

Africa during the Era of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

HIST 387-001, Fall 2014

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3-4:15 pm, Enterprise Hall 275

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-2:30 pm, or by appointment

Course Description:

An estimated twelve million Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas between 1500 and 1866. The mass movement of people from one continent to another was unprecedented in human history and the forced migration of these Africans had a lasting impact on the peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Europe. The aftershocks of the trade can still be felt in politics in the United States, scholarly debates in Africa, and arguments over issues such as reparations for those negatively impacted by the trade.

This course examines African history during the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It will provide an overview of important economic and political developments in African societies between the fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries. In this course, we will focus on issues such as African participation in the trade and resistance from both slaves and leaders. We will also highlight African contributions to the Americas. In addition to using a variety of data sources to make sense of the magnitude and shape of this forced migration, we will study historical debates about the impact of the slave trade on African societies.

Our work in class will culminate in the development of a research project involving Africa and the slave trade. You will be led through this process gradually, encouraged to choose a topic that interests you, and guided to sources that will help you answer your research question. This research will then be shared with the rest of the class. By the end of the semester, we will have gained a greater understanding of the African side of the slave trade, including the turmoil, tragedy, and transformations that occurred on the continent during this period.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will gain a better understanding of the history and culture of Africa between the fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries.
2. Students will note how aspects of African societies – including identity, religion, gender relations, and state formations – influenced the slave trade and slave populations in the Americas. Students will learn about African participation and involvement in historical events.
3. Students will learn how to analyze and think critically about a variety of sources – oral histories, archeological data, and colonial documents – to make sense of the history of slave trade.
4. Students will gain an appreciation of the diversity of African communities and experiences from an African perspective. We will also discuss the impact of Africans in the Diaspora.

5. Students will be able to clearly and concisely express themselves in writing and speaking. They will learn how to properly cite print and online material in their papers. In addition, they will be able to identify and grapple with major issues discussed by historians.

Grading and expectations:

Participation: This class is participatory and, in order to get the most from class, you need to attend every class prepared and having thought about the assigned reading(s). You will be expected to spend about 5 hours per week outside of the classroom preparing for class and finishing assignments. If you have poor class participation due to absences – i.e., your non-presence during discussions – your final grade will fall dramatically. In other words, if you average a B on assignments and exams but fail to participate consistently, your final mark will be a C. If you are absent for more than four classes (and do not provide an adequate excuse in a timely manner – i.e., notify the instructor after your second missed class), you will lose points from your class participation grade. **Note: the instructors will not re-teach a missed class via email or during office hours.**

Classroom Etiquette: **You may not use cell phones, laptops, or any other electronic devices in the classroom** unless they are being used for a classroom activity as indicated by the instructor. Please arrive on time and pack up your things only when the lecture or discussion has completely finished. **Any violation of these rules will significantly lower your participation grade.**

Reaction Papers: You will write short papers of 200-300 words answering the question(s) posted on blackboard. These papers are to be emailed to your recitation instructor as a Word attachment **before 1:30 pm each Thursday**. You will receive a score of 2 (very good), 1 (needs improvement), or 0 (does not respond to the question adequately) for each paper. You must provide proper citations for each paper. Out of 12 reaction papers listed on the syllabus, you will be graded on 10 of these papers (you can either choose to skip two papers or have the two lowest reaction paper grades dropped at the end of the semester). **Late reaction papers will not be accepted for any reason.**

Discussion Leading: During the semester, you will lead discussion once with another student. You will be responsible for spending between ten and fifteen minutes at the beginning of class presenting major themes, important points, and issues for discussion for the class. You will also provide the class with one or two discussion questions that you think should be at the center of our discussion for class that day. You will be individually graded on the quality of your presentation.

Research Paper: You will be required to work on a 5-7 page research paper throughout the semester. Parts of the paper will be due incrementally - your topic (due September 16), an annotated bibliography (due September 30), an outline (due November 11), a five to ten-minute presentation (on November 25 or December 2), and your paper (5-7 pages, due December 4). All

of these portions will count in your final paper grade. The assignment will be introduced with further detail throughout the semester.

Mid-term and Final: These exams will be comprehensive and deal with our readings and discussions in class. The exams will test your ability to analyze historical data and not just focus on the memorization of dates and events. To do well in this course, you must take careful notes of the readings and pay attention in class. The exams will be take-home and submitted to the professor through the blackboard site for the course. Guides will be distributed in advance of the exams.

Exam Rules and Deadlines:

In accordance with university regulations, professors in the Department of History and Art History re-schedule exams after receiving documentation of a medical emergency or family emergency; often this documentation must be verified by the Dean of Student Life. **Work-related or personal/family obligations are not adequate excuses for re-scheduling an exam or obtaining any kind of extension.** Note: September 2nd is the last day to add classes or drop classes with no tuition penalty; September 26th the last day to drop with a 67% tuition penalty. If you have questions about registering for this class, please speak with your academic advisor.

Final Grade:

Participation - 10% (based on the quantity and quality of your contributions)

Discussion leading - 5%

Reaction Papers (10 total) - 10%

Research paper (topic – 2.5%, bibliography – 2.5%, outline – 5%, presentation – 5%, final paper – 15%) - 30% total

Mid-term - 15%

Final - 30%

Office of Disability Services:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. See <http://ods.gmu.edu>.

Note about Communications:

Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information. Blackboard will be used to post important messages, links for readings, and grades for papers.

Other Important Campus Resources:

The Writing Center: Robinson A114, <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

University Libraries: <http://library.gmu.edu>

Counseling and Psychological Services: 703-993-2380, <http://caps.gmu.edu>

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient. Plagiarism cannot be tolerated in an academic setting.

Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited; this is incorrect. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions to this rule include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources—what has been called common knowledge—or the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research. What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being "reader friendly."

In other words, writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might be unfamiliar with and want to investigate or debate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will not be guilty of plagiarism.

Cheating means to get help on an assignment without permission. This includes asking another classmate to “see” their paper before writing your own paper OR hiring someone to “edit” your paper. Allowing another student to see your work without permission from the instructor is also considered cheating. You must get permission from your instructor before asking anyone outside of your professors, writing center tutors, or teaching assistants for help on assignments. If you don't understand an assignment, you need to ask the professor for clarification rather than your classmates.

In this course, you will be expected to adhere to the Honor Code at George Mason. It is your responsibility to read and understand the policy (available at <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>). We will discuss the use of citations and quotations throughout the semester. If you have any questions on how to cite a source, please see the professor or instructor.

Texts Available for Purchase through the Bookstore:

Africa and the West: a Documentary History, Vol. 1, edited by William H. Worger, Nancy L. Clark, and Edward A. Alpers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). (Also available on 2 hour reserve at the Johnson Center library.)

Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). (Also available on 2 hour reserve at the Johnson Center library.)

Trevor R. Getz and Liz Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men: a Graphic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). (Also available on 2 hour reserve at the Johnson Center library.)

All other readings on the syllabus are found in links given on blackboard or on course reserves. You are expected to bring a copy of assigned readings with you to class.

Course Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change. Please consult the course blackboard site for updated course information.

Introductions

August 26: Introduction to the course and expectations.

August 28: The slave trade in African history

Readings:

- Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa," *Granta* 92 (2005), available online at: < [http://www.granta.com/Archive/92/How-to-Write-about-](http://www.granta.com/Archive/92/How-to-Write-about-Africa/Page-1)

[Africa/Page-1](http://www.granta.com/Archive/92/How-to-Write-about-Africa/Page-1)>

- Wole Soyinka, "Between Truths and Indulgences," Part 1 and 2, *The Root* (2010), available online at:

<http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2010/07/wole_soyinka_on_africas_role_in_the_slave_trade.html> and

<http://www.theroot.com/articles/world/2010/07/wole_soyinka_on_africas_role_in_the_slave_trade_part_2.html>

Reaction paper #1 due

The Early Slave Trade

September 2: Defining slavery in a global context

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 1-16.

September 4: Using primary sources to understand trade in West Africa

Readings:

- "Leo Africanus Describes a West African World of Trade, c. 1515," in *Major Problems in Atlantic History*, edited by Alison Games and Adam Rothman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2008), 35-38 (available on online reserves).

- *Africa and the West*, 5-14, 21-24.

Reaction Paper #2 due

September 9: Demand for enslaved laborers: an overview

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 17-48.

September 11: Understanding the chronology of the slave trade using the trans-Atlantic slave trade database

Assignment:

- Complete the worksheet online and bring to class, along with a laptop (if available).

Reaction Paper #3 due

Africans, Europeans, and Americans in the Slave Trade

September 16: African states, communities, and traders during the slave trade: Senegambia, Kongo, and the Guinea Coast as case studies

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 49-74.

Topic for research paper due

September 18: European competition in the slave trade

Readings:

- *Africa and the West*, 24-31.

Reaction paper #4 due

September 23: The conduct of the slave trade

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 75-104.

September 25: The slave trade from the African perspective

Reading:

- Philip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), choose chapter 1, 2 or 3 (available online via GMU library catalog).

Reaction paper #5 due

September 30: Debates about the impact of the slave trade

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 105-131.

Annotated bibliography due.

October 2: Slave ships off the African coast

Readings:

- *Africa and the West*, 33-51.

Reaction paper #6 due

***Mid-term posted online at noon on October 6**

The Middle Passage and the Americas

October 7: The Middle Passage and brief review for mid-term

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 132-161.

October 9: African resistance in the slave trade

***Mid-term submitted to professor by noon on October 10**

October 14: Fall break

October 16: One European perspective

Reading:

- Alexander Falconbridge, "An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa" (Farmington Hills, MI: Cengage Gale, 2009; originally published 1788), 1-56, available online through the GMU library catalog.

Reaction paper #7 due

October 21: The slave trade in the Indian Ocean

Recommended Reading:

- David Eltis and Jane Hooper, "The Indian Ocean in Transatlantic Slavery," *Slavery & Abolition* 34, 3 (2013): 353-375 (available online through the GMU library catalog).

October 23: The slave trade into South Africa

Readings:

- *Africa and the West*, 31-32, 83-85.

Reaction paper #8 due

October 28: The impact of the slave trade on the Americas

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 162-187.

October 30: The impact of the slave trade on the Americas, part 2

Reading:

- John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), choose chapter 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9 (available online through GMU library catalog or physical copy in library)

Reaction paper #9 due

Abolition?

November 4: The abolition of the slave trade

Recommended Reading:

- Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 188-211.

November 6: African understandings of abolition

Readings:

- *Africa and the West*, 95-103, 110-117.

Reaction paper #10 due

November 11: Abolition and slavery in Africa

Recommended Reading:

- start reading *Abina*

Outline due

November 13: Discussion of Abina

Reading:

- Abina

Reaction paper #11 due

November 18: Abolition in the Indian Ocean

Recommended Reading:

- *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*, edited by Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 183-194 (online reserve)

November 20: Remembering the slave trade

Reading:

- Saidiya Hartman, *Lose your Mother: a Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 3-18, 49-75 (online reserve)

Reaction paper #12 due

November 25: Final presentations

November 27: No class.

December 2: Final Presentations

December 4: Review and Final Reflections

Final papers due in class

***Final exam posted on December 10 at noon, completed exam emailed to professor by December 15 at noon**