

AM/HI 505
The American South in History, Literature, and Film



Professor Nina Silber
226 Bay State Road, Room 408
617-353-8307
nsilber@bu.edu

Office hours: Mondays 10-12 and Wednesdays 11-12; and by appointment.
(Email is best for contacting me.)

Course website: (copy and paste the link below):

https://learn.bu.edu/webapps/blackboard/execute/modulepage/view?course_id=45436_1&cmp_tab_id=138100_1&editMode=true&mode=cpview

The American South presents us with a set of contradictions: a place sometimes considered different, even “foreign”, and set apart from the central story of US history, yet also integral to the development of American institutions (just consider

that four of the first five US presidents were southern slaveholders) and economic development. At times, too, the South has been figured as both beguiling and appealing; at other times, and by different creators, the South has appeared terrifying and barbaric. This class will consider some of these contradictory views of the US South by exploring this region through a variety of disciplinary lenses: historical, literary, and through the medium of art and film. Our readings will examine the rise and consolidation of the plantation slave system, the establishment of a distinctive southern agenda in the years leading up to the Civil War, the experience of the South in war and Reconstruction, and then the region's embrace of modernization and modernity, culminating with the reconfiguration of Southern race relations and politics in the second half of the twentieth century.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This class will rely heavily on student participation and classroom discussion. Hence, one of the most important requirements is to complete the readings, think about the topics and questions you might have, and participate in our conversations. One way we'll try to advance the discussion is through **postings on Blackboard**. Over the course of the semester, students will be required to make two postings to the Blackboard discussion board: the **first by February 27 at 10 AM** and the **second no later than April 10 at 10 AM**. These should be brief reflections (about a paragraph) on a point that has come up in the readings that intrigues you, or perhaps a historical point that strikes you as having contemporary relevance.

Each student will also be required to **present at one of our class meetings** by making a thoughtful intervention to the class discussion. This will involve identifying two passages from one (or two) of the readings for the week and posing questions for the group about those passages: Why did you choose those passages? What questions did they raise for you? What themes do you see illuminated in these passages? Passages selected for discussion **MUST BE NO LONGER THAN ONE PARAGRAPH**. Students will sign up for their class presentation at our first meeting.

Students must also complete a **3-page reading or film reflection**, discussing how you see that reading or film in connection with other themes we've discussed in class and/or how it relates to the historical literature being considered. Your reflection must be on one of the following (and you must hand in that response, in class, by the date indicated in parenthesis): *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (February 14); *Songs and Sayings of Uncle Remus* (February 28); the stories of Charles Chesnutt (March 14); *Birth of a Nation* (March 21); *As I Lay Dying* (March 28); *The Little Colonel* or *The Littlest Rebel* (April 4). You *cannot* prepare a reflection that overlaps with your oral presentation.

This class also requires students to complete a **research paper**, 13-15 pages, for undergraduates and 20-25 pages for graduate students. For this project, students can either pursue a topic that involves historical research, literary analysis, or a closer examination of some other artistic expression (film, painting, music, television) that deals with the "South". Students must turn in a proposal for their

project on March 29 no later than 10 pm via both email (to me) and via the Blackboard portal. In this proposal you will: explain the topic; identify 3-4 questions you will ask as you do your research; list 10-12 sources you will use for this project, at least 7 of which must be primary source material. On either April 25 or May 2 you will give an oral presentation about your project to the class. Final papers are due on May 7 by 11:59 PM via both email (to me) and via the Blackboard portal.

Finally, there will be an **in-class 40-minute short-answer test on February 28.**

Your grade will be based on the following: Blackboard postings, oral presentation and general class participation (20%); reading/film reflection (10%); short-answer test (25%); proposal for final paper and oral report on final project (10%); final paper (35%).

ACADMIC CONDUCT: Cheating – and that includes plagiarism – is absolutely forbidden. Plagiarism means presenting somebody else’s work as if it is your own, *even if you do so unintentionally*. It is the responsibility of all students to know and understand the BU Academic Conduct Code that deals with plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. This code is posted at:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

Graduate students enrolled in AM/HI 505 should be aware of the GRS Academic Conduct Code:

<http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/>

POLICY ON TECHNOLOGY: Studies show that students do not benefit from multi-tasking and that some students’ tendency to shop or face-book during class time can be a distraction for everyone. Evidence also suggests that students really don’t learn better by taking notes on electronic devices. For this reason, cell phone use is NOT PERMITTED AT ALL during class time and laptops and other devices must be used sparingly (e.g., to access a reading assignment being discussed in class).

ATTENDANCE POLICY: This is a 3-hour, once-a-week class. That means if you miss one class, it’s the equivalent of missing three MWF classes. Because of this, students are allowed ONE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE. More than one absence will require a conversation with the instructor and some extra work. More than two absences will result in a significant reduction of the final grade.

Readings:

The books below are available in the bookstore. Whenever possible, it’s best to have

a hard copy of the reading material so that you can mark passages and write notes in the margins. If it doesn't break the bank, try to print out at least some of the shorter reading assignments that are posted on Blackboard or are on the web.

Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Oxford University Press edition)

Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (Penguin/Random House edition)

Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (Penguin/Random House edition)

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

January 24: What is the South?

In this class we'll discuss what it means to study "the South", some of the historical background that shaped that portion of the North American continent that we now refer to as "the South" and also consider some of the most recent events that have put "the South" in the news.

