

## HIST 447-1/ HIST 347W-1 Archives and Absences: Writing from the Margins of History

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Office Location: Rush Rhees Library Room 455

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

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00-4:00pm and by appointment. Please email me if you plan to attend office hours.

### Course Details

Meeting Place & Time:

Rush Rhees Library 305, Thursdays 2:00-4:40pm

Format:

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

### Description:

How do archival absences impact what we know about the past? How *should* these silences shape the histories we write? This course will explore the process of historical production through critical archival studies. We will discuss how “the archive” documents power dynamics in the past and present. We will read histories and theories of archives’ construction and examine different approaches to recovering African diasporic history. Researchers have turned to microhistory, memoir, fiction, theory, and other methods or genres to address archival absences, and we will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these choices. By the end of the semester, students will be familiar with key voices within critical archival scholarship and postmodernist theories of history, and students will learn different techniques for addressing absences in their own research.

### Required and Optional Materials:

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* – ISBN: 0807080535

Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* – ISBN: 0812224183

Laura Helton, *Scattered and Fugitive Things: How Black Collectors Created Black Archives and Remade History* – ISBN: 0231212755

Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* – ISBN: 041539144X

Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* – ISBN: 9780394711065

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* – ISBN: 022650235X

Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake* – ISBN: 1984855018

Carla Peterson, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth Century New York City* – ISBN: 0300181744

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* – ISBN: 0374531153

Diana Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* – ISBN: 0822331233

J.C. Cloutier, *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature* – ISBN: 0231193319

John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* – ISBN: 0807855219

Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* – ISBN: 0674016890  
(optional)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* – ISBN: 1400033411 (optional)

August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson* – ISBN: 0452265347 (optional)

Prerequisite Courses: N/A

Credit Hours: 4.0

## Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

### Course Goals

The goals of this course are to:

- Introduce students to critical archives studies and scholarly critiques of 'the archive'
- Analyze methodologies that complicate positivist narratives
- Hone graduate-level research and writings skills

### Learning Outcomes

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

- Evaluate and critique the context and subtext of primary sources
- Apply course concepts and themes to stories they draw from their research
- Compare the strengths and weaknesses of different historical methodologies

## Assignments and Deadlines

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

**Weekly Reading Response (20%):** Submit a response every Wednesday morning by 6 am on Blackboard.

**Class Discussion Leader (10%)** – At least once during semester

**Historiographical Essay (15%)** – Thursday, February 13 by 11:59pm on Blackboard

**Archives Analysis (15%)** – Thursday, March 20 by 11:59pm on Blackboard

**Research Paper Draft (10%)** – Thursday, April 10 by 11:59pm on Blackboard

**Research Paper Revision (20%)** – Sat., May 10 by 11:59pm on Blackboard (Final exam day)

## Assignment Descriptions

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

**Weekly Reading Response (20%):** Each week, you will submit a 300-400-word reading response by 6am on the Wednesday before class. In this class, we'll be exploring questions of evidence, method, and epistemology. Your response should go beyond factual queries (i.e. when or why something occurred) into more complex debates. Be sure to include at least three quotes (with page citations) from the reading. Quotes can sometimes help to clarify which passages are informing your thinking.

**Weekly Discussion Leader (10%):** Each week, a student will be responsible for reviewing the reading responses and structuring our class discussion. The discussion leader should consider key points from the week's reading, and then identify engaging topics and themes between the reading, reading responses, and previous weeks' readings.

**Historiographical Essay (15%):** Everyone will complete their research paper through a series of staggered assignments. For your first task, you will write a five-page historiographical essay on silences and your research topic. In other words, your essay should discuss what *has* been said *on what hasn't been said* about your topic. Is there a consensus around common archival challenges? Are there frequent blind spots in the historiography? Has there been a shift to address these issues? Your essay should engage three to five scholarly monographs. These books can exemplify common challenges to your research topic or represent new approaches to the field or topic. A more detailed prompt will be given closer to the deadline.

**Archives Analysis (15%):** Visit an archive related to your research topic, and analyze two collections' contents and construction. Your essay should discuss who or what each collection documents (person, organization, or otherwise), how those collections came to that site, and what each collection contains. Your five-page essay can also speculate on how these details might inform your research paper. A more detailed prompt will be given closer to the deadline.

