

# Hist/AS236

# History of African Americans to 1865

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Bowdoin College, Spring 2008

Meets: MW 11:30-1:00  
Prof. Patrick Rael  
Office hours: M2-3, T2-3, by apt.

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This course examines the history of African Americans from the origins of slavery in America through the death of slavery during the Civil War. How could anyone (let alone the Founding Fathers) have traded human beings as chattel? How did African-descended people in America come to be both part of and yet perpetually marginalized in America? What does this say about the nature of American democracy and the mythologies of American history? How much agency did African Americans have in crafting their own experience, and what does this say about the nature of both their oppression and their resistance? In what ways have African Americans contributed to the formation of American society? We will be concerned not simply with the important task of re-inserting the African-American past into our national historical narrative. We will also be interested in understanding the depths to which American society has been predicated on the intersections of race, economy, and society. Throughout, we will try to work by listening to the neglected voices of African Americans themselves as we attempt to better understand the complex part of the nation's past.

This course is a 200-level lecture course, intended for majors and non-majors, of every class. It is a moderately difficult course, requiring frequent reading and writing. Students who have not had a previous history course at Bowdoin should speak with me early in the semester during office hours.

**BOOKS:** These books can be found at the campus book store, and on reserve at the library.

Turner, Nat. *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996. ISBN: 0312112076. \$9.99.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. David Blight, ed. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993. ISBN: 0312075316. \$9.99.

Rampolla, Mary Lynn. *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. 3rd edition. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 2001. ISBN 0312274664. \$7.99. A short, concise, and complete guide for history undergraduates.

## ASSIGNMENTS

**SECONDARY ANALYSIS** (two papers @ 15% each, for 30%): For this assignment, you will prepare short papers on the readings assigned for class. I will discuss what I'm looking for early on in the semester. Both of these papers will be due before Spring Break.

**WPA SLAVE NARRATIVE PROJECT** (15%): In this project, we will explore the voluminous collection of slave narratives gathered in the 1930s. You will pick a topic and mine the narratives to write about it.

**HISTORICAL CENSUS DATA PROJECT** (15%): We will work singly or in pairs to analyze census data in order to answer questions we have about the past. The project will involve using Microsoft Excel and a web browser to engage in some quantitative reasoning. The final product will be a paper illustrated with charts and tables. I will present this assignment in class.

**THREADED DISCUSSION LIST** (10%): Each week, I would like you to post one message on the course's electronic message board regarding issues we have discussed in class. A post may respond to a point raised in class, or perhaps to a question or issue raised by another student, either in class or on the discussion list. The object here is to keep discussion and the critical process going on outside of class. You needn't say anything earth-shattering, but you should say something thoughtful -- something that reflects a genuine curiosity about what is happening in the course. I will award you one point for each post per week, up to a total of ten points.

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION** (10%): Your thoughtful participation in both lecture and discussion is a significant part of your course work. Please make sure that you have read the assigned readings before each class and are prepared to discuss them. While I know it is sometimes difficult or frightening to participate in class discussions, it is also necessary. Please keep your comments relevant, and consider others when speaking.

FINAL (20%): In-class essay exam. Please note that the final date is set by the College, and I will not be able to alter that to accommodate travel plans.

## COURSE CONTRACT

ATTENDANCE: No absences are “excused” -- you are responsible for all material covered during missed class days. Those who may miss class to attend extra-curricular events are requested to inform me, as a courtesy, of planned absences. If special considerations prevent you from fulfilling course obligations (such as illness), please provide me with documentation so we may consider an exception.

LATE OR MISSED ASSIGNMENTS: Unless stated otherwise, assignments are due at the beginning of class; assignments handed in later in the day (during or after class) will be considered one day late. I will accept late assignments with no penalty only for documented health or other emergencies. In general, assignments which receive letter grades will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g., from B+ to B), for each day late. A final but crucial point: ***All work must be completed in order to pass this course.***

PAPER RE-WRITES: I encourage you to re-write your papers with an extremely generous re-write policy. You may re-write any assignment. If you re-write a paper, your grade for the assignment may or may not go up, but it will not go down. A re-write is a significant re-working of the paper which responds to my critiques of the original paper regarding organization, argument, and evidence. It is not sufficient to, for instance, simply correct grammatical mistakes or errors in punctuation. I will accept re-writes for any paper up to the last regular class meeting, but not after. Re-written papers will receive the same late penalty (if any) applied to the original paper. You must submit any originals with your re-write. Grading re-writes must be my lowest grading priority; please give me plenty of time.

A NOTE ON ACADEMIC HONESTY: Each author owns his or her own ideas, words, and research. You *must* give appropriate credit — generally in the form of quotations and proper footnotes — when using the work of another scholar. I expect you to be familiar both with Bowdoin's honor code, and with the guidelines for proper citation and attribution of sources provided for this course. If you have any questions, ask rather than take risks. *Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, is a serious violation of academic standards and Bowdoin's honor code.* I will enforce violations of the honor code by bringing immediate, uncontested action before the Judicial Board. Minimum penalties for plagiarism will be to fail the course. A special place in the underworld is reserved for those who think their college professor is technologically impaired; I can track down plagiarized Internet material faster than it can be copied and pasted into a paper.

### SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS

- This schedule is liable to change to suit class needs. The online syllabus always offers the most recent version of the syllabus.
- Complete readings prior to class and be prepared to discuss them.
- We will not discuss each reading with the same degree of rigor. I will do my best to let you know when to make special efforts with your reading. You are, however, responsible for all the assigned material, whether or not we discuss it in class.

