Slavery and the systematic exploitation of people of African descent have profoundly shaped our nation. The rise of racial slavery underpinned the beginnings of pervasive and discriminatory racialist ideologies. Debates over slavery informed our national constitution and ultimately led the nation into four years of bloody war. But rather than settling arguments about the role of black men and women in national political, social, and economic life, emancipation raised new questions, many of which beg for resolution today.

As Frederick Douglass suggests, black Americans were never passive vessels. From the moment the first disembarked on the tip of Long Island and at Jamestown, Africans and African Americans have played a vital role in shaping our nation’s social, productive, cultural, and political life. Agency, or struggle, if you will, has been a hallmark of black life in mainland North America. Black Americans’ resistance gave particular shape to North America’s peculiar institution, and then helped bring about its destruction. Nearly a century later, continued traditions of resistance and struggle forced a reluctant nation to make good on long deferred promises of civil and political rights. Black Americans’ cultures—from early whispers of Africa and a knowledge of rice cultivation, to the blues sung by working people of the Mississippi Delta, to the poets of Harlem—have influenced language, politics, religion, diet, and even agricultural practices.

To leave unexplored the historical experiences of black Americans thus leaves untold—and unexplained—the story of our national past and how we have come to be who we are today. This course is designed to begin telling that story.

**REQUIREMENTS**

**Read:** The course readings consist of both primary and secondary sources. Keeping up with the reading is imperative: informed discussants result in useful discussions. All the books are available for purchase at the Coop. They have also been placed on library reserve. Many of the articles and documents are accessible through the course web site: either via links embedded in the syllabus or in the section labeled “course documents.” It should go without saying, that if any of the readings are not readily available, the sooner the problem is brought to my attention, the better.


**Write:** Writing assignments will take several forms:

- Multiple short assignments, often involving document analysis and always requiring some thought. Check the syllabus for each assignment, and its due date: approximately 40% of final grade.
- Final Exam: approximately 30% of final grade
**Talk:** The study of history is a conversation about the past and how we should think about it. Consider your enrollment in this course an invitation to join in that conversation.

- Class participation: approximately 30% of final grade

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND WRITINGS**

**Tuesday, 16 September**
Introduction: Rethinking the American Narrative

**Thursday, 28 September**
Old World Antecedents to New World Slavery

Read:

**Tuesday, 23 September**
Africa, Africans, and the Middle Passage

Read:
- David Eltis, “*The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment*,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (Jan. 2001), 17-46
- **Africa, Distribution of Ethnic Groups**
- **West and Central African Slaving Regions**
- **Plan of the British Slave Ship “Brookes,” 1789**

Write: The *Brookes*, with its ghastly interior, tells a big – and horrific – story about the Atlantic passage. But does it tell the whole story? Drawing on today’s readings and maps, briefly explain why or why not. Limit yourself to 1-2 typewritten pages, due in class on 23 September.

**Thursday, 25 September**
Making Slavery

Read:
- Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 1-46
- Richard Frethorne to Mother and Father, Jamestown, Virginia, 1623
- James Revel, “*The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon’s Sorrowful Account of his Fourteen Years Transportation at Virginia in America: In Six Parts***

Write: Historians and others have long pondered which came first: racism or slavery – the idea or the act. Berlin offers his own thoughts on the subject. What are they, and to what extent do Richard Frethorne and the unhappy (if talented) James Revel agree with Berlin? Limit yourself to 2 typewritten pages, due in class on 25 September.
**Tuesday, 30 September**
Colonial America: Societies with Slaves
Read:

- Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 47-92

Write: Runaway ads, though written in a master’s often demeaning and derogatory language, contain a wealth of information about slaves and the worlds they made for themselves. What do we learn from this selection about the slaves of the colonial mid-Atlantic? Do you discern any particular patterns? If so, what are they? Jot down your thoughts and bring them with you to class. (Hint: think about women, about men, about clothes, about geography, friends, spaces, and places)

**Thursday, 2 October**
Colonial America: Slave Societies
Read:

- Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 93-216
- *Probing the Past: Virginia and Maryland Probate Inventories, 1740-1810*

Write: Exploring the slave past requires creative interrogation of a wide range of historical materials. Like runaway advertisements, estate inventories provide a wealth of information about what it meant to be a slave in colonial America. Of all those many inventories available at *Probing the Past* that involve slaves, select at least two. Read them carefully, and note what information you can glean from them about what it meant to be a slave in the colonial Chesapeake. What kind of questions about slaves’ everyday lives do all those things – their quantities, their locations, and their uses – answer? What kind of questions do they raise? Be prepared to present your thoughts in class.

