Hist. 75000: The First Emancipation Campaign  
Professor Jonathan D. Sassi | Ph.D. Program in History, CUNY Graduate Center | Spring 2014

Class time: Wednesday, 2:00-4:00  
Office hour: Wednesday, 4:15-5:15, rm. 5107, and by appointment  
E-mail: JSassi@gc.cuny.edu

Course Description:
This three-credit colloquium explores the history and historiography of Revolutionary America’s “first emancipation,” during which every one of the United States from Pennsylvania northward either abolished slavery outright or put it on a gradual track toward elimination. We will pay particular attention to the political dynamics of the antislavery campaign, or why and how it succeeded -- or met with frustration -- where and when it did. We will also attend to the social and ideological origins of abolitionism; the Atlantic-wide contexts of the first emancipation in the U.S.; and its many legacies for nineteenth-century American society, politics, and culture, including the contested construction of race. Students will engage the readings through weekly discussions and short essays.

Learning Goals:
A student who successfully completes this course should be able to
1. Trace the origins, progress, and consequences of the first emancipation movement.
2. Discuss the current state of the field as well as its historiography.

Assignments:
Beginning week 4, students will write a 2-3 page “thought piece” prior to class each week that there is a reading assignment. You may take off one week of your choice, so by the end of the semester you will have written ten short papers. Your paper is not meant to be a summary of that week’s readings; rather, it should be an essay that might, for example, comment on some salient theme in the assigned reading, develop a line of criticism toward the text’s research or interpretation, or draw connections or comparisons to a previous week’s reading. There are several directions one could take, but above all I want to see your mind at work as you grapple with the readings. Please e-mail me your essay by Tuesday at noon, so that I can read them before coming to class. This will enrich our discussion, your participation in which is essential. Each of you will also be responsible for leading the discussion one week. In sum, your grade will be based on the ten essays (60%) and your participation in class (40%).
Week 1 (1/29): Course Introduction & Organization / Background of Colonial-Era Slavery
Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-215. [Recommended as background reading, but not required.]

Week 2 (2/5): The Field Defined

Week 3 (2/12) — Lincoln’s Birthday, no class meeting

Week 4 (2/19): Quaker Roots of Antislavery

Week 5 (2/26): The African-American Revolution

Week 6 (3/5): The Founders and Slavery

Week 7 (3/12): Origins of British Abolitionism

Week 8 (3/19): The Haitian Revolution and its Impact
Laurent Dubois, Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). [Recommended as background reading, but not required.]

Week 9 (3/26): The Emancipation Campaign in the North

**Week 10 (4/2): The Emancipation Campaign in the South**

**Week 11 (4/9): Antislavery Societies**

**Week 12 (4/16) — Spring Break, no class meeting**

**Week 13 (4/23): Slavery and National Politics**

**Week 14 (4/30): Emancipation and the Construction of Race**

**Week 15 (5/7): From Colonization to Abolition**

**Week 16 (5/14): Conclusion**