

## HIST 535 (CRN 41469) Historiography

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What is history? How have historians approached the study of the past? How and why have there been changes in the approach to the study of history? These and other questions will guide our examination of some dynamic scholarship within (and outside) the discipline of history as well as major shifts (or turns), trends, and debates in historiography over the last fifty years or so. While literally meaning, *the writing of history*, “historiography” also refers to theories of history. Some key topics covered in the course will include the relationship between power and the writing of history and approaches that have served to shape theory and modern historiographical scholarship. Instead of offering an exhaustive examination, this course will query themes, approaches, and debates in American history by focusing on key works in African American and Africana historiography. A substantial portion of the course will examine classic African American and Africana historiography as well as newer works in literary, cultural, and memory studies and their relationship to reconstructing the past. We will also explore the transnational implications as well as the centrality of race, class, and gender in American history. Through the exploration of this historiographic terrain, you will be given the opportunity to examine how particular approaches to the writing of history has informed schools of thought that have “served to unsettle conventional wisdom about the past” and “illuminate the contested nature of historical knowledge.”

In addition to laying the groundwork for graduate study in the History M.A. program, this course will prepare students to incorporate historiographical debates into their teaching and research across a range of geographic and chronological fields.

### Required texts

1. Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) ISBN: 9781108712439- 2ND 20
2. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) ISBN: 9780674002111 - 98
3. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) ISBN: 9780807080535-15
4. Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020) ISBN: 9780674737570 - 20
5. Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999) ISBN: 9780393314816 - REV 99
6. David Blight, *Frederick Douglass's Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1991) ISBN: 9780807117248 - 89
7. Martha Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) ISBN: 9781316604724 – 18
8. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: WW Norton, 2019) ISBN: 9780393285673 - 19

9. James Meriweather, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002) ISBN: 9780807849972 - 02
10. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) ISBN: 9780521479417 - 98

- All other readings will be scanned and posted to Blackboard

### **Learning Outcomes:**

1. Situate historical knowledge within the shifting historiographical and methodological contexts that produced it.
2. Practice graduate-level analytical and writing skills.
3. Develop skills to identify and organize the scholarship of historical subfields in preparation for the History M.A. program's comprehensive exams.
4. Incorporate historiography into history teaching at the secondary and college levels.
5. Build connections to the historiographical debates that you have learned about, or are currently learning about, in other graduate history classes.

### **Course requirements**

#### **1. Discussions**

##### **Weekly discussion of reading—400 points (40% of grade)**

Each week, you must write one 500-word-minimum original post (due by Wednesday at 11:59pm) and three shorter responses to your classmates' posts (due by Friday at 11:59pm). Please wait until Thursday to respond to your peers, which will give everybody time to post their opening remarks. Each week's discussion is worth a total of 40 points. Since this is a graduate course, I expect graduate-level work in discussion that demonstrates careful, critical, and constructive engagement with the readings as well as the posts of your classmates. At the end of the semester, I will go back through the discussion forums and assess the overall quality of your engagement with other students' ideas.

#### **2. Book review essay—400 points (40% of grade)**

Students are required to write a review (500-750 words) on any 8 books chosen from the list located at the end of the syllabus. Rather than a traditional summary, the book review should focus mainly on description and historiographic analysis. The format of reviews should be patterned on those that appear in the *Journal of Southern History*, *American Quarterly*, and the *American Historical Review*. The book review essay is due in the week following our discussion of the text.

#### **3. Historiographic essay—200 points (20% of grade)**

All students will be required to write a 15-18-page essay on a topic related to American historiography. You will develop this topic in consultation with me. Topics should be identified no later than the 7<sup>th</sup> week of the class. The essay should focus upon a particular historical trend and discuss that issue using at least 5 books from the course. Be sure to examine how the books interact or engage each other on similar themes. The historiographic essay is due at the end of the semester.

## **Policies**

### **Online Policies:**

Keeping up with the material is essential to doing well in this course. Be sure that you are prepared for a graduate-level workload; if you fall behind, it is very difficult to catch up. If you run into problems during the semester, be sure to talk to me as soon as possible. Your reading load for a typical week will include a book or several articles and chapters totaling approximately 110-180 pages. During the week, you will also contribute posts to the discussion forum on Blackboard and respond to other students' posts; it is best to think of these as short writing assignments. The technology requirements for this online class are modest. You will need access to a computer with a reliable internet connection to use Blackboard and to write and submit your assignments. You should also have a plan for an alternate way to connect to the internet in case of emergency. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard, visit the Online Orientation for Online Learners at <http://www.wku.edu/online/orientation/index.php> before the course begins. If you have any problems using any of the online tools for this course, please contact me as soon as possible.

