

PUBLIC HISTORIES OF SLAVERY

Rutgers University-Newark

Topics in American Studies: 26:050:521:06 & Public History: 26:510:565:02

Wednesdays, 5:30-8:10pm (Eastern Time Zone)

Synchronous Remote Course

Spring 2021

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Video Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2pm-4pm (Eastern Time Zone) and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The past year has been marked by the toppling of dozens of statues of enslavers during the George Floyd Uprisings; and in the same week we begin our class, the Trump Administration's release of further acts explicitly erasing the crime of slavery from US History. Why does the history of slavery suddenly seem to matter so much?

This course looks at the various ways in which the history of Europeans enslaving Africans on the stolen land of the Americas has been remembered and interpreted in contexts ranging from historic sites and public art to theater and the *New York Times*, and contextualizes it within a larger trend of increasing attention to the public history of slavery, both national and international.

Some of the issues we will explore in this class include: Who is telling the story of slavery – and who are they telling it for? How does the method, time, and place in which this traumatic past is narrated affect the story that can be told? What tensions emerge between histories created for different kinds of audiences, including locals, tourists, and various descendant communities?

As a final project for this class, instead of writing a traditional research paper, the class as a whole will engage directly in the process of creating a new contribution to the public history of slavery. This is a moment of great possibility – so the specifics of this project will be based on what emerges in terms of the interests of members of the course as well as the opportunities available to us. Through this project, in addition to having a concrete Public History engagement to add to their CV, students will gain valuable insight that will stimulate new questions about the other material covered in the course; and have a chance to apply what they are learning to strengthen a project that is happening in real time.

SPECIAL NOTE ON TAKING GRADUATE COURSES DURING THE PANDEMIC & POLITICAL VIOLENCE

One of the realities of this moment is that each of us is undergoing various degrees of stress, uncertainty, and trauma due to our experiences since the coronavirus crisis began – nearly a full year ago, now. Even if you have been fortunate enough not to have lost a loved one, a job, or a home, your lives have been disrupted in innumerable ways, as have the lives of your professors.

It is an entirely valid choice not to enroll in classes at a time like this – but for those of you who do wish to work towards your graduate degree this semester, I'd like to address some of the ways that you may find the current learning situation more challenging for you. Many people report difficulty concentrating due to even low-level, background anxiety, and so you may find it easier, for example, to watch a movie than to read an article. Your sense of time may be different, as well – you may find it takes you far longer to complete homework, or that the time between classes passes extremely slowly so you forget what we've already been discussing. This is not even to mention the general challenges that students who take courses online face under pre-coronavirus circumstances, in balancing work, family, and school obligations, covering the costs of school, etc.; or those brought on by changing circumstances, such as more complicated living situations, increased hours at work, and other logistical challenges.

All of this is just a reality of this moment, and we can only be realistic and practice acceptance of what is and isn't possible right now.

As you'll see described later in the syllabus, I will be grading using a structure that is based on trauma-informed practices for teaching. Basically, this means that I have built some flexibility into the grading structure of the course, in the hopes that you'll find options which work well with your current learning style and needs. In particular, for many of the weekly assignments, you'll find two different options to choose from – one that is more heavily based on reading academic texts, and another which includes other kinds of material (video, websites, podcasts, etc) that offer another "way in" to the topic we are studying that week. If, however, you have concerns about your ability to prepare for class at any point, please do not hesitate to talk to me so we can figure out something else.

PLEASE NOTE: By necessity in a course with this subject matter, many of the topics we cover are deeply upsetting and can prompt trauma responses that may even surprise you. We will be doing work throughout the course to take care of ourselves and ground ourselves emotionally as we move through this material. However, you know best what is healthy for you – and you are encouraged to skip anything you need to; and to let me know if you would like trigger warnings around certain subject matter.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

COMMUNICATION

Due to the fact that we are not able to meet in person, and the extreme amount of uncertainty we all face this semester, maintaining good communication is absolutely essential to the functioning of this course.

There are three main technologies that we will use for communication in this course. It is essential that students are set up with and proficient in each one – particularly since we only gather as a class once a week.

NOTE: I find Canvas and other LMSs to be an unhelpful complication for a course of this nature and this time in history. While we will occasionally use its features as a resource, it will *not* serve as the central repository for course info, assignments, submission, etc.

Email

Email will primarily be used for homework – not for general questions for me, or any other communication (see Google Hangouts, below). I'll send you a weekly email that describes the assignments, and includes links and attachments, as needed. Unless otherwise indicated in the email with assignment instructions, you will reply to the email and attach your completed homework, by midnight on Tuesdays.

