

Gender and American Slavery

HIST 472

Fall 2025

Contact Information

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Office Hours: Mondays and Tuesdays, 9am-10am

Feel free to reach out to me via email at any time and for any reason! Please be aware, though, that I will likely not respond before 9am and after 7pm. Also, as we begin this course together, I ask that you show me the same courtesy that I intend to show you; I will always do my best to respond to emails within 48 hours, and I would appreciate if you did the same!

Course Description and Objectives

In this course we will investigate the many ways in which gender influenced the practice, legality, and experience of U.S. slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The majority of our class will be spent reading about the lived experiences of Black women, whose lives were intersectionally shaped not only by their race but also by their sex. We will examine Black women's experiences on the plantation, on the auction block, and on the run; we will also look at gender in the context of plantation medicine and slave insurrection. Alongside the experiences of Black women, we will also examine the institution of slavery from the perspective of white women. Of course, the term *gender*

doesn't simply refer to women, so we will likewise read about and discuss, if more briefly, issues of masculinity, fatherhood, and queerness under slavery.

Objectives:

In this course, students will...

- Be able to identify how Anglo-American conceptions of gender influenced (and were influenced by) the institution of slavery.
- Understand the role of intimacy within American slavery.
- Be able to explain the many ways Black women resisted or revolted against slavery, and the limitations of that resistance.
- Practice analyzing primary source documents; these include runaway and auction advertisements, contemporary images, newspaper accounts, and plantation papers.
- Be able to articulate a research question concerning gender and U.S. slavery and answer that question using secondary sources.

Required Texts and Materials

You must have the following books for this class:

- Finley, Alexandra J. *An Intimate Economy: Enslaved Women, Work, and America's Domestic Slave Trade* (2020).
- Holden, Vanessa M. *Surviving Southampton: African American Women and Resistance in Nat Turner's Community* (2021).

I will put the two above books on course reserve at the library, so you can check them out for 2 hours at a time. However, it is important to have access to a copy in class for our discussions. There are used book sites, such as ABEbooks.com and thriftbooks.com, where you can find cheaper used copies, and if you have any trouble at all getting copies of these books please let me know and we can come to a solution together!

All other readings will be provided via Canvas.

Assignments

Weekly Writing

Throughout the semester you will be required to submit 8 weekly writings, which will be due by 5pm on Friday of that week. You may choose what weeks you would like to submit, but you must complete 8 by the end of the semester! In 1-2 paragraphs you will answer one of the following prompts:

- Relate one of our readings from this week to something we've read for a previous week (related reading must not be from the same book). What do we get from putting these two works in conversation? Ex: Does one help answer a question from another? Do they build off of each other, and how? Do they prompt a question? Do they complement or contradict?
- Offer a critique of one of the week's readings. Please keep in mind that critique is not just criticism—don't simply say you didn't like the reading. Instead, evaluate an aspect of the reading. Perhaps you believe the author should have used other sources, or maybe you disagree with their conclusions, or had a different interpretation, etc.
- Discuss something you found particularly interesting, and why.

Each of these prompts can only be used a maximum of 3 times.

Discussion Questions

Each student will be required to bring in a discussion question twice in the semester, and a maximum of two students can bring in questions each class. Once we reach a point at which each student has met the required 2, students can volunteer to bring in additional questions for extra credit. Importantly, much of our meetings will be discussion-based and being not only present but engaged in class discussion is crucial!

Participation

While participation has often been gauged solely on speaking in class, I believe there are many ways for you to actively participate. You are certainly encouraged to speak up in class discussions and collaborate with your groups. But you may also offer thoughts in nonverbal ways (such as taking active notes, extra contributions to online discussion boards, or emailing with me and/or the class) and by volunteering for roles such as serving as the note-taker in small group discussions. You are also welcome to demonstrate your investment in the course by meeting with me during office hours or by appointment. As a previously shy undergrad myself, I am happy to have a conversation with you about how we can create a classroom climate that best facilitates your participation.