**Tuesday, 7 October**
African Americans in the Age of Revolution
Read:

- Woody Holton, “’Rebel Against Rebel’: Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American Revolution,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 105 (Spring 1997), 157-192
- Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, *Query VIII*, *Query XIV*, *Query XVIII*

Write: Thomas Jefferson had very clear notions about the people of Africa and African descent, and about their capacity for intellectual and political life. As an exercise in taking different perspectives, assume Jefferson’s and in no more than 2 typewritten pages, offer an informed response to both Woody Holton and the authors of the Massachusetts petition; due in class on 7 October.

**Thursday, 9 October**
New Crops, New Homes
Read:

• Charles L. Munnerlyn to James Shackleford, 23 Nov. 1839 (See course documents: Week 4)
• Maria Perkins to Richard Perkins, 7 Oct. 1852 (See course documents: Week 4)
• James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, who was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama* (1838), 25-75

Write: It has become commonplace for historians to refer to the antebellum domestic migration as the “Second Middle Passage.” Read the above materials, and then reflecting on what you know about the Atlantic Middle Passage, decide for yourself is the “Second Middle Passage” is an appropriate concept. Explain your reasoning in 1-2 typewritten pages and bring them to class on 9 October.

**Tuesday, 14 October**

Of Markets and Men (and Women)
Read:


Write: From what kind of evidence does Johnson develop his study of the New Orleans slave market? What are his key assumptions (ie: what does he take for granted)? What are his key conclusions? And last, what are some of the major if unspoken implications of *Soul by Soul* – especially as they relate to our understanding of the American past? Think about these questions as you read and be prepared to discuss your thoughts in class.

**Thursday, 16 October**

Reformatting Family and Community on Antebellum Terrain
Read:

• Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave Under Various Masters, and was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, During the Late War* (New York, 1837), chaps. 1-13
• Jonas Smith to John B. Lamar, 5 May 1851 (See course documents: Week 5)
• Hawkins Wilson to the Chief of the Freedmen’s Bureau, 11 May 1867, enclosing Hawkins Wilson to Sister Jane [11 May 1867]  (See course documents: Week 5)
• Entry of Henry Clay, 22 Aug. 1871, no. 377, Records of the Office of the Comptroller of Currency, National Archives, Record Group 101, microcopy 816: Registers of the Signatures of Depositors in Branches of the Freedmen’s and Savings Trust Company, 1865-1874, reel 5, Shreveport, Louisiana (See course documents: Week 5)

Write: With each master or market-induced upheaval, enslaved and women were faced once again with the problem of reassembling their lives. But as Marx pointed out long ago, while history matters, it is not determinate. Thus no one ever fully replicates what they had been or done in the past. Certainly this was the case with those who scholars have come to call the “Migration Generations.” Drawing on today’s materials, as well as any presented earlier, identify some of the ways in which this productive revolution forced enslaved men and women to adjust their lives and their ideas about, among other things, family, work, and community. Write up a neat list, and be prepared to discuss your ideas in class.

**Tuesday, 21 October**

Black Life and Labor in the Post-Revolutionary North
Read:

• Shane White, “The Death of James Johnson,” *American Quarterly* 51 (December 1999), 753-795
• *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* - Pennsylvania; March 1, 1780
Write: Read “An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery” very carefully. Who is being emancipated? When? What might be some of the implications of this act? How, for instance, might this emancipation project inform the economic status of free blacks in Pennsylvania? How might the terms of this act influence African American families and communities? (You might find it useful to consult a general American history textbook to learn the average life expectancy of Americans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.) In 1-2 typewritten pages, discuss what you see as the major consequence(s) of this sort of gradual emancipation, bring those pages to class on 21 October.

