

HIST 170-1/ BLST 141-1 African American History to 1900

Melanie Chambliss, Ph.D. (she/ her)

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The best way to communicate with me is by email. I usually respond to emails within 1-2 business days.

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00-2:30pm and by appointment. Please email me if you plan to attend office hours.

Course Details

Meeting Place & Time:

Bausch and Lomb Room 270, Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:05am-12:20pm

Format:

Class will be held in person and will not be recorded.

Description:

After a brief review of the primary features of pre-European African society, we will examine the affect of the 'Middle Passage' -- the transportation of enslaved Africans to the Western Hemisphere. We will then focus on the process of 'Americanization'; as the Africans became African-Americans. The struggle for freedom and citizenship will conclude our survey. The main course readings will be a representative sample of African-American autobiographies, and short selections from a secondary text. Using the autobiographies as historical source material, we will produce a brief history of the values and cultural practices of Africans in America, and the ways in which African-Americans adapted to and shaped American life and society.

Required Materials:

Olaudah Equiano, *Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* - ISBN: 9780142437162

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* - ISBN: 9780486284996

Hannah Crafts, *The Bondswoman's Narrative: A Novel* - ISBN: 9780446690294

Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* - ISBN: 9780989609272

Prerequisite Courses: N/A

Credit Hours: 4.0

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Course Goals

The goals of this course are to:

- Provide an overview of the Black experience in slavery and freedom from pre-European contact to emancipation
- Examine the role that Africans and later African Americans played in the early history of the United States
- Prepare students for later coursework in U.S./ Atlantic history or Black Studies
- Introduce students to the methodological challenges of reconstructing histories of transatlantic slavery

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain the connections between European imperialism, the expansion of transatlantic slavery, and the development of the “New World” including the United States as a nation
- Analyze the construction of African American culture and activism within an Atlantic framework
- Identify forms of resistance and control, or “unfreedom,” inside and outside of slavery
- Evaluate and critique the context and subtext of primary sources

Assignments and Deadlines

Attendance and Participation (10%): Every class period.

Weekly Discussion Questions (15%): Submit two discussion questions every Tuesday morning by 6 am on Blackboard.

Foundation Check-in – In-class Quiz and Primary Source Analysis (10%) – Thursday, Sept. 19

History Primer – Midterm (20%) – Thursday, October 17 by 11:59 pm on Blackboard

Foundation Check-in – In-class Quiz and Primary Source Analysis (10%) – Thursday, Nov. 7

Modern Abolitionist Movement Presentation (15%) – Thursday, Nov. 21 at the start of class

History Primer – Final (20%) – Wednesday, December 18 by 11:59pm on Blackboard (Final exam day)

Assignment Descriptions

Attendance and Participation (10%): Please see Course Policies below.

Weekly Discussion Questions (15%): You will submit two discussion questions each week. A good discussion question moves beyond factual queries (i.e. when or why something occurred) into more complex topics (thematic, stylistic, interpretive, for example). A good discussion question can spark debate – whether about an actor’s or author’s choices, the time period, the connections between current and previous texts, among other things. The goal is to practice critically engaging a primary source. You’re asking deeper questions about meaning and evidence and exploring what is being documented on multiple levels (word choice, tone, topic, omissions). I will incorporate your discussion questions (whether verbatim or in combination

with your peers' submissions) into my lesson plan. Be sure to include at least one reading citation per discussion question. Please include the page number or chapter, if using a different version, as well as a full sentence quote from the text.

Foundation Check-ins – In-class Quizzes and Primary Source Analyses (10% each): As a 100-level course, this class surveys key themes, events, and figures during pre-emancipation African American history. While the study of history involves more than memorizing names and dates, a clear command of these details provides a firm foundation for later coursework or personal study of African American, U.S. or Atlantic history. Learning a new sub-field, like learning a new language, requires that you understand the fundamental building blocks of that topic. Your two Foundation Check-ins will ensure that you are keeping up with class material in two low-stakes assignments that build towards your midterm and final primers. I will provide a more detailed prompt closer to the quiz dates.

History Primer – Midterm and Final (20% each): You will create two history primers that introduce readers to key points within African American history. Your goal is to select and include whatever information, images, or anecdotes that you think would be most helpful for someone who wants to better understand race. This assignment will require you to make active choices in selecting what material to include in your primer—rather than writing a chronology of everything we've discussed. I will provide more detailed prompts closer to the two deadlines. These prompts will outline key terms, events, and individuals that you can choose from. The midterm primer will cover material from the first half of class, and the final primer from the second half.

Modern Abolitionist Movement Presentation (15%): For this assignment, you will select a modern-day human rights crisis, and create an imagined campaign that advocates for the resolution of this crisis using at least three different methods that mirror, update, or represent tactics used during the slavery abolitionist movement. You will briefly introduce your issue and describe your chosen tactics for your campaign. Your eight to ten-minute presentation should also explain why you think these tactics will be effective in ending or improving your chosen crisis. A more detailed prompt will be given closer to the deadline.

