

**Slavery: From Africa to America**  
**AS100.120**  
**Fall 2006**

**Professor Pier M. Larson**

Office: 404 Gilman Hall

Office Hours: Tu 1-3

Phone: 410-516-5582

Email: [larson@jhu.edu](mailto:larson@jhu.edu)

**Course Lecture meets M & Tu @ 3 pm in Maryland 109**

Section 1 meets Tu @ 2 pm with Kelly Duke-Bryant place TBA

Section 2 meets Tu @ 1 pm with Gabe Klehr place TBA

**Teaching Assistants:**

Kelly Duke-Bryant, Office Hours: Tu 2-2:50 in Levering Hall Coffee Shop

[kmduke@jhu.edu](mailto:kmduke@jhu.edu)

Gabe Klehr, Office Hours: Th 1:30-2:30 in Levering Hall Coffee Shop

[gklehr@gmail.com](mailto:gklehr@gmail.com)

**Course Description: *Read and study this section very carefully!***

Americans are profoundly affected by and ignorant about slavery. Despite its many lasting legacies in modern society, economy, and politics, slavery is seldom a topic of public conversation. Multiple taboos surround it. Elementary and secondary schools teach slavery poorly (often in stereotypes demanded by the public) or not at all. Most teachers are inadequately trained to teach the subject and pass their ignorance on. There is much silence and misinformation about slavery in American life.

At times, slavery splashes fleetingly into public debate over political issues or discussion surrounding incidents of racial bigotry. Yet slavery and its legacy continue to structure contemporary African and American lives in momentous ways. The aftermath of slavery is conspicuous. Slavery remains on peoples' minds. We are extremely curious about slavery and want to learn more about it. It has taken until today for the first US national museum dedicated to the history of slavery to be put into planning.

This course is an introduction to African slavery in two parts and designed for the North American classroom. The first half of the course considers African experiences of capture and slavery within Africa and in two broad external regions into which Africans have involuntarily traveled for many centuries: the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. We will examine the African origins and impacts of slavery as well as the subsequent experiences of Africans and their descendants in bondage in regions other than the Atlantic. The focus, however, is primarily on different types of slavery *within* Africa itself. Most North American students are unaware of African slavery within Africa and how that slavery was connected to slavery in the Americas and elsewhere. The second

half of the course focuses specifically on African slavery in North America. Although very few Africans who crossed the Atlantic as slaves came to North America (some 4 percent), the purpose of this lopsided course structure (lopsided in the sense of not examining slavery in other parts of the Americas) is to provide students in North America with a better understanding of how slavery in their continent/country was linked to slavery in Africa. By examining slavery on both sides of the Atlantic and the trade that linked those experiences of slavery, this course emphasizes the African origins of enslaved Americans and the economic system of servile labor that spanned the Atlantic, linking continents. Readings emphasize both scholarly studies of bondage and individual experiences of enslavement. The North American portion of the course emphasizes the differences in slavery in various parts of the continent and changes in slavery over time.

Because slavery was a complex system, there are several complimentary ways to study it. One is to take the experience of enslaved persons as a primary focus. To do so, we would chiefly examine slave narratives, listening to slaves and ex-slaves tell about their lives, their perceptions, and their experiences as enslaved persons. Narratives come in the form of oral traditions, personal testimonies, and written documents. The observations of non-slaves telling about the lives of slaves would also be of use to understanding slavery. Without knowing about the lives of enslaved persons, we fail to grasp the essentials of slavery and appreciate its continuing legacy.

Another approach to slavery is to examine the experiences of the masters, the enslavers, and the slave traders—the direct beneficiaries of slavery. Because slavery was a system of subordination and particularly of forced labor in North America, it required both a slave and a master. Without understanding masters, their reasons for enslaving, their motivations, and how they rationalized their practices, we cannot fully understand slavery as a system. The fact that we universally condemn slavery today must not keep us from carefully studying masters. For studying masters, the most useful documents are the records they produced themselves: diaries, plantation account books, testimonies, court records, letters they wrote, and the like. The observations of travelers and others who witnessed masters at work are also useful.

Slavery must also be studied as a dimension of economy, society, and law. Studying slavery in this way requires looking at aggregate data and structures to determine the shape and nature of slavery, how it fit into local and international economies, and what role it played in linking disparate regions. Viewing slavery as a dimension of law is necessary, because law set down the structures enabling masters to enforce subordination of their slaves through the courts. How many enslaved persons were there in a particular society? What role did they play in the economy? What kind of work did enslaved persons perform? How important was slavery to the economy of early North America, for example? How many slaves in a particular region were born in Africa (captured during their lifetimes) and how many were born into slavery (creoles)? How many Africans crossed the Atlantic as slaves and how many of these individuals died during the “middle passage”? What laws did masters rely upon or disregard in the relations of enslavement? These sorts of questions are best answered with evidence such as census data, plantation inventories, shipping and merchant data (for the slave trade), economic

production statistics, laws, court records, and the like. Although often impersonalized (but not always, as in the case of court records), these data are crucial for understanding slavery.