In order to make sure that your homework assignments are not easily lost, I will include "PUBLIC HISTORIES OF SLAVERY" at the start of the subject of each message. You can search inside of your email to find the relevant homework. You may also wish to move messages for this course to a folder inside of your email inbox.

Google Hangouts

This will be the primary method of direct, 1:1 communication between me and each student. If you have questions, want to set up an Office Hours appointment, etc., reach out in this way.

We will also use Google Hangouts for a group chat/general announcements that I may need to make between classes – including cancellations, clarifications of the homework, etc.

You will need to download the "Hangouts" app on your phone; make sure that you are logged in with your Rutgers email address; then use the "plus" sign to add: lm660@scarletmail.rutgers.edu, and send me a message that consists of your full name. After that, you can also use hangouts.google.com to access Google Hangouts from your computer or other device using a web browser.

Zoom

Our weekly class meeting will take place on Zoom. [Click here to join our weekly class meetings](#). If you are prompted for a password, it's 123456.

Video Office Hours will also take place on Zoom, [at this link](#) (same password, if prompted: 123456). You do not need to make an appointment; you can click on the link, which will take you to the "Waiting Room"; I'll welcome you in once I've finished speaking with the previous student. That said, if you want to be sure you can speak to me at a specific time, please send me a message on Google Hangouts.

You will need to download and install the free Zoom software/app on each of the devices that you plan to use for class. You also need to authorize your Zoom account through Rutgers, [which you can do by clicking here](#).

For our class meetings, please set your display name on Zoom to your first name (or other name you go by), followed by your pronouns in parentheses. For instance, I'll appear on Zoom as: Lyra (she/zie).

CLASS MEETINGS

This course will be held "synchronously," which means that we will gather remotely at the originally scheduled class meeting time. Please plan to be present for class every Wednesday from 5:30pm-8:10pm (Eastern Time Zone), in a setting in that is relatively free of distractions and interruptions. You will need to be on either a computer or a tablet with a keyboard for each class meeting.

We will take 2 breaks during each class meeting.

COURSE MATERIALS

I will email you the homework either as attachments or links on a weekly basis.

All readings, films, websites, etc. for this class will be provided (with the exception of any films or TV shows that are only on streaming services – in that case, we will coordinate to make sure everyone can access them). If you wish to purchase hardcopies of any of the books we are reading for the course, you can find the list below – all the books are also available as ebooks (often, for free).

When the readings are provided in PDF format, you may find that it is helpful to print them out in order to annotate them as you read. If you don't have a printer, you could send them to print at your local Staples or FedEx/Kinkos.

Finally, you will need a physical notebook to use for certain activities during class. You're also encouraged to use it to take notes on class, readings, etc.

TECHNOLOGY

Because this is a remote course and all of our interactions will be online, it is essential that you are fully set up and have the technological capacity to complete the course.

The required equipment is a computer or tablet with a keyboard; and a smartphone with a camera. During class, you may wish to use one for joining the Zoom call, and the other to view course materials, collaborate on group-work, etc. If you do not have a computer or a tablet with a keyboard that you can use during our class meetings and complete assignments on, please let me know ASAP to arrange for an equipment loan from Rutgers.

Students will need to have a reliable internet connection, sufficient to stream video (for instance, if you can watch YouTube or Netflix you should be fine) and also participate in class meetings on Zoom. Because this is a discussion-oriented seminar, all students are expected to be on video.

If you are not sure if your connection will work for Zoom, contact me to run a practice session to test it. If you do not have a strong internet connection in the location where you will be during our class meetings and where you will complete assignments, please let me know ASAP to arrange for a discounted or free connection to be installed.

GRADING

Students are expected to attend all class meetings on Zoom with cameras on, and to participate actively in class discussions. Class sessions are where the bulk of the essential work of this course gets done. If you end up needing to miss more than 2 class sessions, meet with Dr. Monteiro to find an alternative path towards completing the course.

30% Response Papers (Due weekly on Tuesday by midnight)

Because this course depends on thoughtful engagement with the material, students will prepare for each class by writing brief, 2-3 page responses to the readings, websites, etc., assigned for class. Papers must be emailed to me by midnight of the evening **before** the class meeting during which the material will be discussed.

Due to the challenges we are all facing this semester, students can skip 3 out of the 9 response papers, without any penalty, and without needing to ask permission.

10% Community Learning Presentation

Attend, observe, and briefly present on a relevant event online or in person.