### **Academic Dishonesty:**

Please contact me if you are facing a serious issue that will impede your ability to complete assignments on time. Acts of plagiarism or any other cheating will not be tolerated. Please read the relevant section of the WKU Student Handbook: [www.wku.edu/handbook/academic-dishonesty.php](http://www.wku.edu/handbook/academic-dishonesty.php).

### **ADA Notice:**

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, 1074. SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at [sarc.connect@wku.edu](mailto:sarc.connect@wku.edu). Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.

### **Sexual Misconduct/Assault:**

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) at <https://wku.edu/eoo/documents/titleix/wkutitleixpolicyandgrievanceprocedure.pdf> and Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040) at [https://wku.edu/policies/hr\\_policies/2040\\_discrimination\\_harassment\\_policy.pdf](https://wku.edu/policies/hr_policies/2040_discrimination_harassment_policy.pdf).

Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.

Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are "Responsible Employees" of

the University and MUST report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

## Schedule

### **Weekly course structure:**

This class includes no lectures, exams, or zoom meetings. Instead, your labor will be devoted to reading and written discussion. Each week will be structured as follows:

**Monday and Tuesday:** These days are reserved strictly for reading. During this time, Dr. Rosa will post a set of framing remarks to guide the discussion.

**Wednesday:** Each student will submit a 500-word post (which can be longer if you wish) to the Blackboard discussion board.

**Thursday and Friday:** Each student will submit at least three comments (for a combined total of at least 500 words) responding to the posts submitted by your fellow students. Please note that you are not allowed to submit your responses early. This is to ensure that everybody has had time to write their initial post by Wednesday at 11:59pm. You are encouraged to check back several times on Thursday and Friday to keep up with the discussion.

### **Schedule of readings:**

Aside from books required for purchase, all readings are posted in the “Content” section of Blackboard. Please contact me if you have any trouble accessing course materials this semester.

#### **Week One (Aug 22-26): Reading Africa and Africans into Old World History**

Read: Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, chps. 1-3; Robert L. Harris, Jr., “Coming of Age: The Transformation of African American Historiography,” *Journal of Negro History*, 67,2 (Summer, 1982), 107-121

#### **Week Two (Aug 29-Sep 2): Africa and Africans in Making of the Atlantic World**

Read: Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, chps. 4-8; Earl Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas,” *American Historical Review*, 100, 3 (June, 1995), 765-787 (Bb).

#### **Week Three (Sep 5-9): Theorizing Slavery in the Colonial Era**

Read: Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp1-216; Leon Litwack, “The Making of an Historian,” pp. 15-32 (Bb).

#### **Week Four (Sep 12-16): North of Slavery in the era of Revolution**

Read: Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 217-365; Eric Foner, “The Education of Richard Hofstadter,” 25-48 (Bb).

**Week Five (Sep 19-23): Power and the Production of History**

Read: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

**Week Six (Sep 26-29): Rethinking Subaltern Resistance**

Read: Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*; Peter Parrish, "Slavery and Its Schools," 52-72 (Bb).

**Week Seven (Oct. 3-7): Gender and Antebellum Slavery**

Read: Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W.W. Norton, 1999); Darlene Clark Hine, "Reflections on Race and Gender Systems," 51-65.

**Week Eight (Oct. 10-14): Reading Biography as History**

Read: David Blight, *Frederick Douglass's Civil War*; Jaqueline Jones, "Autobiography and Scholarship," 111-130.

**Week Nine (Oct 17-21): Asserting the Right to Be**

Read: Martha Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Eric Foner, "Blacks and the US Constitution," 167-188

**Week Ten (Oct 26-30): Interdisciplinary History**

Read: Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, book 1

**Week Eleven (Oct 31-Nov 4): Interdisciplinary History—cont.**

Read: Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, books 2&3

**Week Twelve (Nov 7-11): Transnational Perspectives in African and African American History**

Read: James Meriweather, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*

**Week Thirteen (Nov 14-18): Afrocentrism—what is it?**

Read: Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia*; David Levering Lewis, "From Eurocentrism to Polycentrism," 66-60

**Week Fourteen (Nov 21-25): Thanksgiving Break**

**Week Fifteen (Nov 30-Dec 4): Afrocentrism—what is it?**

Read: Complete Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia*; Mark Naison, "The Significance of the Personal for the Professional," 131-146