Runaway Ad Analysis and Short Presentation

For this project you will locate a runaway ad and, in 2–3 pages, discuss both the historical context (who/what/where/when) and your analysis (why—why is this source valuable? What do our readings tell us about what you see in this source? What does it tell historians, and how does it contribute to our understanding of gender and American slavery?). We will discuss how to locate these advertisements in class. For the paper, you must cite a minimum of two secondary sources, one of which must be from outside the class readings. For class that day, please prepare a 5-minute presentation for your classmates mirroring your paper (i.e. give us the context as well as your interpretation).

Annotated Bibliography

Your annotated bibliography is part of the lead-up to your final project. You will find 5 secondary sources outside class readings that speak to your research topic. Of these 5 sources, at least 2 must be book-length works (i.e., not articles or chapters from edited volumes). For each source, write 150–200 words describing the argument and how the work fits into your research project. We will go over how to find secondary sources and how to organize an annotated bib in class.

Final Paper

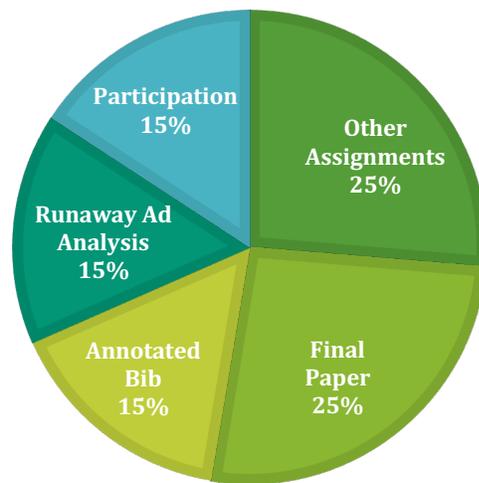
For your final paper, you will write a 10–12-page research paper on a question or problem of your choosing. I do not expect primary source research; instead, the purpose of this paper is to find the answer to your question using secondary literature. We will discuss the paper further in class, and I am more than happy to discuss potential research topics and ideas with you throughout the semester!

Grade Breakdown

- Final Paper: 25%
- Annotated Bibliography: 15%
- Runaway Ad Analysis: 20%
- Participation: 15%
- Other Assignments: 25%

Grading Scale:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| A = 93% and above | A- = 90-92% |
| B+ = 88-89% | B = 83-87% |
| B- = 80-82% | C+ = 78-79% |
| C = 73-77% | C- = 70-72% |
| D+ = 68-69% | D = 63-67% |
| D- = 60-62% | F = 0-59% |



Absence Policies

Each student has 3 “freebie” absences, no questions asked. I invite you to use these however you want or need, and you are not required to tell me why or when you are taking them. If you miss a fourth class or more, though, you must email me to set up a one-on-one conversation where we can discuss how best to go forward together. This is because I want to make sure you are getting the support you need and getting the most out of this course. Excessive absences can affect your overall grade.

AI Policy

The use of generative AI, while certainly a powerful tool, will be limited in this course. Though AI can be used at the brainstorming stage, it *cannot* be used in the writing or editing stages. While I am certainly open to discussing this policy with you all, I do have my reasons. AI can be a useful tool but does not necessarily help you become a better writer or improve your critical thinking skills. If, for instance, I wanted to get stronger, I may go to a gym and lift weights. We can all agree that a forklift, a tool designed to lift heavy objects, is stronger than me. But using a forklift at the gym would be both silly and ineffective. Think of this classroom as your gym. In working on our writing together, you may break a sweat, and you may be tempted to use the forklift, but this is a space where I invite you to try, to take risks, and work on bettering your ability to communicate your thoughts and ideas verbally and in writing.

