This course explores how Africans brought to the Americas lived during the period before the Abolition of Slavery. Themes will include African origins, the history of labor relations in the Atlantic world, social relations especially focusing on gender and sexuality, and understanding the nature of resistance by Africans and their descendants to the social relations in which they were enmeshed.

This course will be largely discussion-based, anchored on weekly key readings. These readings represent the leading literature in the field, and explore the most important controversies and themes that have interested historians of the African Diaspora in the past 40 years.

Each class will be structured around an interrelated group of readings, mostly either as excerpts from books or as articles. It is absolutely essential that each student read all readings and attend each class. Please advise me in advance if you will be missing a class if this is possible. The excerpts will be available on-line on the course website, see the listing under AA514 on Blackboard. In addition you will be required to purchase the following books:


Also available online as a free download at:
Written course work will consist of four papers of approximately 5 pages in length in which summarize and then evaluate the reading for that week, followed by a final paper (see below for fuller details). All written work will be submitted as e-mail attachments to jkthorn@bu.edu (my email address). The choice of weeks to write on will be determined on the first day of class.

Those students who are writing essays will be expected to take the lead in the discussion that week. To do this, read the texts carefully and think about questions you might highlight, for example, what is the author’s primary intent in this piece, and did he or she achieve it? If there are multiple texts, how do they fit together, can we understand why there are differences in positions? Other students in the class should also think of their own questions, either factual or conceptual that are raised by the reading. The quality of the discussion will depend very heavily on not just doing the reading, but thinking about it and having questions or comments to make.

The short papers should first outline the principal arguments in each of the readings dealt with on that day, and then proceed to produce an evaluation of the readings on their own and in the context of the others. As a rule of thumb, of the five pages, about three should be descriptive and the remaining two evaluative. In order to increase the quality of the paper, students should do some outside reading, for example reviews of books, or if relevant commentary on articles found by searching on GoogleScholar or other scholarly websites. Students leading the class should use these reviews also to guide their discussion.

In addition to the short papers, each student should write a research paper. This paper can focus on any theme that the class has dealt with, and should include an overview of how other historians have addressed the question, as well as insights from your own research, which should include primary sources that are available to you. Please consult with the instructor before embarking on the research. Each student will make a short oral progress report on the last day the class meets. This paper will be due on the day the class would have its examination if there were an examination (not yet posted).

Ten per cent of your grade will be based on my assessment of your participation in class, then each short essay will be worth 15% to a total of 60% of the grade, and the final paper will be worth 30% of the grade.

Papers are due on the day the class meets by 1:00 pm (as determined by the date given your message by my email account). If you have reasons to believe you cannot make this date and time, inform me and discuss options. Late papers will be assessed a grade reduction of one third of a grade (i.e. an A becomes an A-) for each class session that the paper is late, but no paper will fail simply because of lateness. I expect each student to produce independent papers though I encourage students to discuss their ideas with each
other and read and comment on each other’s papers. Plagiarized papers will be dealt with according to the CAS Academic Conduct Code.

Schedule of Reading/Classes

Class 1, 20 January. Introduction and Assignments

Class 2, 27 January. Slavery and Labor.

Class 3, 3 February. Slavery, the Slave Trade and its Impact in Africa

Class 4. 10 February. Muslim and Christian Africa and the Americas

Class 5. 17 February. Spanish America Status and Labor

Class 6. 24 February. African Culture and Brazil

Class 7, 3 March. Status and Control
Burnard, whole book.
Sections of the Diary of Thomas Thistlewood, to be assigned to each student

Spring Break 4-12 March
Class 8, 17 March. The Internal Market, Bargaining, and the “Peasant Breach”.
   Sydney Mintz and Douglas Hall, “The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Market
   System,” in Beckles and Shepherd, Caribbean Slave Society, pp. 319-34.
   Richard Sheridan, “Strategies of Slave Subsistence: The Jamaican Case
   Reconsidered,” in Mary Turner, ed. From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves. The Dynamics

Class 9, 24 March Freedom in Slave Societies
   Jerome Handler, The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of
   Patrick Carroll, Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity and Regional
   Development, pp. 112-29.
   Paul Heinegg, “Free African Americans of Virginia, North Carolina, South
   Read the forward by Ira Berlin and Heinegg’s introduction’s to the sections on both
   Virginia/the Carolinas and Maryland/Delaware.

Class 10, 31 March. Women in Slavery
   Hilary Beckles, Centering Woman (whole book) Note: Hilary Beckles is a man.

Class 11, 7 April. Resistance and Maronage
   Mavis Campbell, The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796 (Africa World Press,
   1990), pp. 126-208.
   John Thornton, “War, the State, and Religious Norms in Coromantee Thought,”
   in Robert Blair St. George, ed., Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in America (Cornell
   University Press, 2000), pp. 181-200

Class 12, 14 April. The Haitian Revolution
   C. L. R. James, Black Jacobins (whole book)
   John Thornton, "'I am the Subject of the King of Congo': African Ideology in the

Class 13, 21 April. The Williams Thesis: Slavery and the Industrial Revolution
   Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, pp. 126-68. This whole book is also
   available as a free download at https://archive.org/details/capitalismandsla033027mbp
   Ronald Bailey, “The Slave(ry) Trade and the Development of Capitalism in the
   United States: The Textile Industry of New England,” in Inikori and Engerman, Atlantic
   Slave Trade, pp. 205-246.
   Seymour Drescher, “Public Opinion and Parliament in the Abolition of the British

Class 14, 28 April. Wrap up, provisional presentations
Each student will give a brief overview of their research project and their progress to date. This does not have to be the finished paper, which is not due until later.