

Cotton and Sugar in the Making of the Atlantic World

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Contact: walcenat@mit.edu, 612-483-7093**I. CLASS OVERVIEW:**

This course examines how the rise of commodities like cotton and sugar fueled the enslavement of Africans in the New World and helped facilitate the industrial revolution in Europe. Western modernity and industrial capitalism as we understand it today were [inextricably linked to slavery](#). In light of this fact, we will be exploring the following questions: What is the relationship between history, slavery and capitalism? Was slavery a pre-modern institution with little resemblance to capitalism as we know it? Or were they inverse products of each other? If so, which came first or is that merely a chicken and egg question? Was the plantation itself a space to practice and rehearse the coming of the Industrial Revolution? And if so, was the slave a proletarian and a worker and the master an industrial overseer?

The above questions have been asked by many historians ranging from Betty Woods to Edmund Morgan, and Sir Hilary Beckles to Eric Williams. A new group of historians like Edward Baptist, Walter Johnson, Sven Beckert and Calvin Schermerhorn have fused the fields of U.S., African-American, the Black Atlantic and Caribbean histories to write the global history of these developments. This new history of capitalism and the rise of the new global history include discussion on the relationship between slavery and its ongoing legacy within the cultures of the financial institutions of today, especially following the cataclysm of the Great Recession (2007-2009). The new insights of this research have profound implications for our historical understanding of the origins of our time. In this class, we will engage the new scholarship of the history of capitalism next to the older literature on capitalism and slavery to better understand how the history of cotton and sugar shaped the world we inherited.

The Atlantic Ocean and the many actors that navigated it will be at the center of the stories we explore. We will focus in particular to how the Ocean served as space for the flow of people, goods, and ideas between 1600 and 1888, when Brazil finally abolished slavery. We will investigate how the interactions between merchants, slaveholders, the enslaved and the consumers of the cotton and sugar made the Atlantic world. Also important, will be our exploration of how the live experience in that world shaped issues surrounding freedom and enslavement and ultimately modern capitalism. Most importantly, this class is concerned with how the increasing taste of Europeans for sugar and later the fabric of cotton contributed to the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade, the rise and fall of Caribbean and American slave societies, and the resistance against oppression to bring about the Haitian Revolution, the Atlantic struggle for the abolition of slavery, and the American Civil War.

II. ATTENDANCE: Attendance is mandatory. More than one unexcused absence will negatively affect your grade. If you are not here, you cannot participate. If you cannot participate, I cannot evaluate your work. Family and medical emergency are the only exceptions to this rule. Students should NEVER miss class without letting me know.

III. PARTICIPATION: Since this is a discussion-based section, its success—that is, how much we learn from each other—depend entirely on preparation. For the sake of you and your fellow classmates, plan accordingly; do the required reading by giving yourself enough time to complete it. This will help you lighten the load of the course as you get in the habit of reading quickly but intelligently. That means you should decode whole passages by either annotating the text with thoughts, comments and questions or take notes.

IV. DISCUSSION: Students are expected to post a brief response (2 paragraphs, approximately 250 words) to the assigned readings each week. These responses must be posted on the course's online portal for your colleagues to read and engage ahead of class. Please submit all reflections by 9pm the night before class meets. Please do not summarize readings. Focus on providing a critical reflection in which you raise questions, identify themes and analyze contexts and quotations. You may want to bring your reading reflections to class as I will call on you to present your ideas and expand on your post during discussion. In the weeks ahead, you will be paired with a classmate to present the week's reading to the class. In 7 minutes, discuss the argument, elaborate on what you believe/think are the big concepts, and then provide your critique and suggestions.

V. CELL PHONES & LAPTOPS: Be considerate of others by turning off cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices during class.

VI. PLAGIARISM: Please refer to Hamilton College's students' manual for the policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.

VII. EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE: Please allow at least 24 hours for any responses to questions or scheduling meetings with me via email.

VIII. CLARIFICATIONS & COMPLAINTS: I will not discuss grades with you before or after classes. If you want to discuss grade, come to office hours. Bring me your original paper/exam with my comments. If you want me to reconsider a grade or would like it to be changed type a **one page defense of your work** with a suggestion of the grade you think you deserve instead. After considering your defense, any re-evaluation I issue afterward is final.

IX. COLLEGIALITY: This class is about discussion and sharing perspectives and ideas. Please bring a positive attitude, be respectful and polite. Above all, remember that this is your classroom. You are responsible for our mutual development and articulation of ideas. Please create an environment in which you and your classmates are comfortable enough to conduct a healthy debate. Never hesitate to contact me about any issues you have with this class.

