Course Description:

At its core, this course takes up concerns animated by both the persistent and emergent focus on slavery in the disciplines. It asks how and why distinct disciplines are suddenly approaching the study of slavery? Obviously this dynamic portends to far more than an engagement with the study of slavery solely as an economic system or as a technique of power. Slavery, as a result, is no longer restricted to the domain of historians and the study of the enslaved past. For this reason, the course “Slavery & the Disciplines” offers a wide-ranging examination of slavery’s presence and impact on disciplinary formation. In discerning the work of slavery in various disciplines, notably Anthropology, English, Philosophy, Political Theory, Religion, and Sociology, this course explores how scholars of distinction disciplinary formations employ the study of slavery to press on the extant cultural logic but also framings of the past, present and future.

Robert Reid-Pharr has recently written that “even as we joyously celebrate the victories of our enslaved ancestors, even as we take satisfied stock of how far we have come, we must studiously avoid the triumphalist narratives that are the hallmarks of humanist discourse.” Reid-Pharr’s trenchant critique is not alone. A variety of intellectuals and scholars have leveled a similar broadside against the epistemology configuring Western thinking and its enduring legacy. Rather than reduce this to a generational critique framed as an inquiry into the history of the present, we might be better served asking how and why this engagement with slavery and its legacy arises at this precise moment among a range of scholars in various disciplines? What, in other words, does this engagement and critique say about our historical moment, previous representation of the slave past, and slavery’s sublimated presence in contemporary life? What might be conveyed by invocation of slavery’s enduring afterlife? What are the implications for the University and its constituent elements—disciplines?

Over the course of the semester, the seminar participants will deliberate over slavery and freedom as these subjects have been broached and now are treated by distinct disciplines.

Assigned Readings:
Requirements:

There are four (4) writing assignments in total plus your weekly response to the discussion prompt (see: “Guidelines for Reading & Seminar Discussion”). All students will write two reviews and two analytical critiques.

First, you will write a short (1000-1500 words) paper on Saidiya V. Hartman, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). This essay should be modeled on standard academic reviews.
Here the emphasis will be on an accurate summary and a minimal evaluation. This review is due on March 1, 2018.

Next, you are to produce a second review of 1000-1500 words selecting one of the books assigned to read between March 8th and March 29, 2018. Here again you are too focus largely on an accurate summary of the argument and how that argument structures the book. This paper is on March 29, 2018.

Seminar participants will be asked to produce two brief (five to seven pages) critiques that underscores their engagement with some of the more conceptual and theoretical readings that frame the later part of the course. Here you are to identify a thematic concern and offer an analytical response to an idea, concept, or theoretical formulation that appears in one or more of the books in the later part of the semester. At a basic level, the engagement can be composed as a synopsis of the idea, concept or theoretical formulation but also requires you to frame that discussion rather than offer a mere summary of the argument and how it might have structure the conversation in the book. These papers are due respectively on April 26th and May 17th.

All papers need to be submitted electronically as a Word document (no PDFs). Your margins should be 1” and with the 12pt font. Please attend to all stand formalities (name, proper citation format, page numbers, etc.)

**Key Dates:**
March 1, 2018      First Review Due
March 29, 2018     Second Review Due
April 26, 2018     First Critique Due
May 17, 2018      Second Critique Due

**Guidelines for Reading & Seminar Discussion:**
Ideally, you should engage all of your readings with the following guidelines and questions (or some similar version) in mind. After reading a book or article take about 20-30 minutes to write your thoughts in relation to the following queries. The questions and your responses are designed to facilitate discussion and serve as a guide for how you should be approaching all the books and articles we read this and every semester.

1. What are the main arguments of the book or article?
2. Why these arguments? i.e., what’s at stake for the author? (this is a question you should ask of everything you read; it is the equivalent of the "what keeps you up at night? question.)
3. What did you learn that you did not know?
4. What are 3 representative or provocative or memorable quotes?

5. What are the book’s strengths? Why do these strengths appeal to you?

Why are these particular strengths so apparent to you? What do they say about intellectual interests, commitments, preferences?

6. What are the book’s structural, argumentative or empirical weaknesses? (remember: Be constructively critical [try asking yourself: could I have written this book?])

Why are these particular weaknesses so apparent to you? What do they say about your intellectual interests, commitments, preferences?

7. What footnotes did you turn to the back to look at (there ought to be at least a few!)?

What books, articles or ideas do you want to pursue from this text? (and what system do you have [you need one!] for keeping track of leads like this?)

8. How or why is this book useful to your work? When all is said and done (pros, cons, loved it, hated it, etc.), what is the “take away”?

9. How might this book be useful for teaching?

10. What other kinds of questions or issues do you want to raise in discussion, whether in class today, with a colleague or professor, or in the course of your own work? (why did I boldface or underline certain passages? And not unrelatedly, whom do you know who’s interested in the same kinds of questions you are? how will you make the time to pursue these kinds of questions in conversation, in community? what, where, who are your communities?)

If you address these questions in writing, however briefly, for every book and article you read in the coming weeks and months, you’ll be well on your way toward an annotated reading list by the time your exams. It is a challenging task, but worth thinking about, even in modified form (make a template of your own design, use it as a worksheet for everything you read).

I request that everyone address the ten (10) questions in the reading and seminar discussion outline for each class. These will be due at 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday the day before class. Please send them to: hbennett@gc.cuny.edu again by 9:00 p.m.

Again, all papers need to be submitted electronically as a Word document (no PDFs). Your margins should be 1” and with the 12pt font. Please attend to all stand formalities (name, proper citation format, page numbers, etc.)

Week One
February 1, 2018

Intellectual and Ideological Framings

Week Two
February 8, 2018

Week Three
February 15, 2018

Week Four
February 22, 2018

Week Five
March 1, 2018

Week Six
March 8, 2018

Week Seven
March 15, 2018

Week Eight
March 22, 2018
Readings: Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University
Week Nine  
March 29, 2018  

March 30, 2018 – April 8, 2018  
**Spring Break**

Week Ten  
April 12, 2018  

Week Eleven  
April 19, 2018  

Week Twelve  
April 26, 2018  

Week Thirteen  
May 3, 2018  

Week Fourteen  
May 10, 2018  

Week Fifteen  
May 17, 2018  
Michelle Wright, *Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemologies*, selections  
Christina Sharp, *In the Wake: Blackness and Being*, selections  
Fred Moten, Black and Blur (consent not to be a single being), selections