COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course introduces students to the history and historiography of slavery and emancipation in what became the United States, within transoceanic and comparative frames of reference. The blood and toil of human chattel helped knit North America with the Indian Ocean World into international networks of trade and travel, and conquest and colonization, of politics and ideology, and culture and community. It was within and across these networks, that the historical actors and groups that populate this course circulated, lived, loved, worked, negotiated, and rebelled. We will use the scholarship, archives, and images that they inspired, to connect and compare the ways in which slavery was codified, experienced, imagined, narrated, and contested in the United States, with slavery histories from the western Indian Ocean.

Our comparative and transoceanic perspectives will invite reflection on the following questions: how exceptional was “American” slavery, and its relationship with notions of freedom? How do we theorize “agency,” “diaspora,” and “difference,” in African American history, and evaluate scholarly debates over the boundaries between law and practice, family and the market, and nation and empire within that history? In what ways did migration remake identities and produce change? We will grapple with these larger questions by placing U.S. historiography in dialogue with scholarship on the Indian Ocean, comparing, for instance, the Atlantic slave trade with human trafficking on the Trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean routes; considering the ways in which tropes of difference (race, religion, class, gender, sex) and ideas about dependence (especially kinship) shaped ideologies and practices of “master-slave” relationships; discussing the workings of the state, law, political economy, religious institutions, and demography, in constructing slavery, influencing the enslaved’s material conditions, and regulating their access to community membership/citizenship; examining the dynamics of African American family, culture, community, and resistance through the prism of “subaltern” historiography; tracing the transoceanic circulation of debates over slavery and poverty, and abolition and empire; and contextualizing emancipation in the U.S, within the framework of comparative histories of freedom.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will: 1) compare and contrast U.S. slavery histories and historiographies with scholarship on the Indian Ocean. 2) develop a critical understanding of the ways in which context influences concepts central to African American history (“agency,” “difference,” “diaspora,” “freedom,” etc); 3) reflect on the relationship of the past with memory, identity, and representation in literature, popular culture, and sites of public commemoration (like museums); 4) analyze and synthesize scholarly works; 5) frame research questions, and build arguments from a spectrum of primary and secondary sources.

CLASS FORMAT:

Each class will consist of seminar-style discussions and debate over the assigned readings. We will read and interpret scholarly pieces, in juxtaposition with a variety of other sources on the same themes. Such sources may include archival documents and audiovisual materials that prompt us to think critically about the ways in which historians use primary sources. Students will take turns introducing and leading class discussions on selected readings assigned for each period. Details of these requirements follow.

COURSE MATERIALS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

1) Required readings: E-book links and pdf copies of articles, book chapters, primary documents, and images will be posted on Blackboard [hereafter BB, and available through https://cunyportal.cuny.edu/]. These materials are listed in the schedule of readings below.
2) Film clips/podcasts/images: will be supplied by instructor in class, as per schedule.
3) References: The required readings for each week are followed by supplementary bibliographies, listing works which you are NOT expected to read for class discussion purposes. These materials – not posted on BB -- are designed to give you overviews of the topics under discussion, help you with more specialized research in areas that interest you, and on occasion, to help you place the required readings in historiographical context.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and class participation: You are required to attend class regularly, complete reading assignments carefully and according to schedule, and participate in class discussions. All absences MUST be excused.

Leading discussions in rotation: Students will take turns leading discussions on selected readings during each class period. Each student will lead discussions of THREE required readings (essays or book chapters) in the course of the semester, selecting one from each of three Groups of readings—A, B, and C, listed on a sign-up sheet distributed in class and posted on BB. The lead discussant of each reading must introduce the piece and pose questions for class discussion that address the main ideas, arguments, supporting evidence, historiographical context (where appropriate), and connections with other readings assigned for that class period.
Three short review essays: Submit three short analytical review essays, each approximately 2-3 pages long, (typed, double-spaced). Each essay must review a secondary source (article or book chapter/s) assigned for class, one or all of which may be pieces on which you lead a discussion. Each essay must offer a critical analysis of the central themes, and supporting arguments and evidence of the piece under review, place the piece in historiographical context, and connect, compare, or contrast it with other readings assigned for that class period. These assignments are due on October 16, November 13, and December 11. You may submit these essays either in hard copy or digitally via SafeAssign on Blackboard.

Research paper or historiographical essay: You are required to submit a 10 page research paper (typed, double-spaced) or historiographical essay on any topic related to the themes of this course that interests you. If you choose to write a research paper, you must identify and draw on primary sources, in addition to secondary works. All papers must be accompanied by notes and a bibliography, citing all sources of information used in the paper. Details will be supplied in class. The paper is due no later than 5 pm, on December 23, 2017 via SafeAssign, on BB.

