African-American History and Memory

K20.1560
Spring 2016

Gallatin School of Individualized Study

New York University

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Office Hours:
Tuesdays 3:00PM to 4:40PM
Thursdays 2:00PM to 4:00PM

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This course looks at the relationships between history, memory, counter-memory, trauma and identity. We will use the history and memory of American slavery as our case study. Tracking back and forth between learning about the slave era and about its continuing impact in the 20th and 21st centuries, we ask, What gets remembered about African-American history? How do subordinated peoples create counter-memories, including humor?

Our goal is to achieve a solid grounding in the history of American slavery and to develop conceptual tools for making complex analyses of the past and of the politics of memory.

Middle Passage mem’ries...they in a dungeon in my head. Ain’t no jailor, ain’t no keys, ain’t no judgment read...

James A. Emanuel
Course Outline

For explanations on written assignments and student presentations, please see the handout entitled, Assignments and Grades and attached to the bottom of the syllabus. Articles and book chapters can be found online, on the Resource tab of Classes and in a Bobcat Database as noted in brackets.

The following required texts can be found at the bookstore; feel free to get a cheaper version


January 26  Introduction

January 28  Memory and History


RESPONSE PAPER

February 2  Memories of Africa


**THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**February 4**


**FIND A THESIS STATEMENT IN PLECK, MAZAMA OR WHITE**

**February 9**
**The Middle Passage**
Equiano, Chapter 2. [ebrary]

https://getit.library.nyu.edu/go/9365377

In Class Screening: *Roots* episode 2

**THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**February 11**


FIND A THESIS STATEMENT IN HARTMAN, TILLET OR HOLSEY

February 16

THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

February 18  “Birth of a Nation”

FIND A THESIS STATEMENT IN BAY, GORDON-REED OR TILLET

February 23

In Class SCREENING: Spielberg, Steven et. al. Amistad Part I
THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
February 25

http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/74

**IN CLASS SCREENING: Amistad Part II**

**RESPONSE PAPER**

March 1  Building the Old South


**FIND THESIS STATEMENT IN CARSON OR TADMAN**

March 3  Who was Uncle Tom?

**IN CLASS SCREENING: Porter, Edwin S, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1903); Clips from Pollard, Harry A. Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1927);**

**THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO VOL. 1**

March 8
Complete *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

**IN CLASS SCREENING: Clips from Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1987)**

**THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

March 10  Slave Testimony
Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup*. Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853. Chapters 1-12 [Free online]
THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MARCH 14- 20  SPRING BREAK

March 22
Complete Twelve Years a Slave
RESPONSE PAPER

March 24  Sites of Grief


Find Thesis Statement in Rosenstone, Cheng or Morrison

March 29  The Civil War, Reconstruction and Memory
3 Group Presentations: See the Assignments and Grades Page

March 31
3 Group Presentations: See the Assignments and Grades Page

April 5  History, Trauma and Humor


Film Analysis Due: See the Assignments and Grades Page

April 7
Randall, The Wind Done Gone. (Complete reading)
RESPONSE PAPER

April 12  Neo-Slave Narratives

THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

April 14
Morrison, Beloved (read at least to 165)
Childs, Dennis. “‘You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet’: Beloved, the American Chain Gang, and the Middle Passage Remix.” American Quarterly 61:2 (June 2009): 271-297. [Project Muse]

THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

April 19
Morrison, Beloved (complete book)
Response Paper

April 21 Return to Trauma and Memory

FIND THESIS STATEMENT IN DIXON OR AWKWARD

April 26
Student Presentations: See the Assignments and Grades Page

April 28
Student Presentations

May 3
Student Presentations

May 5
Student Presentations

May 13 Final Paper Due
Assignments and Grades

- In this class, I have assigned a series of short tasks that are designed to help students deepen their understanding of the readings, prepare students for active involvement in class discussions, and to give the instructor an idea of what students have learned from the reading and what should be examined more closely in class. And, yes, admittedly, these assignments are designed to help the instructor grade students at the end of the semester. All written assignments should be handed in on NYU CLASSES. Here’s what I’m looking for:

  - **Response Papers**: In these one to two page papers, I will be looking for evidence that you have reflected on and engaged with the reading. This is your opportunity to interact directly with me about the reading. After the first response paper, these will be graded.

  - **Thesis Statements**: Choose a key passage that states the thesis of a chapter or an article. Your chosen passage should be from one sentence to one paragraph long. Then, in one paragraph, explain why you think this selection is a key to understanding the article or chapter. Please bring your thesis statements to class. These will be marked pass or fail.

  - **Discussion Questions**: Please post on the Assignment tab of NYU CLASSES three (3) clearly formulated questions about the week’s reading that you think will stimulate or enrich class discussion. These are due no later than 12pm the day of the class. Please bring your questions to class. These questions will be marked pass/fail.

  - **Group Presentations**: The class will be divided into 6 groups to report on a book about the Civil War and/or Reconstruction and memory. This assignment is an opportunity for you to teach each other about important texts on these two topics. The instructor will provide the names of the books to be presented.
    - On NYU CLASSES, please provide the instructor a self-evaluation of your part in the presentation [i.e., what part of the presentation did you prepare; how did you help pull things together; etc.]. The self-
evaluation is designed to help the instructor grade your participation.

- **Written Film Analysis:** The professor will provide a list of popular movies on slavery, the civil war and/or reconstruction from which you should write a 5-page analysis of one of the films.
  - Choose one character in the film to analyze who can help you answer the following questions:
    - Does the film have a clear Point of View that relates to history?
    - Is there a subtext you can detect in the film?
    - Does there seem to be an intended audience for the movie?
  - Features of the character you might examine include: the effects of the character’s body, clothing, voice or mannerisms; the character’s apparent motivations, desires, barely hidden agendas, and contradictory statements; and relations to other key characters.

- **Final Class Presentation and Paper:** Each student will choose from a list of novels provided by the instructor to present with questions about African American history and memory. The professor will provide further instructions on what to include in the presentation. This assignment is designed to build on the film analysis assignment and to broaden everyone’s sense of the ways that novels use history and memory.
  - The presentation should be turned into an 8 to 10 page paper.

- Grades will be based on the following matrix:
  - Response papers 15%
  - Thesis statements 15%
  - Discussion questions 10%
  - Group presentation 15%
  - Film analysis 15%
  - Final paper 20%
  - Class participation* 10%
  - Extra Credit**

*Very thoughtful participation can lead to extra credit.
**For extra credit, you may present at the beginning of a class an item from the press or internet that uses the
history of slavery, the civil war or reconstruction to
make an argument about race in the US today. The
goal here is to demonstrate the various ways that
history and memory inform present day debates.