Era of Slavery, Era of Emancipation: Select Readings on African American History

Spring 2021

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2020-2021 Center for Diversity Innovation Distinguished Visiting Scholars at SUNY UB

Organizers’ Picks of Select Texts and Discussion Dates

A Note on Content:

As we gather to discuss both Black history and contemporary issues of race, discrimination, and systemic inequality, it is important for us to note that the content in our reading selections, visual sources, and media will contain descriptions and depictions of racial violence. We will also discuss sexual violence and abuse. We approach our work as scholars with an ethic of care, particularly when it comes to studying and discussing Black suffering. We will provide content warnings but want to acknowledge that we will be engaging material that can be painful, violent, and triggering.
Rationale and Description

In 2020, we witnessed right here in America, the very real dangers of sweeping under the rug crucial issues of historical injustice; systemic anomalies; socioeconomic inequalities coupled with lack of equal access to healthcare and educational opportunities; and mass incarceration, and gross racial bias in the justice system. It is important and necessary for academics in all disciplines to lead the way in responding, in a morally adequate way, to some of the challenges posed by America’s legacy of racism, colonialism, land theft, and white supremacy.

Although the list below is inadequate and incomplete, it presents such an opportunity for scholars to engage and discuss African American history. The history of Black people in the United States is one of many entry points for this discussion. We acknowledge Black history’s many points of intersection with Indigenous history, women’s, and gender history, the nation’s history of class and capitalism, and the much longer and diverse history of the African diaspora. Indeed, it is hoped that even more interesting readings and materials will be added onto the list as we read and discuss African American history together. In the meantime, members of faculty, staff, and students at SUNY UB are asked to read our selections monthly for an engaged moderated discussion.
Meeting 00:


Date/Time: Wednesday 17 February 2021 @ 3:00 PM

Primary Texts:


Media:


Meeting 1:

Settler Colonialism is Not an Event, it is a Structure: Is it Possible to Reform and Reconfigure a System Built on White Supremacy?

Date/Time: Early March TBA

Primary Texts:

1. Chapter XVIII [#18], “The present and probable future of the three races which inhabit the territory of the United States,” (pp. 384 to 470 and/or the conclusion [pp. 498-504] in Volume I of Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America Vols. I (1885).


   Introduction and Chapter 2


   Chapters 1 & 2, plus the Conclusion.

Media:

1. NYT, “The 1619 Project,” Opening Article by Nikol Hannah Jones

   And

2. Photo Essay: Sites of Auctions_

   https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/02/12/magazine/1619-project-slave-auction-sites.html

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1 At the end of our first meeting, on Wednesday 17 February 2021, participants will be polled, and a fixed recurrent day and time of the week chosen for most of the rest of the readings discussion meetings over spring semester.
Meeting 2:
A More Perfect Capitalist Union: Capitalism, Slavery, and Early National Unity

Date/Time: Late March TBA

Primary Texts:
2. Daina Ramey Berry, The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation, (New York: Beacon, 2017), Chapter 3: Adolescence, Young Adulthood, and Soul Values

Supplementary Texts:

Media:
1. Tobacco Burn (Short Film): https://vimeo.com/87829771

Content Warning: Sexual and Physical Abuse, though not graphically depicted, is implied and overheard during the film. It is suggested for mature audiences only.
2. Freedom on the Move (Digital Humanities Project): www.freedomonthemove.org
Meeting 3:
The Cost of National of Reconciliation: Black Freedom and Sacrifice in the Era of Emancipation

Date/Time: Mid-April TBA

Primary Texts:


Supplementary Texts:


Media:
1. Stephen Towns, Visual Artist, Black Magic Series and Story Quilts Series

Website:
Story Quilts http://stephentowns.com/story-quilts/

Black Magic http://stephentowns.com/black-magic/


Meeting 4:
Give Your Hands to the Struggle! Contemporary Resonances

Date/Time: Mid-May TBA

Primary Texts:


Supplementary Texts:
Michael Eric Dyson, Long Time Coming: Reckoning with Race in America (December 2020).

Barack Obama, A Promised Land (November 2020).


Media:

1. Ava DuVernay, When They See Us, Episode 1, 2, 3, or 4.
   Content Warning: Depictions of racial violence and police violence

---Post-production Interview via Netflix: Oprah Winfrey Presents, “When They See Us Now,”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18UZO9UmCPg

2. Lee Daniel’s, The Butler (Drama/Historical drama –2h 15m. Content Warning: Depictions of racial violence including lynching.

3. Childish Gambino, “This is America,” youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY (May 2018). Content Warning: Depictions of gun violence