GRADING:

Your course grade will be computed according to the following percentages: Attendance and general class participation: 15%; leading discussions: 30%; review essays: 30% (10% each); research Paper: 25%;

COURSE PLAN AND SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Week 1 (Aug 28)
Topic: Introductions; Why study African American history within transnational and comparative frames of reference?

Overviews for your reference (optional, not posted on BB):

**Week 2 (Sept 11)**

**Topics:** 1) Historiography, Contexts, and Concepts

2) Memory and Diasporic Consciousness

**Readings:** PDF/E-Book Links on BB:


3) John Samuel Harpham, “‘Tumult and Silence’ in the Study of the American Slave Revolts,” *Slavery and Abolition* 36 (2015), 257-274

OR


OR


**Film Clips:** *Daughters of the Dust; Rue cases nègres*

**References**

**Week 3 (Sept 18)**

**Topics:** 1) The Atlantic Slave Trade: Debates over “Human Commodification,” Public Commemoration, and the “Blame Game.”

**Readings:** E-book link/PDF on BB:
1) John W. Sweet, “The Subject of the Slave Trade: Recent Currents in the Histories of the Atlantic, Great Britain, and Western Africa,” Early American Studies 7 (Spring 2009), 1-45
OR

Film: Scenes from Wonders of the African World: The Slave Kingdoms (1999)

References

Week 4 (September 25)
Topic: 1) Emergence of Slave Societies: Diaspora and Difference in the United States

Readings (E-book link/PDF on BB):
3) Plus ANY TWO of the following:
   Craig S. Wilder, Ebony and Ivory: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), chapters 2 & 3
4) “272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does it Owe Their Descendants?” New York Times, April 17, 2016

References

Week 5 (October 2)
Topic: Reverberations: Revolution, Nation, and Empire
Readings (E-book link/PDF on BB):
OR
2) Mia Bay, “In Search of Sally Hemings in the Post-DNA Era,” Reviews in American History 34(December 2006), 407-426
6) Documents from British colonial records on the suppression of the African slave trade in India

References
Weeks 6, 7, 8 (Oct 16, 23, 30)
Topics: 1) “Mammy,” Magnolias and Mint Juleps: Old South Fantasies amid “War Capitalism”
2) Transoceanic debates over slavery as “poor law”
Readings (E-book link/PDF on BB):

October 16
2) Excerpts from George Fitzhugh, Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society (Richmond, VA: A. Morris Publisher, 1854), 226-58, electronic edition, “Documenting the American South,” or “DocSouth,” a digital publishing project of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (http://docsouth.unc.edu)

FIRST REVIEW ESSAY DUE

October 23
1) Deborah Gray White, Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York: Norton, 1985), 1-61
2) Excerpts from Reports of the India Law Commission Upon Slavery in India, January 15, 1841, Volume I.

Film: Scenes from Gone With the Wind (1939).

(October 30)
4) Documents on Mississippi overseers and free labor experiments in India

Reference:
Weeks 9 & 10 (November 6, 13)

**Topics:** 1) “From Sundown to Sunup”: Enslaved Communities, Culture, “Creolization.”
2) Resistance and the Problem of Agency

**Readings** (E-book link/PDF on BB)

**November 6**
5) Blassingame, “The Slave Family,” in *The Slave Community*, 149-191
   OR

**November 13**

SECOND REVIEW ESSAY DUE

**Film:** Scenes from *Amistad* (1997); Scenes from *Beloved* (1998)

**References:**

**Week 11 (Nov 20)**

**Topic:** How Space, Mobility, and Migration Made Meaning in Local and Imperial Contexts

**Readings** (E-book link/PDF on BB):
3) Documents by and on emigration advocate, Mary Ann Shadd Cary
References

Week 12 (Nov 27)
Topics: 1) Gender, Power, and Work within Slaveholding Households:
A) Plantation Households in the American South.
B) Courtesans, Concubines, Eunuchs in the Indian Ocean
2) Family, Politics, and the Market.
Readings (E-book link/PDF on BB):
1) Letter by Louisa S. McCord to an abolitionist Englishwoman, the Duchess of Sutherland, and published in the newspaper, the Charleston Mercury, 1853.
4) Documents on “slaveholding” sex workers in 19th century South Asia from the British colonial archives.

Week 13&14 (December 4, 11)
Topics: 1) Abolition and Emancipation
2) U.S. Connections with Indian Ocean Slavery After the Civil War
Readings (E-book link/PDF on BB):
December 4
1) Manisha Sinha, The Slave’s Cause, Chapter 7
2) Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852), Selections.
3) Stephanie McCurry, Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), “Prologue” and Chapter 6

**Film:** Scene from *12 Years a Slave* (2013)

December 11

OR
4. Documents on American slaveholders and African fugitives in the Indian Ocean

**THIRD REVIEW ESSAY DUE**

**References**