Grades and Related Policies

Grading Scale and Standards:

A: 100-93
A-: 92-90
B+: 89-87
B: 86-83
B-: 82-80
C+: 79-77

C: 76-73
C-: 72-70
D+: 69-67
D: 66-63
D-: 62-60
F: 59-0

Late/ Make-up Work Policy

Discussion questions cannot be submitted once the assignment closes. However, you can miss two weeks without penalty. Other late assignments (foundation check-ins, primers, and abolition presentation) that have not been previously approved/ scheduled will automatically be docked a fraction of a grade for every day late (from A to A- to B+, etc) up to one full letter grade decrease. Late work will not be accepted once assignment has been returned to the class.

Academic Honesty

All work must be completed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. We will discuss best citation practices for each assignment, but when in doubt, please ask me or err on the side of caution and cite!

Course Schedule

Week One: Course Introduction ///
“How do we talk about pre-Emancipation African American history?”
Tuesday, August 27 and Thursday, August 29

Thursday Reading: Excerpts from *Five Hundred African Voices*, ed. Aaron Spencer Fogleman and Robert Hanserd

Week Two: The Development of Race-based Slavery
Tuesday, September 3 and Thursday, September 5

Reading: Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, pgs. 5-94 -- Authenticating Documents (Letters to readers, List of Subscribers, etc.) and Chs. 1-4

Week Three: The Transatlantic Slave Trade - I
Tuesday, September 10 and Thursday, September 12

Reading: Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, pg. 95-160 – Chs. 5-8

Week Four: The Transatlantic Slave Trade - II
Tuesday, September 17 and Thursday, September 19

Reading: Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, pgs. 161-236 – Chs. 9-12

- **Assignment:** Foundation Check-in – In-Class Quiz and Primary Source Analysis –

Thursday, September 19

Week Five: Africans in Colonial America
Tuesday, September 24 and Thursday, September 26

Reading: William Cooper Nell, [*Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*](#), pgs. 3-118 -- Introductions, preface, and Ch. 1 (Skim for overall style and types of stories and details)

Week Six: The Age of Revolution - I
Tuesday, October 1 and Tuesday, October 3

Reading: William Cooper Nell, [*Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*](#), pgs. 119-213 – Chs. 2-10 (Skim for overall style and types of stories and details)

Week Seven: The Age of Revolution - II
Tuesday, October 8 and Thursday, October 10

Reading: William Cooper Nell, [*Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*](#), pgs. 214-309 – Chs. 11-18 (Skim for overall style and types of stories and details)

Week Eight: Fall Break/ Midterm
Tuesday, October 15 and Thursday, October 17

Tuesday, October 15 – No class. Enjoy your Fall break.

Thursday, October 17 – No class. Work on your History primer.

- **Assignment:** History Primer – Midterm due **Thursday, Oct. 17** at 11:59pm on Blackboard
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Week Nine: Antebellum Slavery in a New Nation
Tuesday, October 22 and Thursday, October 24

Reading: Douglass, *Narrative*.

Week Ten: Resistance in Slavery
Tuesday, October 29 and Thursday, October 31

Reading: Crafts, *Bondwoman's Narrative*, Chs. 1-6.

Week Eleven: The Abolitionist Movement - I
Tuesday, November 5 and Thursday, November 7

Reading: Crafts, *Bondwoman's Narrative*, Chs. 6-10.

- **Assignment:** Foundation Check-in – In-class Quiz and Primary Source Analysis –
Thursday, November 7
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Week Twelve: The Abolitionist Movement - II
Tuesday, November 12 and Thursday, November 14

Reading: Crafts, *Bondwoman's Narrative*, Chs. 11-21.

Week Thirteen: The Abolitionist Movement - III
Tuesday, November 19 and Thursday, November 21

Reading: Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, pgs. 3-31 – Preface and Chs. 1-4

- **Assignment:** Modern Abolitionist Movement Presentation due **Thursday, November 21**
at the start of class
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Week Fourteen: Civil War and Emancipation
Tuesday, November 26 and Thursday, November 28

Reading: Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, pgs. 33-97 – Chs. 5-12

Thursday, November 28: No class. Enjoy your break.

Week Fifteen: Civil War and Emancipation

Tuesday, December 3 and Thursday, December 5

Reading: Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, pgs. 99-156 – Chs. 13-Appendix

Final Exam Day
Wednesday, December 18

- **Assignment:** History Primer - Final due **Wednesday, Dec. 18** at 11:59pm on Blackboard

[Course Policies](#)

Attendance Policy: You are expected to attend class. There are no excused absences in the course. However, you may miss two classes without penalty. Any additional absence will decrease your attendance and participation grade by a fraction of a letter grade (A to A-, A- to B+ etc). Attendance will be taken during the first few minutes of class. If you miss this window, remember to check in with me at the end of class, and you will be marked late. Accommodations will be made for religious holidays. Please email me prior to your absence.

Participation Policy: Participation is expected and encouraged. Please complete assignments to be prepared for class discussion. Your participation grade will be based around your attendance. For example, if you miss three classes, an A- would be the highest attendance and participation grade you could earn, but if you participate regularly, that could be a high A- (like a 92). Or if you never participate in class, the grade could be in the B+ range or lower. In other words, I cannot account for participation in a class you did not attend, so your attendance sets the max for that grade. Please be aware that regularly arriving late, leaving class early, and/or not participating in our discussions will all negatively impact your attendance/ participation grade.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is intended to introduce topics that may be covered during the semester and will be followed as closely as possible. However, I reserve the right to modify content and requirements as course needs arise.