

HIST 535 (sec 001) Historiography (Web course)

Fall 2024

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Overview:

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, including 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, therefore, 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 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, social, cultural, and memory studies. We will also explore comparative and transnational implications of some current historiography, as well as the centrality of race, class, and gender in American history. Our exploration of this historiographic terrain will give you the opportunity to consider how particular approaches to the writing of history have informed schools of thought, unsettled conventional wisdom about the past, and illuminated 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.

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. I will provide feedback in either written or video format. 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 (1000-1200 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 an 8-10-page comprehensive essay in response to a prompt provided by me toward the end of the semester. The essay will require that you address historical trends, themes, and patterns as presented by the readings in the course and address how these works interact or engage each other. This historiographic essay will be due at the end of the semester.

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. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: WW Norton, 2019) ISBN: 9780393285673 - 19
8. James Meriweather, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002) ISBN: 9780807849972 - 02
9. Ana Lucia Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History*, Second Edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic Pub., 2024) 9781350297661

- All other readings will be scanned and posted to Blackboard

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.

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. 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.

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, I 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 (August 19, 21,23): Reading Africa and Africans into Old World History

Read: Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, part one, 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 (August 26, 28, 30): Africa and Africans in Making of the Atlantic World

Read: Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, part two, 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 (September 4, 6): 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), part one, “charter genderation”; Leon Litwack, “The Making of an Historian,” pp. 15-32 (Bb).

Due: Gomez review

- Labor day, Monday, Sep 2, no class.

Week Four (September 9, 11, 13): 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), part two (plantation generation) and part three (revolutionary generation); Eric Foner, “The Education of Richard Hofstadter,” 25-48 (Bb).

Week Five (September 16, 18, 20): Power and the Production of History

Read: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, chps 1-2,5; begin Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*.

Due: Berlin review

Week Six (September 23, 25, 27): Rethinking the Roots and Routes of Subaltern Resistance

Read: Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*, complete.

Due: Trouillot review

Week Seven (September 30, October 2, 4): 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.

Due: Brown review

Week Eight (October 9, 11): Reading Biography as History

Read: David Blight, *Frederick Douglass's Civil War*.

Due: White review

- Fall Break, Monday, October 7, no class)

Week Nine (October 14, 16, 18): Asserting the Right to Be

Read: David Blight, *Frederick Douglass's Civil War*, complete.

Week Ten (October 21, 23, 25): Interdisciplinary History

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

Due: Blight Review

Week Eleven (October 28, 30, November 1): Interdisciplinary History—cont.

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

Week Twelve (November 4, 6, 8): Transnational Perspectives in African and African American History

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

Due: Hartman Review

Week Thirteen (November 11, 13, 15): Transnational Perspectives in African and African American History—cont.

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

Due: Meriweather review

Week Fourteen (November 18, 20, 22): Reparations for Slavery--A Comparative and Transnational Approach

Read: Ana Araujo, chps. 1-3

Week Fifteen (November 25):

- Thanksgiving Break Nov. 27, 29, no class.

Week Sixteen (Dec.2,4, 6): Reparations for Slavery--A Comparative and Transnational Approach

Read: Araujo, chps. 4-6

Due: Araujo review and final essay.