- For this assignment, students will attend, take notes on, and give a brief (3-5 minutes, with 2-3 slides) presentation about an event somehow related to public histories of slavery.
- Students will also collect a minimum of 3 images related to the event – such as screenshots, photographs, the flyer used to advertise it, etc.
- Examples of events you could attend include watching parties with filmmakers, livestreamed panel discussions with artists or scholars, Instagram Live conversations, rallies, public hearings – and many more.
- The last date to attend an event is March 25; the last day to present is March 31.

10% Building and Supporting Community

This portion of the grade is about applying liberatory, community-building practices as we move through our study of often-traumatic (and usually intense) topics in the midst of the alienating experience of social distancing during a pandemic, and with our government under siege. Because we are not able to share space together in person, we must be intentional about building a sense of community within this class, and supporting each other. This can take a number of forms, including (but not at all limited to):

- Engaging with classmates in the online components of this class
- Volunteering to guide classmates who are unfamiliar with the technology we are using
- Setting up study groups
- Sharing your access to streaming services with another student
- Taking notes for classmates who may be unable to attend class due to illness or family responsibilities, etc.
- Creating a WhatsApp group for your classmates to keep in touch during the week
- Proposing changes to the course that can build & support community

Everyone has something different to offer – so an important part of this portion of the grade is also about self-reflection and self-awareness.

40% Final Project: TBA (required)

The final project will be our focus for all of April and the beginning of May. The specifics of the final project are yet to be determined, but students will be working as a group or in small groups/pairs, to concretely engage with ongoing work around how we address the public history of slavery within a post-Trump, post-George Floyd world.

Regardless of the specific project, however, students will take on different roles that are most suited to their skills, interests, and connection to the material; and

the grade for this project will largely be about process: engaging in the necessary steps in order to create the intervention. This focus on process will be particularly supportive of students future work in public history, organizing, and really any kind of work that involves the public sphere.

10% Final Reflection Paper (required)

Upon completion of the course, students will write a brief personal reflection paper (3-5 pages) about their experience with the final project, and the course as a whole.

- This paper is *not* a research paper, but instead is written in the first person, and reflects your own personal experiences and thoughts about the semester.
- The paper is due on May 12.

EXTRA CREDIT:

The following is also available to you for extra credit – and can potentially boost your grade substantially, and even replace some of the course requirements listed above.

Journal: up to 15% boost on Final Grade

Each student has the opportunity to boost their final grade substantially by keeping a journal throughout the semester. Each journal entry will be worth a ½% increase on your final grade, up to a 15% boost to your final grade. This means that if you find journaling to be a better way for you to engage with the course than some of the components that are a regular part of the grade, you can opt to do it instead. Journal entries (maximum 1 per day) track your personal experiences throughout the semester – including the course in whatever ways it might seem relevant, but certainly not prioritizing it. Each student will receive a link with a private space for them to journal – where it can only be viewed by themselves and Dr. Monteiro. During the first two weeks of class, all students will be required to complete at least 2 journal entries (you will get extra credit for these).

POLICIES

Academic Integrity

As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community. The entire Academic Integrity Policy can be found here:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Attendance

Regular attendance in class is expected, with your camera on and with the ability to contribute by voice, especially when you are in your small groups. In general, no notes are required for absences – and you do not need to ask permission or let me know before class; you're adults and I trust that you're making the right choices for you. If you need to miss more than 2 classes, please meet with me so that we can find alternative ways for you to earn the grade you desire in the course.

Given that we only meet once a week, it is especially important that students make every effort to be present for each class. Joining more than 20 minutes late or leaving more than 20 minutes early will be considered half an absence, but is preferable to missing the entire class.

Except in cases of emergency, cell phones must be in "Do Not Disturb" mode during class.

Communication

The best way to communicate with me outside of class is via Google Hangouts. You can message me privately, and I will get back to you as soon as I am able (within 24 hours on weekdays; possibly longer on weekends.) Also, realistically, I may miss your message if it arrives just before or during class or Office Hours, as there is such a flurry of activity around those times (Wednesdays 2pm-9pm; Fridays 2-6pm). If you've messaged me then and don't hear back, please do send another message to make sure I saw your message!

I also encourage you to come to Office Hours, which are Wednesdays 2-4pm (Eastern Time Zone), and [at this link](#). If you're unable to come at those times, message me to set up an appointment.

If you have a general question about the course, I encourage you to use the all-class group chat that will be set up on Google Hangouts.