Requirements/Grades:

Participation (40%) represents a substantial portion of the grade, and will be evaluated in terms of preparation, participation, active listening, collaboration, and overall contributions to the class during the term. Needless to say, if you do not attend a class it is impossible for you to contribute to it. In addition to general participation, you will also **lead discussion** at least once and give **Two oral presentations & reading responses (20%)** during the course of the term.

Each student will write a **major research paper of approximately 15-20 pages (40%)**, based on substantial research in primary or secondary sources.

PAPER ASSIGNMENT:

1. Review essay (ca. 1500-2000 words.) of an assigned book in the seminar.
 3. A final paper – either a historiographical paper (aka literature review) or a research paper. It should be roughly 15-20 pages in length and on a topic related to your research interests. I will ask you to submit periodic progress reports to make sure that you are moving along with the project in a timely fashion. A few questions to consider in your essays:

1. What is the relationship between the plantation and the factory?
2. Historiographical overview of American slavery and American capitalism?
3. What is the difference between racialized chattel slaves and other forms of slavery?
4. A topic of choice that is appropriate to the seminar?
5. Was the slave proletarian?

RESOURCES:

1. **General Reference:** Neal, Larry and Jeffrey Williamson, eds. *The Cambridge History of Capitalism*. 2 Volumes. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014. (Note: The “Cambridge History” volumes is a good place to start if you are unfamiliar with the field of economic history)
2. **Research & Writing:** On the research process, this book is indispensable: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*, rev. by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams and the University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

BOOKS: Selections will be taken from the following monographs:

1. Kolchin, Peter. 1987. *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
2. Ch. 2: “The scale of Negro Speculation” in Michael Tadman. 1989. *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 11-46
3. Selection from: Morgan, Edmund S. 1975. *American slavery, American freedom: the ordeal of colonial Virginia*. New York: Norton.
4. Smallwood, Stephanie E. 2008. *Saltwater slavery a middle passage from Africa to American diaspora*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10318388>.

Week 1: ORIGINS: Conceptualizing Slavery & Capitalism

- a. David Waldstreicher, *Slavery’s Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 3-19 (“Prologue: Meaningful Silences”). Sven Beckert, “History of
- b. American Capitalism,” in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 314-335.
- c. Susan Buck-Morss, “Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (1995): 434-467.

Week 2: ORIGINS: The Atlantic System in Slavery Part II

- a. Chapter Selections: David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*
- b. Sven Beckert, "History of American Capitalism," in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 314-335.
- c.

Week 3: ORIGINS: Slavery, Race and Conquest

- a. Stuart Banner. 2005. *How the Indians Lost their Land*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- b. Rothman, Adam. *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (2005).

Week 4: Historicizing Slavery and Capitalism

- a. Louis Hyman, "Why Write the History of Capitalism?," *Symposium Magazine*, July 8, 2013,
- b. Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*

Week 5: The Ideologies of Racism, Slavery and Capitalism

- a. Jeanne Fields - *Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America*

Week 6: Race, Gender, and Slavery in Capitalism**Week 7: Capitalism and Antislavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams**

1. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*
2. Seymour Drescher, *Anti-Slavery and Capitalism*

Week 8: Commodity Chains: Part 1: Sugar & Tobacco in Slavery

- a. Robert L. Paquette. 1988. *Sugar is Made with Blood*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- b. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*
- c. Graeber, David. "Turning Modes of Production Inside Out: Or, Why Capitalism is a Transformation of Slavery." *Critique of Anthropology* 26 (2006): 61-85.

Week 9: Commodity Chains: Part 2: Cotton in Slavery

1. Chapter Selections: Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*
2. Schoen, Brian. 2009. *The Fragile Fabric of Union Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Week 10: Slavery, Empire and Capitalism

1. Richard Drayton, "The Collaboration of Labour: Slaves, Empires, and Globalizations in the Atlantic World."
2. Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire*
- 3.

Week 10: The Business of American Slavery

1. Chapter selection from: Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Harvard University Press, 2012).
2. Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*
3. Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860*.

4. Chapter Selection from: Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*
5. Chapter Selection from: Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860.*

Week 11: Gender, Slavery and Capitalism

Week 12: Slavery, Capitalism and Democracy

Week 13: Comparative Slavery & Capitalism

Week 14: Capitalism & Labor After Emancipation

1. Grandin, Greg. Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World. New
2. Ferrer, Ada. 2014. *Freedom's mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the age of revolution*