

History 343 - Slavery in the United States

Dr. Charles W. McKinney

Spring 2008, 205 Palmer Hall
TR 12.30 - 1.45
Office Hours: TR 2.30 - 4.00
and by appointment

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Course Description

The purpose of this course is to attain a fundamental knowledge of one of the most complex and controversial experiences in United States history. This course will examine various social, economic, and political factors in an attempt to explain why slavery developed as it did. Also, because slavery remained in the United States over such a long period (approximately 240 years), we will discuss how it changed over time. Students will consider the role historians play in shaping popular conceptions of historical events. Using primary and secondary sources and film, students will come to a greater understanding of the central issues presented in the course, and respond to these issues in a series of critical essays and one longer writing project.

Books:

- Ira Berlin, ed., *Remembering Slavery (Remembering)*
- Thomas C. Holt, Elsa Brown, *Major Problems in African American History (Problems)*
- James and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty (Hope)*
- Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul*
- Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery (Slavery)*

Course Requirements

2 Reaction Papers and 1 Book Review - 30% of final grade

Reaction Papers (2) Due on January 31 and February 28

You will submit two 3-5 page reaction papers, due on the days indicated. The main point of the reaction paper is to provide a critical reaction to the readings covered in a particular segment of the class. In these papers, you will discuss and evaluate the major themes that arise in the readings you select for the paper. While a (very) short synopsis of the readings can make its way into the papers, reaction papers will ultimately be graded based on the *conclusions* you draw about the readings themselves, and the ways in which they help/do not help you understand particular topics or themes.

Book Review (1) Due on March 27

You will submit **one** 5-7 page book review essay, due on the indicated date. This is your opportunity to evaluate a piece of scholarship pertaining to slavery. In your review, you should consider the following questions when describing the book:

- What is the scope and focus of the book? What is the author attempting to do?
- What conclusions did the author reach?
- To reach those conclusions, what kinds of evidence did the author use?
- How would you describe the author's research and methodology?

To critique your chosen work, you should consider the following:

- Does the author have a bias? Explain and illustrate by brief example.
- Are the author's methodology and arguments convincing? If so, how so? If not, why not? Illustrate your point with brief examples.
- In what ways does this work change your understanding of slavery in the United States? What does it contribute to our understanding of slavery? Does it add fresh perspectives or does it recycle old stereotypes?

In-class discussion/participation - 20% of final grade

I expect you to attend every class, arrive on time and come ready, having done the assigned reading and/or written assignment. Since there will be a very high premium on class discussion, it is imperative that everyone comes to class ready to contribute with comments, questions and insights. Remember though, class participation is not a contest. The people who talk the most do not necessarily "win." What really counts is your ability and willingness to bring something valuable to the discussion that your colleagues and I can build upon in our efforts to bring some clarity to the issues that we are discussing. Of course, this level of participation will require full reading of assigned work. Also, to ensure the best possible experience for all of us, let's refrain from using inappropriate language, or any other activity that may make our classroom less than open and engaging. In addition, coming to the office to discuss material covered in the class, or engaging in a substantive electronic conversation also count (broadly) as class participation.

Discussion days and Discussion page:

On selected days throughout the semester, we will have in-class discussion (these days will be in **bold** on your syllabus). On those days you will submit a **typed** discussion page at the end of class. This page will consist of five fully formed discussion topics that you would like to discuss with the class. These topics can take the shape of questions or observations about the reading. You will come to class with this page, and use it to engage your classmates in an informed, thoughtful discussion of the dominant themes and ideas discussed in recent weeks. I will call on students randomly to begin discussion on these days by using one of their prepared discussion topics. Please note that a fifth of your grade is based on your participation in class. While in-class discussion days represent a significant opportunity for you to shine, it is in your best interest to come to class throughout the semester ready to contribute to the intellectual give and take of the class.

Historiographical Essay - 30% of final grade Due on April 17

Using the same set of questions and criteria as the book review, students will submit a 10-15 page historiographical essay that will evaluate a series of books and articles dedicated to a particular aspect of American Slavery. This means that the essay should have a very detailed area of analysis, and should draw some very specific conclusions about the state of the historical literature pertaining to your topic. I'll provide more information on this assignment later on in the semester.

Final Exam - 20% of final grade

The final exam will be an open book, take home essay exam. Students will be expected to write (rather eloquently) on several themes that present themselves throughout the course. We'll discuss the exam as we approach the end of the semester.

Please do not hesitate to come by my office to discuss any of these requirements.

Honor Code:

All work turned in for this course is to be completed in accordance with the Rhodes College Honor Code. To demonstrate your commitment to the Code, each student must write "pledged" and sign his/her name on every assignment. If you have questions about plagiarism you should talk to me directly.

Policies:

Note on written work:

All written work must be composed on a computer, be double-spaced and in 10 or 12 point font. Have your name, the assignment name (and number if necessary), date, course name and email address on each document you turn in. Students who feel that they need assistance with written assignments should feel free to contact me so that we can discuss whatever challenges you may be facing.

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Students will be allowed three unexcused absences. *All other absences after the third one must be excused. Each unexcused absence after the third one will cost you 5% of your final grade. If you miss three weeks worth of classes, you can be dropped from the class or flunked.* Valid excuses for missing class include but are not limited to religious observances, college-sanctioned academic or athletic travel, personal illness or injury, family illness or injury or bereavement. Needless to say, infrequent class attendance will negatively impact your final grade.