Thursday, 23 October
Free People of Color in the Slave South
Read:
- Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South (New York, 1984), chaps. 1, 3 (See course documents: Week 6)
- Citizens of Rutherford County to Tennessee Assembly, ca. 1825 (See course documents: Week 6)
- David B. Gibson et al. to the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, 31 Oct. 1835 (See course documents: Week 6)
- Petition of Citizens and Mechanics of Smithville to the North Carolina General Assembly, 1856
- Contract between Maria Cohen and Levi S. D’Lyon, 1 Nov. 1836 (See course documents: Week 6)

Write: “Apollo Belvedere” reveals much about the state of mainstream racial belief in antebellum America. Yet rhetoric did not quite match reality: 488,000 free people of color lived within the nation’s borders by 1860; 261,000 of whom lived in the slaveholding states. How did the latter do it? What sort of strategies enabled them to survive as free women and men in a slaveholders’ society? Can you discern any regional or gendered or other patterns? Finally, what did their presence mean to the institution of slavery, and to the arguments used to buttress it? Develop your answers in 1-2 typewritten pages and bring them with you to class on 23 October.

Tuesday, 28 October
The Northern Struggle against Slavery: The Worlds Abolitionists Made
Read:
- David Walker, Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829 (Boston, 1830)
- Henry Highland Garnet, “Address to the Slaves of the United States,” given at Buffalo, New York, 1843
- “Idleness in Our City,” Palladium of Liberty (Columbus, Ohio), 3 Apr. 1844 (See course documents: Week 7)
- “A Word to the Ladies,” Palladium of Liberty (Columbus, Ohio), 22 May 1844 (See course documents: Week 7)
- “What do the Ladies Think,” Palladium of Liberty (Columbus, Ohio), 22 May 1844 (See course documents: Week 7)

Write: In facing off against slavery, black Northerners not only debated the best means by which to destroy slavery, they also talked about what kind of social and political system ought to replace it, and the various roles women and men would play in that new world. Working with today’s readings, discuss the kinds of societies imagined by David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, and David Jenkins, the editor of the short-lived Palladium of Liberty. Who would fit in where? Doing what, and for whom? Confine you response to 1-2 typewritten pages and bring them with you to class on 28 October.
Thursday, 30 October
The Southern Struggle Against Slavery: “Dissidents in the Conscript Army”
Read:

- Stancil Barwick to Col. J. B. Lamar, 15 July 1855 (See course documents: Week 7)
- Runaway slave advertisement, Milledgeville, *Georgia Journal*, 26 Jan. 1836 (See course documents: Week 7)
- Testimony in the case of State of Georgia v. William W. G. Nuel, 28 May 1852 (See course documents: Week 7)
- Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave Under Various Masters, and was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, During the Late War* (New York, 1837), chaps. 14-26

Write: David Walker was hardly alone in questioning the ability of slaves to act on their own volition; countless of his contemporaries shared his doubts. So too did many generations of historians of slavery (W. E. B. Du Bois being an early and important exception). As we have changed our assumptions and our perspectives, we have come to recognize that slaves were never passive objects of slaveholders’ authority. But at the same time, we have come to recognize that resistance – the forms slaves’ responses took as they struggled to restore order and coherency to their lives – has its own history. In other words, how enslaved people attempted to deflect their owners’ impositions depended on the specific circumstances of their lives. Taking as your starting point today’s readings, identify the various modes of resistance you find in them, noting which seem to depart from colonial antecedents and why that might be so. Be prepared to discuss your conclusions in class.