Rice Honor Code

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at <http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/>. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

Disability Resource Center

With or without documentation, we can discuss how to improve your access to course material and explore different methodologies for learning. If there are ways in which the overall structure of the course and general classroom interactions could be adapted to better facilitate your full participation, do not hesitate to raise your ideas with me: comments and suggestions about the format of readings, lectures, and class discussions are

always welcome. Additionally, consult with the Disability Resource Center (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice.edu) if you need specific accommodations.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Course Schedule

Monday, August 25

Welcome! Introductions and Overview

Creating Difference

Wednesday, August 27

Collaborative policies

Friday, August 29

Jennifer Morgan, ““Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder”: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770”

Monday, September 1 - NO CLASS

Wednesday, September 3

Kathleen Brown, “Engendering Racial Difference”

Friday, September 5

Sharon Block, “Making Meaningful Bodies: Physical Appearance in Colonial Writings”
Small Group Discussions—bring your discussion questions!

Black Women and Labor

Monday, September 8

Daina Ramey Berry, “I Had to Work Hard, Plow, and Go and Split Wood Jus’ Like a Man’: Skill, Gender, and Productivity in Agricultural Settings”

Wednesday, September 10

Berry, “Dey S’lected Me Out to Be a Housegirl’: The Privileges and Pain of Nonagricultural Labor”

Friday, September 12

Discussion Day

Black Women as Fugitives

Monday, September 15

Stephanie Camp, "I Could Not Stay There': Enslaved Women, Truancy and the Geography of Everyday Forms of Resistance in the Antebellum Plantation South"

Wednesday, September 17

David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic"

Friday, September 19

In-Class Work Day

Monday, September 22

Runaway Ad Analysis due, short presentations of your chosen source in class.

Black Women and the Slave Trade

Wednesday, September 24

Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, introduction

Friday, September 26

Finley, ch 1

Monday, September 29

Finley, chs 2 and 3

Wednesday, October 1

Finley, ch 4 and conclusion

Friday, October 3

Discussion Day

Medicine and Slavery

Monday, October 6

Dierdre Cooper Owens, "Contested Relations: Slavery, Sex, and Medicine"

Wednesday, October 8

Owens, "Historical Black Superbodies and the Medical Gaze"

Friday, October 10

Discussion Day

Monday, October 13 - NO CLASS

White Women and Slavery

Wednesday, October 15

Laura Sandy, "Homemakers, Supervisors, and Peach Stealing Bitches: The Role of Overseers' Wives on Slave Plantations in Eighteenth-Century Virginia and South Carolina"

Friday, October 17

Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, "Mistresses in the Making: White Girls, Mastery and the Practice of Slaveownership in the Nineteenth-Century South"

Queerness, Masculinity, and Slavery

Monday, October 20

Libra R. Hilde, chapter 1

Wednesday, October 22

Hilde, chapter 2

Friday, October 24

Hilde, chapter 7

Monday, October 27

Thomas A. Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery"

Wednesday, October 29

Riley Snorton, "Trans Capable: Fungibility, Fugitivity, and the Matter of Being"

Friday, October 31

Discussion Day

Gender, Rebellion, and Resistance

Monday, November 3

Marjoleine Kars, "Dodging Rebellion: Politics and Gender in the Berbice Slave Uprising of 1763"

Wednesday, November 5

Vanessa Holden, intro

Friday, November 7

Holden, chapter 1

Monday, November 10

Holden, chapters 2 and 3

Wednesday, November 12

Holden, chapter 4

Friday, November 14

Holden, chapter 5 and conclusion

Discussion Day

Black Women and Themselves

Monday, November 17

Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The pleasures of resistance: enslaved women and body politics in the plantation South, 1830-1861"

Wednesday, November 19

Courtney Moore Taylor, "A Badge of Slavery: Clothing and Enslaved Teenage Girls' Identity Formation"

Friday, November 21

Discussion Day

Monday, November 24

Come to class ready to discuss research questions for your final paper!

Wednesday, November 26 - NO CLASS

Friday, November 28 - NO CLASS

Monday, December 1

In-Class Workday

Wednesday, December 3

In-Class Workday

Friday, December 5

Due: Annotated Bibliography

Final Paper due on the last day of Finals Week.