"Life Happens" Policy

Even before the pandemic, unexpected and severe life challenges came up for as many as a third of my students every semester. You might become sick or injured; have an illness in the family which requires you to take on extra hours at work; lose a family member, etc. If you should be unfortunate enough as to have this happen to you this term, please know that, as your professor, I care far more about your wellbeing than I do about your completing the course exactly as outlined on this syllabus. *Instead of just disappearing, I encourage you to let me know as soon as you are able to about what is going on – just as you would let your supervisor at work know if you couldn't come to work.* Together, when you are ready, we can work out a plan for you to complete the work for the course in a way that is realistic given your changing situation; and, if need be, connect you with resources at the university that can offer you additional support (to which you are entitled as a Rutgers student!).

Coronavirus policy: If you or someone you are close to has the misfortune to contract COVID-19, please do what you need to do to take care of yourself/your loved one. There is no need whatsoever to worry about this course – no matter how much time you need to take off, we can discuss approaches to completing the course with the grade you desire whenever you are able to return.

Insurrection policy: In the event of further attacks on the government, no one will be required to come to class that day. Instead of a regular class, I aim to hold space for anyone who would like to connect for mutual support during our regular class time.

Anti-Black Violence policy: In the event of attacks on Black people by police or white supremacist vigilantes, or of such perpetrators being cleared of responsibility for their murders, no one will be required to come to class that day. Instead, I aim to make our class Zoom space available for anyone who would like to connect for mutual support.

Office Hours

No appointment is necessary; however, you are welcome to make an appointment if you need to come at a specific time during my Office Hours, and I will reserve it for you. Also, you can message me on Google Hangouts for an appointment at a time that works better for your schedule.

You can [join Office Hours on Zoom, every Wednesday from 2-4pm](#). If I am already meeting with a student, you will be in the “Waiting Room” until I finish – aside from students who made appointments in advance, Office Hours are first come, first served.

Homework

Unless otherwise instructed, all written work for this class must be submitted via email. Page number guidelines refer to the following format: 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins on all sides. Page and/or word limits must be adhered to – if you’ve written too much, it is important to learn how to edit your work down to the appropriate length.

CLASS TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Books

All of these texts are available as ebooks; and many are available for free from the Rutgers Library. If you prefer hardcopies, you can order most of them from most booksellers.

1. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995 (any edition) **(ebook available for free through Rutgers Libraries)**

2. Laurajane Smith, *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museums and Historic Sites*. New York: Routledge, 2020.
3. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. **(ebook available for free through Rutgers Libraries)**
4. Marisa J. Fuentes and Deborah Gray White, eds., *Scarlet and Black, Vol. 1: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016. **(ebook available for free through Rutgers Libraries)**
5. Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
6. Jeremy O. Harris, *Slave Play*. New York: Theater Communications Group, 2019.

Links or PDFs of all other assigned material will be sent in a weekly email, with the subject line "PUBLIC HISTORIES OF SLAVERY." If you need the materials more than a week ahead of time, just let me know via Google Hangouts and I'll send them to you.

Weekly topics and assignments subject to change

Wednesday, January 20

Introductions

(no readings)

Wednesday, January 27

The 1619 Project

OPTION 1:

- Read the full 1619 Project issue of the *New York Times Magazine*

OPTION 2:

- Listen to the 1619 Project podcast
- Read the resources on the Pulitzer Center's companion website, and find one to try out with a young person in your life

Wednesday, February 3

Race, Memory, and History

- Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (all)

Wednesday, February 10

The 1776 Commission

OPTION 1:

- Read the full 1776 Commission Report
- Read Trump Executive Orders on National Garden of American Heroes; and Classical Architecture

- Selections from Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2002.

OPTION 2:

- Read/Watch selected response to the report
- Explore social media responses
- Explore Mount Vernon website for exhibition on slavery, etc.

Wednesday, February 17

Heritage and Learning

- Smith *Emotional Heritage* (all)

Wednesday, February 24

Slavery as inheritance

- Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* (all)

Wednesday, March 3

Slavery and Tourism: Southern Plantations & Caribbean Islands

- Readings TBA

Wednesday, March 10

Institutional Legacies: American Higher Education

- Fuentes and White, *Scarlet and Red* (all)

SPRING BREAK

Wednesday, March 24

Slavery on Stage: Who Tells Your Story?

- Watch *Hamilton* on Disney+ (can coordinate for access if you don't have a subscription) *or* listen to the soundtrack
- Read Harris, *Slave Play* (all)

Wednesday, March 31

Confederate Statues, White Supremacy, and the George Floyd Uprisings

- Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves* (all)

Wednesdays, April 7, 14, 21, 28

Final Project

- Work will be assigned once we've determined the specific project we'll be doing
- Due dates TBA

Friday, May 12

Final Reflection Paper Due