft due: Wednesday, April 15
    - 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.
    - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
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## **Week Eleven:** April 16: Black Citizenship Denied: Race and the Legal Process

### Readings

- Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, Chapter 8.
- *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), National Archives. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Eleven module.](#))

### Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine
    - First post due: Sunday, April 19
    - Second post due: Wednesday, April 22
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## **Week Twelve:** April 23: Civil War: Freedom Envisioned

### Readings

- Deborah Willis, *The Black Civil War Soldier*, (New York University Press, 2021), 1–48, 75–124. ([This reading can be accessed through the Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

### Suggested Further Reading:

- Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Chapter 10.

### Assignments

- Final Project/Paper due: Wednesday, April 29
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## **Course and Program Policies**

It is the responsibility of students to know, understand, and abide by course and program policies.

For a full overview of program policies, review the Gettysburg College–Gilder Lehrman Institute Student Handbook.

### Course correspondence

Correspondence with faculty and administrators should be formal. Include a subject line, addressee, and closing. Put the name and number of your course in the subject line.

### Plagiarism and AI

This program uses Turnitin to check for instances of plagiarism and AI. Plagiarism and papers composed fully or in part by AI will not be tolerated. This includes self-plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing or composing papers with AI for the first time may receive a zero on the assignment. A student caught plagiarizing or composing with AI for a second time may be permanently removed from the program.

Your section professor will set the policies for use of AI for research or purposes other than composing your papers.

### Late work

Assignments should be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the due date unless otherwise specified by your section professor. If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact your section professor to ask for an extension before the assignment's due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% if less than a week late, 10% if one week late, and an additional 10% for each subsequent week.

### Grading scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Grade Points
A	95%–100%	4
A-	90%–94%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3
B-	80%–83%	2.67
C+	77%–79%	2.33
C	74%–76%	2
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1
D-	60%–63%	.67
F	0%–59%	0

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## **Assignment Descriptions**

### **Short Papers** (25% of grade – 5% per short paper)

Students will complete five short papers. Each should be approximately 500 words long. The purpose of these papers is not to merely summarize weekly readings but to demonstrate that you have read them analytically and contextually. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings. If you need help getting started, you can complete one of the options listed below.

**Complete a thesis identification** - Select one of your assigned readings and focus on identifying the thesis as well as the evidence the authors use to support that thesis.

**Complete a primary source evaluation** - Evaluate a primary source from the Gilder Lehrman Collection or elsewhere. Primary sources must be relevant to that week's readings. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is the author of this document?
- Who was their intended audience?
- How might both author and audience impact the content of the document?
- For what reason was this document created?

**Complete a book review** - Focus on one of the secondary sources assigned in this course and critique it. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's argument?
- Does the author adequately support their argument?
- Are you convinced of their argument? If not, why not?
- How does this source fit into the larger discussion of its topic?

### **Discussion Board Posts** (18% of grade – 2% per discussion board)

Students will interact in 9 discussion boards in this course. Discussion boards are led by section professors, who will provide specific instructions for participation in their section. You are required to make at least one post to each discussion board and respond to **at least two other students**.

### **Question-and-Answer Sessions** (15% of grade – 5% per reaction)

Throughout the semester the lead professor of each course will conduct five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1–2-paragraph Q&A Reaction within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&As, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 500-word review of topics covered for each missed Q&A. **Makeup assignments must be completed within two weeks of the missed Q&A.**

### Final Project/Paper (42% of grade)

For the final assignment of each course, you will choose to complete either a research project or 15-page research paper. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts and podcasts, documentary editing and transcription, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a project or paper, finals are scaffolded throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows time to incorporate instructor feedback into assignments.

### Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Project/Paper Proposal (2%)

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final project or paper. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be super specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing) and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (what is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%)

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan on utilizing in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Project or Paper Preview (5%)

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.