#### 1/23: Introductions

#### 1/28: The origins of race and slavery

Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 7, no. 2 (April 1950), 199-222. (Jstor); Carl N. Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 1 (October 1959), 49-66. (Jstor)

#### 1/30: Writing issues

Keith Hjortshoj, "Footstools and Furniture," in *The Transition to College Writing* (Boston: Bedford/Saint Martin's, 2001), 32-45. (pdf)  
Patrick Rael, "What Happened and Why? Helping Students Write Like Historians" (pdf)

#### 2/4: Defining race, defining slavery

Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, chs. 1-2. (pdf)

#### 2/6: Trans-Atlantic perspectives

Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African- American Society in Mainland North America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 53, no. 2 (April 1996), 251-88. (Jstor); Winthrop D. Jordan, "American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of Mulattoes in the British Colonies," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 19, no. 2 (April 1962), 183-200. (Jstor)

#### 2/11: Colonial perspectives I

Russell R. Menard, "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," *Southern Studies* 16 (Winter 1977), 355-90. (pdf)

#### 2/13: Colonial perspectives II

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. (Jstor); Russell Menard, "The Africanization of the Lowcountry Labor Force, 1670-1730, in *Race and Family in the Colonial South*, eds. Winthrop D. Jordan and Sheila L. Skemp (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 81-161. (pdf)

#### 2/18: Slavery and freedom in the age of the Revolution I

Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," *Journal of American History* 59, no. 1 (June 1972), 5-29. (Jstor)

#### 2/20: No class

#### 2/25: Slavery and freedom in the age of the Revolution II

Herbert J. Storing, "America's Founders Recognized the Dilemma of Slavery," in *Slavery: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2002), 280-89. (pdf); John Hope Franklin, "Slavery Left America with a Weak Moral Foundation," in *Slavery: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2002), 270-79. (pdf); David Brion Davis, "The Uncertain Antislavery Commitment of Thomas Jefferson," in *Slavery and American Society*, 3rd. ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1993), 83-95. (pdf)

#### 2/27: Slavery and freedom in the age of the Revolution III

Ira Berlin, "The Revolution in Black Life," in Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 349-82. (Reserve); Patrick Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery in New York" (pdf)

#### 3/5: The culture of slavery: culture, personality, and paternalism

Readings to be announced. WPS slave narrative assignment handed out today

#### 3/24: The culture of slavery: women and family

Harbert Gutman, "Family Life," in *Slavery and American Society*, 3rd. ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1993), 161-66. (pdf)  
Brenda Stevenson, "The Question of Slave Female Community and Culture" (pdf)

#### 3/26: The culture of slavery: religion

William Courtland Johnson, "'A Delusive Clothing': Christian Conversion in the Antebellum Slave Community," *Journal of Negro History*, 82, no. 3 (Summer 1997), 295-311. (Jstor); other readings TBA.

#### 3/31: The slave community - critiques

Peter Kolchin, "Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of American History* 70, no. 3 (December 1983), 579-601. (Jstor)

4/2: Control and resistance

Drew G. Faust, "Slave Management," in *Slavery and American Society*, 3rd. ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1993), 237-47. (pdf); Eugene D. Genovese, "The Legacy of Slavery and the Roots of Black Nationalism," *Studies On the Left* 6, no. 6 (November-December 1966): 3-26. (Reserve); James Oakes, "The Political Significance of Slave Resistance," *History Workshop* 22 (1986), 89-107. (pdf)

4/7: The Nat Turner Rebellion

Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996).  
Film: *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property* (San Francisco, Ca.: California Newsreel, 2002).  
WPA slave narrative assignment due

4/9: Census project: Introduction

4/14: Census project: Computer lab

4/16: Free Blacks in a Slave Society

Ira Berlin, "The Structure of the Free Negro Caste in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1976), 297-319. (pdf); David L. Lightner and Alexander M. Ragan, "Were African American Slaveholders Benevolent or Exploitative? A Quantitative Approach," *Journal of Southern History* 71, no. 3 (August 2005), 535-58. (pdf)

4/21: Black life in the North

Patrick Rael, "Black Identity Formation in the Diaspora: The Strange Case of the Antebellum North." *Maryland Historian*, 28, nos. 1-2 (Fall/Winter, 2003), 47-68. (pdf); Patrick Rael, "The Market Revolution and Market Values in Antebellum Black Protest Thought," in *Cultural Change and the Market Revolution in America, 1789-1860*, Scott Martin, ed. (Lanham, Md., Rowman and Littlefield, 2004). (pdf); Emma Lapsansky, "Since They Got Those Separate Churches: Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1980), 54-78. (Jstor)

4/23: Black activists

Leon Litwack, "Emancipation of the Negro Abolitionist," in *The Antislavery Vanguard*, Martin Duberman, ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965). (Reserve); Ernest Allen, Jr., "Afro-American Identity: Reflections on the Pre-Civil War Era" (pdf)

4/28: The slave narrative

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, David Blight, ed. (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993).

4/30: The coming of the Civil War

*Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857)

Read online: background summary, key excerpts from majority opinion, key excerpts from dissenting opinion, how the case moved through the courts, more background.

5/5: Lincoln and the slaves

James M. McPherson, "Who Freed the Slaves?" in *Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 192-207. (pdf)

George M. Fredrickson, "A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality," *Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 1 (February 1975): 39-58. (Jstor)

Census project due

5/7: Black agency during the Civil War

Armstead L. Robinson, "In the Shadow of Old John Brown: Insurrection Anxiety and Confederate Mobilization, 1861-1863," *Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 4 (Autumn 1980), 279-97. (Jstor)

Ira Berlin, "Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning," in *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, Michael Perman, ed., 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 288-97. (pdf)