

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

Spring 2021

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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:

“The Double Standard of the American Riot”: Summer 2020 Racial Justice Protests & the Washington, DC Infamy of 6th January 2021 in Historical Perspective

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

Primary Texts:

1. Timothy Snyder, “The American Abyss,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/magazine/trump-coup.html>
2. Kellie Carter Jackson, “The Double Standard of the American Riot” *The Atlantic*, June 1, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/06/riots-are-american-way-george-floyd-protests/612466/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share
_____ “The Inaction of Capitol Police Was by Design,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/01/inaction-capitol-police-was-design/617590/>
3. Jessica Marie Johnson, “Yet Lives and Fights”: Riots, Resistance, and Reconstruction,” *Black Perspectives*, November 12, 2016, <https://www.aaihs.org/yet-lives-and-fights-riots-resistance-and-reconstruction/>

Media:

1. ABC News, “24 Hours: Assault on the Capitol,” 11 January 2020, Hulu—1hr, <https://abc.com/news/insider/watch-24-hours-assault-on-the-capitol-abc-news-special-streaming-exclusively-on-hulu>
2. Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ25-U3jNWM>

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 TBA¹

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).

2. Sharon Block, *Colonial Complexions: Race and Bodies in Eighteenth-Century America*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

Introduction and Chapter 2

3. Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
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>

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:

1. Julia Ott, "Slavery": The Capital that Made Capitalism (August 2015)

<https://publicseminar.org/essays/slavery-the-capital-that-made-capitalism/>

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:

Woody Holton. (1997). "Rebel against Rebel": Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution. *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 105(2), 157-192.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4249636>

Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014), Read the Introduction and at least one chapter of your own interest.

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:

1. Jaron Browne, "Rooted in Slavery: Prison Labor Exploitation," in *Race, Poverty & the Environment* (Spring 2010): 1-5.
2. Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys Through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps*, (UNC Press, 2018.) Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter 2: Finding Shelter

Supplementary Texts:

William W. Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery." *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (1972): 81-93. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1856595>

Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*, (W. W. Norton & Company; 1st edition, 2020)

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/>

2. "The Forgotten: The Contraband of America and the Road to Freedom," National Trust for Historic Preservation

<https://savingplaces.org/stories/the-forgotten-the-contraband-of-america-and-the-road-to-freedom#.YAS3O5NKjlw>

Meeting 4:

Give Your Hands to the Struggle! Contemporary Resonances

Date/Time: Mid-May TBA

Primary Texts:

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, ‘Post-Racial’ America,” in *American Behavioral Scientist* (May 2015).

Jesmyn Ward, *Men We Reaped: A Memoir*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Fabiola Cineas, “White Rage Won’t Just Go Away: African American Studies Scholar Carol Anderson on the Policies that Legitimize White Rage,” 27 January 2021, *Vox*, <https://www.vox.com/22243875/white-rage-white-nationalism>

Supplementary Texts:

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

Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (November 2020).

Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, Reprint Edition, 5 September 2017).

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](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY) (May 2018). Content Warning: Depictions of gun violence

4. Gary Younge, “Angry, White & American,” (2018).