Tuesday, 4 November
Civil War: Loosening the Bonds and Self-Emancipation
Read:

- Abraham Lincoln, *First Inaugural Address*, 4 Mar. 1861
- *Maryland Fugitive Slave to His Wife*, January 12, 1862
- C. B. Calloway to Governor Brown, 25 Feb. 1862 (See course documents: Week 8)
- *Proclamation of the President*, 18 May 1862
- Richard F. Lyon to his Excellency Joseph E. Brown Governor of Geo., 9 Aug. 1862 (See course documents: Week 8)
- *Emancipation Proclamation*, 1 Jan. 1863
- *Louisiana Planters to the Commander of the Department of the Gulf*, January 14, 1863
- *Testimony by the Superintendent of Contrabands at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission*, May 9, 1863
- A. J. Dollar to Mr. J. E. Brown, 29 June 1864 (See course documents: Week 8)

Write: Who freed the slaves? Develop your answer in 2-3 typewritten pages and bring them to class on 4 November.
Thursday, 6 November
Civil War: Black Soldiers in the War for Freedom
Read:

- [Hannah Johnson to Abraham Lincoln](#), 31 July 1863
- A colored man, [September? 1863] (See course documents: Week 8)
- [Corporal James Henry Gooding to Abraham Lincoln](#), 28 Sept. 1863
- [Marriage certificate of Rufus Wright and Elizabeth Turner](#), 3 Dec. 1863
- [Private Spotswood Rice to My Children](#), [3 Sept. 1864]; and [Spotswood Rice to Kittey Diggs](#), [3 Sept. 1864]
- Affidavit of Joseph Miller, 26 Nov. 1864 (See course documents: Week 8)
- Joseph J. Harris to General Daniel Ullman, 27 Dec. 1864 (See course documents: Week 8)

Write: In August 1863, Frederick Douglass famously pronounced that “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.” So it seems from today’s readings, but “citizenship” is a slippery subject. Drawing from today’s readings, use 1-2 typewritten pages to discuss some of the ways in which black Americans thought about citizenship, and about the kinds of rights and responsibilities that accrued to those who had it. Be prepared to discuss your ideas in class.

Tuesday, 11 November

- Holiday: no class

Thursday, 13 November
The Problem of Freedom
Read:

- John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, chap. 2
- [Meeting between Black Religious Leaders and Union Military Authorities](#), January 12, 1865
- [Order by the Commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi](#), January 15, 1865
- Capt. Charles C. Soule to Maj. Gen'l. O. O. Howard, 12 June 1865, enclosing a speech "To the Freed People of Orangeburg District," [June 1865]; and Maj Gen. O. O Howard to Captain Charles C. Soule, 21 June 1865 (See course documents: Week 9)
- Contract between A. T. Oliver and Cummins et al., 1 July 1865 (See course documents: Week 9)
- William, Toney Golden, et al. to Col. H. F. Sickles, 28 Nov. 1865 (See course documents: Week 9)

Write: What did freedom mean, to whom, and to the extent that you can offer an explanation: why? Be prepared to discuss these questions, and your answers, in class on 13 November.
Tuesday, 18 November
Presidential Reconstruction
Read:

- Mississippi “Black Codes” (See course documents: Week 10)
- South Carolina “Black Codes” (See course documents: Week 10)
- “Amnesty Proclamation,” *The Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America from December 1863, to December 1865* (Boston, 1866), vol. 13, pp. 758-760
- J. B. Carr to Major General Oliver O. Howard, 17 Jan. 1866 (See course documents: Week 10)
- Howell Cobb Jr. to Howell Cobb, 3 Jan. 1866 (See course documents: Week 10)

Write: “Presidential Reconstruction” has been the label commonly assigned to that period between the Confederate surrender and the March 1867 passage by Congress of the Reconstruction Act. But as with the case of emancipation, what happens to the conventional American historical narrative when the ideas and activities of African Americans are taken into account? To what extent was this the president’s reconstruction? Develop your response in 2-3 typewritten pages and bring them to class on 18 November.