Paper Policies:

Due Dates

Papers are due at the beginning of class and I define "beginning" as the first fifteen (15) minutes. On the 16th minute, your paper is late, and ***I do not accept late papers.*** "My computer crashed" or "the printer jammed a few minutes ago" or "my slacker roommate didn't wake me up" are not reasons to excuse/accept a late paper; rather, they are a testament to poor time management on your part. *However, please keep in mind that, while I do not accept late papers, you must turn in all of the assigned work in order to pass the class.* Of course, I will accept a late paper with an acceptable, college-sanctioned excuse.

Grades

As a general rule, grades are not negotiable. However, I will gladly discuss the grade on any assignment 24 hours after the work is turned in.

Citation:

Papers should be written using the Chicago citation style. This style may be viewed at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. If you have any questions about proper citation, please refer to this site, *and then* contact me.

A note on the use of the web: websites must be approved by the professor before they can be cited in any of the written work in the class. Generally, approved sites will be those that provide you with primary source material (autobiographies, interviews, newspapers, etc.) However, please observe that websites may not be used as sources for either the book review or the historiographical essay.

Learning Differences:

I am strongly committed to accommodating students with disabilities, and ask your cooperation in making sure that I'm aware of any such accommodation you might need. For more information, please contact Student Disability Services to alert them of any needs you may have.

Additional Information:

- Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, games, and any other object that can beep, buzz, ring or vibrate. These devices are extremely disruptive when they go off in the middle of class.
- *I reserve the right to amend this syllabus as necessary*

Class Schedule:

January 10: Introductions; go over the syllabus

January 15, 17: The World Changed - Bringing Africans to America

T: African Background

R: Africa and the Slave Trade

(*Problems*, chap. 2, all documents, essays by Rodney and Thornton)

Slavery in the Colonial Era

January 22, 24: The Emergence of Slavery in the New World

T: Why Africans? Slavery and Indentured Servitude

R: Making Slaves, Making Race

(*Slavery*, chp. 1; *Hope*, Intro -p. 11; *Problems*, chp. 3)

January 29, 31: Having it both ways: Slavery and the American Revolution

T: Slavery in the Colonial Era

R: The Riddle of the Revolution

(*Slavery*, chp. 2, chp. 3 (parts I-III); *Hope*, rest of chp. 1 - 3; *Problems*, chp. 4, docs. 1, 2; chp. 5, docs 1-3)

January 31: Reaction Paper #1 Due

February 5, 7: Slavery and the Constitution

T: The Problem of Black Freedom

R: Discussion Day

(*Slavery*, rest of chp. 3; *Problems*, chp. 5, docs. 4-6, both essays)

Slavery in Antebellum America

February 12, 14: Free Blacks in the Antebellum North

T: The tenuous nature of black life in the North

R: Institution building in the North

(*Hope*, chps. 4-7)

February 19, 21: A Life of their own: African American Culture

T: Overview of Antebellum slave life

R: Masters and Slaves: The world they made together

(*Slavery*, chp. 4, chp. 5 (I-IV); *Problems*, chp. 6, docs. 1-6; chp. 7, docs. 1, 3, 4, essay by Berlin and Rowland)

February 26, 28: African American Culture, Part II

T: Religion and Family Life

R: Discussion Day

(*Slavery*, chp. 5; *Problems*, chp. 7, docs. 7-8; *Remembering*, chp. 3)

Extra Reading: Charles Joyner article (in public folder)

February 28: Reaction Paper #2 Due

February 29 - March 10: Spring Break

March 11, 13: Turning People into Property

T: Marking bodies, making racial difference

R: The impact of the trade on White America.

(*Soul*, intro - chp. 4; skim *Remembering*, chp. 3)

March 18: Life in the Shadow of the Market

T: The business of slavery

R: Guest Lecture - Professor Art Carden on the Economics of Slavery

(*Souls*, chps. 5 - epilogue)

March 20: Easter Break

What Does Freedom Mean?

March 25, 27: Black Women in Slavery and Freedom

T: The double dynamic of race and gender

R: Free women of color in Antebellum America

(Read "My Mother was very much of a Woman." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 235-269. Available from *JSTOR*)

March 27: Book Review Due

April 1: Expansion, Anti-Slavery and Resistance

T: The expansion of slavery

R: Resistance, North and South

(David Walker's *Appeal* (Preamble, Articles 1, 4) @

<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/walkerhp.html> ; Maria Stewart speech (in public folder); Frederick Douglass speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" @

http://douglassarchives.org/doug_a10.htm)

April 3: Film, "Slavery and the making of America", part 3

April 8, 10: On the Brink and Beyond

T: The centrality of slavery to the White South

R: Black efforts to destroy slavery/Discussion Day

(*Slavery*, chp. 6; *Hope*, skim 8, read 9-10; *Problems*, chp. 8, all docs, Lapansky essay)

April 15, 17: Civil War and Emancipation

T: Making the War about Freedom

R: Securing the Promise of Freedom

(*Slavery*, chp. 7 (I-II); *Problems*, chp. 9, all docs, essay by Harding; skim Berlin article (public folder))

April 17: Historiographical Essay Due

April 22, 24: The Promise of Freedom

T: Building freedom from the ground up

R: "A whole race learning to read"/Discussion Day

(*Slavery*, rest of chp. 7; *Problems*, chp. 10, all docs, essay by Gutman)

Tuesday April 29: Final Exam Scheduled