**Research Paper Draft (10%):** Write a ten to twelve-page draft of your research paper and include at least one method from Methods I-IV on the syllabus. We will workshop this paper in class on Thursday, April 17. I will provide a more detailed prompt closer to the deadline.

**Research Paper Expansion (20%):** Revise your research paper based on peer and instructor feedback and expand your analysis by including an additional method from Methods V-VII on the syllabus. Your final paper should reflect on how your argument shifted from this new method. Ideally, each method should help you to reconsider the stories you draw from your sources based on your approach.

### Grades and Related Policies

#### Grading Scale and Standards:

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| A: 100-93 | C: 76-73  |
| A-: 92-90 | C-: 72-70 |
| B+: 89-87 | D+: 69-67 |
| B: 86-83  | D: 66-63  |
| B-: 82-80 | D-: 62-60 |
| C+: 79-77 | F: 59-0   |

### Late/ Make-up Work Policy

Reading responses cannot be submitted once the assignment closes. However, you can miss two weeks without penalty. Other late assignments (paper proposal, annotated bibliography, collection report, research paper, and revision) 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) down to a C grade as your highest possible grade. 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 // "Power and the Production of History"**  
**Thursday, January 23**

Reading: Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

**Week Two: "The Archive' is not an Archives"**

**Thursday, January 30**

Reading: Dorothy Berry, "The House Archives Built;"  
Michele Caswell "'The Archive' is not an Archives;"  
Zakiya Collier and Tonia Sutherland, "Witnessing, Testimony and Transformation as Genres of Black Archival Practice;"  
Terry Cook, "Archival Science and Postmodernism."  
Ashley Farmer et al, "Toward an Archival Reckoning."  
Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power."

---**Note:** We will meet in Rare Books and Special Collections today---

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**Week Three: Reconsidering Method and its Meanings**

**Thursday, February 6**

Reading: Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*;  
Deborah Gray White, "Private Lives, Public Personae: A Look at Early Twentieth Century Black Clubwomen."  
Darlene Clark Hines, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West."

--**Class Exercise:** Come prepared to discuss your research topic with the class--

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**Week Four: A History of Black Collecting**

**Thursday, February 13**

Reading: Helton, *Scattered and Fugitive*.

- **Assignment:** Annotated bibliography due by 11:59pm on Blackboard
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**Week Five: Postmodernist History I**

**Thursday, February 20**

Reading: Munslow, *Deconstructing History*.

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**Week Six: Postmodernist History II**

**Thursday, February 27**

Reading: Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Parts 1-3

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**Week Seven: Postmodernist History III**  
**Thursday, March 6**

Reading: Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Parts 4 and 5;  
Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

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**Week Eight: Spring Break // Method I -- Microhistory**  
**Thursday, March 13**

Reading: Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival* (optional reading).

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**Week Nine: Method II -- Research Narrative**  
**Thursday, March 20**

Reading: Miles, *All That She Carried*.

- **Assignment:** Archives Analysis due by 11:59pm on Blackboard

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**Week Ten: Method III - Critical Fabulation**  
**Thursday, March 27**

Reading: Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*;  
Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

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**Week Eleven: Method IV - Family History**  
**Thursday, April 3**

Reading: Peterson, *Black Gotham*.

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**Week Twelve: Method V - The Repertoire**  
**Thursday, April 10**

Reading: Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

- **Assignment:** Research Paper draft due by 11:59pm on Blackboard
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**Week Thirteen: Method VI - Historical Fiction**  
**Thursday, April 17**

For the reading this week, choose one of the following titles:

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*

Melvin B. Tolson, *A Gallery of Harlem Portraits* (written in 1930s; published 1979) and/or  
*Harlem Gallery Book I: The Curator* (1965)

--Class Exercise: Peer Review Workshop--

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**Week Fourteen: Method VII - Lifecycles**  
**Thursday, April 24**

Reading: Cloutier, *Shadow Archive*.

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**Week Fifteen: Reinterpreting "Real History" through Early Black Historiography**  
**Thursday, May 1**

Reading: Ernest, *Liberation Historiography*.

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**Final Exam Day**  
**Saturday, May 10**

- **Assignment:** Submit Paper Revision by 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 one class 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 two 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.