Readings: "A Historian Destroys Roy Moore's Myth"
<https://www.rawstory.com/2017/12/a-historian-destroys-roy-moores-myth-about-united-black-families-during-slavery/>
Greg Grandin, "How Endless War Helps Old Dixie Stay New"
http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/176020/tomgram%3A_greg_grandin,_how_endless_war_helps_old_dixie_stay_new/
"Introduction" to James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Blackboard)
Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 2-49

January 31: A Slave Society: The South in the New Nation

How did the "southern" perspective shape the formation of the new nation state during and after the American Revolution?

Readings: Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Queries I, II, V, VI, VIII, XI:
<http://literature.proquest.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/toc.do?sourceId=Z001160710&action=new&area=prose&divLevel=0&queryId=&mapping=toc#scroll&DurUrl=Yes>

and *The Declaration of Independence*:

<http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/transcript-declaration-independence-rough-draft>

Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 51-157
Annette Gordon-Reed, "The Hemings-Jefferson Treaty: Paris, 1789" (Blackboard)

February 7: The Plantation South

What did the rise and consolidation of plantation agriculture mean for those who lived in the Southern states (and elsewhere) and what did it mean for creating a regional identity? How was this new plantation system intertwined with the nation as a whole?

Readings: Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 159-244
Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, 111-144 (Blackboard)
Sven Beckert, "Slavery and Capitalism", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 12, 2014:
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/SlaveryCapitalism/150787>
7 (Cut and paste this link)
John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*, "Introductory Epistle" and Chapter I ("Swallow Barn"), 1-24.
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/kennedyswallowbarn1/kennedyswallowbarn1.html>
(Kennedy's book is considered a prime example of an antebellum plantation idyll. Do your best with this reading; the writing is excessively flowery!)

February 14: The North/South Divide
(Class will end at 4 pm)

How did "the South" emerge as a distinct formation through both the cultural and political developments of the antebellum era?

Readings: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

February 21: The Civil War

What drove the formation of the Confederate States of America and how did the Civil War experience reshape the South?

Readings: Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 1-84; 133-177; 263-309
Mississippi's Secession Declaration:
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_missec.asp
South Carolina's Secession Declaration:
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_scarsec.asp
Alexander Stephens, "Corner Stone" Speech, March 21 1861:
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/corner-stone-speech/>

FIRST BLACKBOARD POSTINGS MUST BE DONE NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 27 BY 10 AM

February 28: Short-Answer Test/Reconstruction & the Lost Cause

Students will complete a 40-minute short-answer test at the beginning of class. Then we will proceed to the discussion: What did Reconstruction, and its downfall, mean for white and black Southerners?

Readings: Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 245-270
Joel Chandler Harris, *Songs and Sayings of Uncle Remus*:
Legends of the Old Plantation:
 I Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy (page 3)
 II The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story (page 7)
 IV How Mr. Rabbit was too sharp for Mr. Fox (page 16)
 XIII Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf (page 62)
 XXXIII Why the Negro is Black (page 168)
 A Story of the War (page 201)
Page numbers above refer to the page on which the story begins in the online version:
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/aje0676.0001.001?view=to>
[c](#)

SPRING BREAK: March 5-March 9

March 14: Jim Crow & The "New South"

What were the historical circumstances that gave rise to the Jim Crow system and what did that system mean for black and white southerners? How were conceptions about race being reshaped in this era?

Readings: Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 61-175 (Blackboard)
Charles Chesnut, Stories from *The Conjure Woman*: “The Goophered Grapevine” and “Sis’ Becky’s Pickaninny”
https://books.google.com/books?id=Mv4QAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false

And “Dave’s Neckliss”:
https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/chesnut_davesneckliss.pdf

March 21: Modernity and the New South

How was the South transformed by the rise of industrialization and commercialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What kind of cultural responses were generated by modernization?

Viewing: Students must watch *Birth of a Nation*, a 1915 silent film, on their own, available on Netflix and Youtube at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQe5ShxM2DI>

Reading: Michael Rogin, “ ‘The Sword Became a Flashing Vision’: D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*” (Blackboard)
Natalie Ring, *The Problem South*, 18-57 (Blackboard)
Pete Daniel, *Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the Twentieth Century*, 88-108 (Blackboard)

March 28: The South in the 20s and 30s

Readings: William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*
Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, Introduction:
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma01/white/anthology/agrarian.html>

GUEST VISIT: Professor John Matthews (English)

PROPOSALS FOR FINAL PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD PORTAL ON
MARCH 29 BY 10 PM

April 4: The South in the 30s and 40s

Viewing: Students must watch, on their own, EITHER: *The Little Colonel*, a 1935 Shirley Temple film, available on Youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ASCb9XPxl8> or *The Littlest Rebel*, a slightly different 1935 Shirley Temple film, available on Youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJtGagslyyk&t=3s>

Reading: Grace Hale, " 'For Colored' and 'For White': Segregating Consumption in the South" (Blackboard)
Pete Daniel, *Standing at the Crossroads*, 109-149 (Blackboard)

SECOND BLACKBOARD POSTINGS MUST BE DONE NO LATER THAN APRIL 10 BY
10 AM

April 11: The South in the Civil Rights Era

Readings: Ann Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*
Matthew D. Lassiter, "De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth" in Lassiter and Crespino, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Blackboard)

April 18 NO CLASS (MONDAY SCHEDULE)

April 25: The South in the 1970s & Beyond/Begin Reports on Final Projects

Readings: Nancy MacLean, "Neo-Confederacy versus the New Deal: The Regional Utopia of the Modern American Right" in Lassiter and Crespino, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Blackboard)

May 2:

Finish Reports on Final Project

FINAL PAPERS DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 7 AT 11:59 PM