Thursday, 20 November
Black Mobilization
Read:

- John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, chap. 3
- Capt. George Smith to Major A. W. Preston, 31 Oct. 1866 (See course documents: Week 11)
- Aima Ship to Leathe, 13 May 1866, and Aima Ship to Adeline, 13 May 1866 (See course documents: Week 11)
- Peter R. Hines to Chief of Freedmens Bureau, 1 Nov. 1865 (See course documents: Week 11)

Write: Only recently have historians come to recognize the extent to which former slaves were mobilizing in advance of that period known as “Radical Reconstruction.” Yet once again, former slaves refused to follow a single script. Who mobilized, how, and for what reason depended heavily on the specific circumstances of black people’s lives. Using the above sources, describe in 1-2 typewritten pages some of the different purposes that brought former slaves together in the months following freedom. Do you see any relationship between purpose and participants? Bring your papers – and thoughts – to class on 20 November.

Tuesday, 25 November
New Lawmakers, New Laws
Read:

- John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, chap. 4-7
- “An Act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States,” *Statutes at Large*, vol. 14, pp. 428-429 (See course documents: Week 11)
- Rev. Samuel Lewis M.E. to W. W. Holden, 4 Jan. 1869 (See course documents: Week 11)
- B. T. Sellers to Daniel H. Chamberlain, 1 Sept. 1876 (See course documents: Week 11)
Write: Read these selections carefully, and as you do, ask yourself whose aspirations – whose freedoms – are being enacted by the Reconstruction governments? Jot down your thoughts and be prepared to discuss them in class on 25 November.

Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, 2 December
Democratic Resurgence
Read:

- John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, chap. 8
- Philip Joiner to John Emory Bryant, 10 Sept. 1868  (See course documents: Week 12)
- A. L. Holliday to R. L. Hunter, 18 June 1868  (See course documents: Week 12)
- Martin W. Gary, “Plan of the Campaign of 1876,” in Frances Butler Simkins, *South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1832), Appendix, 564-569  (See course documents: Week 12)

Thursday, 4 December
Bi-Racial Movements and Political Promises
Read:

- Eric Arneson, ”It Aint Like They Do In New Orleans': Race Relations, Labor Markets, and Waterfront Labor Movements in the American South, 1880-1923," in *Racism and the Labour Market: Historical Studies*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen (Berlin, Germany, 1995), 57-100  (See course documents: Week 12)
- Excerpts from “Big Bill” Haywood, *Bill Haywood’s Book* (1929), 241-242  (See course documents: Week 12)
- *Galveston (Texas) Daily News*, 5 Sept. 1898  (See course documents: Week 12)
- And their fathers: *Coal miners at lunch*, Roslyn, Washington, ca. 1900

Write: In *The Wages of Whiteness* (revised ed., 1999), p. 8, David R. Roediger states rather unequivocally that "working class formation and the systematic development of a sense of whiteness went hand in hand for the US white working class." Is this view sustained or challenged by today's materials? Were the categories as stable as Roediger suggests?  In 1-2 typewritten pages support your response with specific examples. Due in class on 4 December.

Tuesday, 9 December
Dawning of the Age of Jim Crow
Read:

- John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, epilogue
- “A Serious Question – How Long Will This Last,” *News and Observer*, 13 Aug. 1898
- “Re-Pop.li.can Office Holder Despises Humble Farmer,” *News and Observer*, 27 Aug. 1898
- “A Warning. Get Back! We Will not Stand It,” *News and Observer*, 30 Aug. 1898
Write: Historian Steve Kantrowitz argues in his biography of South Carolinian Ben Tillman that white supremacy was hard work. What do you think? Develop your response in 2-3 typewritten pages, and bring them to class on 9 December.

Thursday, 11 December
New Leaders, New Directions, New Constituencies
Read:

- Mrs. A. M. Curtis, *Appeal to Colored Voters*, no date

Write: Karl Marx once observed that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from their pasts.” If that’s the case, what sort of pasts help to explain the individuals represented in this week’s readings? Come to class prepared to discuss the historical antecedents that helped produce those such as Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Mrs. Curtis, and the working-class women of turn-of-the-century Atlanta. In other words, how do we as historians account for their presence, their ambitions, and their ideas?

Tuesday, 16 December

- Wrap up & Review