Finally, we can study slavery as a cultural system. There are different dimensions to this. There is the degree to which enslaved persons fashioned a distinct culture for themselves, the world that slaves made in their places of captivity. How did enslaved people form families? celebrate important personal and cultural events? bury their dead? How separately did they (or were they able to) keep these parts of their lives and experiences from those of their masters? Likewise, masters often formed distinct cultures and these are important to understand. But masters and slaves also interacted in very personal, face-to-face ways—the violence/torture of North American slavery was very intimate, for example—and these interactions formed part of the system of domination and subordination. What kinds of relationships did masters and slaves form beyond those of laborer and overseer?

### **Course Goals**

Because this is a *history* course, its purpose is to focus on the past and to examine the ways that historians have understood and written about slavery. Discussion sections are not free-for-all public events to be based on your *current* knowledge, understanding, and feelings. Our investigation of the past will be *disciplined and based on recent scholarship*. We will learn and think about slavery through careful reading of current research and some primary sources. The professor's belief is that a rigorous confrontation with research and primary works will both challenge the way you currently think about slavery and lead you to a more profound understanding of how its multiple legacies structure the present.

Among the principle purposes of this course are the following:

- Breaking the silence about slavery and fostering appreciation for the lives of enslaved Africans and their descendants in Africa, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and North America.
- Founding investigation of slavery on the most current research and primary sources.
- Challenging preconceived notions about slavery and debunking common myths about North American slavery in particular.
- Encouraging you to learn about the diversity of slavery (or slaveries) in different times and places, and how they are connected.
- Challenging the notion that slavery in North America is the norm against which all other forms of slavery should be measured.

### Required Books

- Cooper, Frederick. *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*. reprint edn. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1997. ISBN = 0435074199
- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998. ISBN = 0674002113
- Berlin, Ira, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, eds. *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation*. New York: New Press, 2000. ISBN = 1565845870
- Rothman, Adam. *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005. ISBN = 0674016742
- Martin, Jonathan D. *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004. ISBN = 067401149X

### Required Coursework

1. Take-Home midterm. Two essay questions, 5 pages each. Due in class on Monday, October 23. 200 points each. You will have the questions approximately one week before your essay is due.
  
2. Take-Home final. Two essay questions, 5 pages each. Due Saturday, December 16 at noon in MSEL Q-level café (this is the end of the final examination time for this class; the exams will be picked up by the TAs). Exams completed early may be placed in your TA's History Department mailbox. 200 points each. You will have the questions approximately one week before your essay is due.
  
3. Project report, 5-7 pages. Due by Tuesday, November 28 in class. 200 points. The purpose of the project is to visit a place that interprets, or should interpret, slavery through public information. The ideal location is some sort of museum or other public site with interpretive material respecting slavery or a known site of slavery that has public information that ignores slavery. You should visit the site and very carefully observe how it and its staff interpret slavery, especially in light of what you have learned in this class. For this reason, I would urge you to visit the site as late as possible before the deadline for the projects (or to visit it more than once, including soon before you write your report). This is one assignment I do not urge you to complete early! And, judging by past courses, this is the most enlightening—and in many respects “fun”—part of this class. For more information and possible sites to visit, explore the course web site.
  
4. Weekly reaction papers. Reaction papers are entirely informal and *should not* exceed one page, single-spaced. They must be typed but are informal—don't worry about getting all your spelling correct and making sentences elegant. The papers should record 1) what you feel the primary argument of the assigned readings for the week is, 2) what your thoughts about the readings are (agree, disagree, new discoveries, strange material, connections among readings, etc.) and 3) about three questions to promote discussion in discussion section (not informational questions that can be answered with yes/no answers

etc.). For more on weekly papers, see the separate document at the course web site. These papers serve as the basis for your oral participation and must be turned in to the TA at the end of discussion section each Tuesday. **You must turn in your own reaction paper; you may not give it to another person to turn in without *prior approval of the TA*.** 10 points will be subtracted from your semester score for each weekly reaction paper not turned in. Late papers are never accepted.

5. Attendance. Attendance at lectures and discussion sections, and participation in discussions, is required and expected. Students failing to attend and participate will be dropped to a lower final course grade if *near* a cut-off point between grades when figuring the course grade. Conversely, the professor routinely slips students just on the low side of a grade divide to the higher grade if they have been active and vocal in class.

### Class & Readings Schedule

#### **Week 1 (read the below article for your Tuesday discussion section this first week and prepare an informal paper!)**

September 11-12

- Larson, Pier M. "African Diasporas and the Atlantic." In *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000*, edited by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Eric R. Seeman, 129-147. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2007. [Electronic reserve]  
 →*Summary*: This reading introduces the three major slave trades exiting sub-Saharan Africa and the fourth slave trade, which was internal to Africa. The article also discusses the characteristics of the African diaspora communities created or disappearing as a result of these dispersions of captives. Read this article very carefully and be prepared to discuss 1) how the four African slave trades were related, 2) similarities and differences in slaves' lives in the four major locations of the African diaspora: the Americas, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and sub-Saharan Africa.

#### **Week 2**

September 18-19

- Hunwick, John. "The Same but Different: Africans in Slavery in the Mediterranean Muslim World." In *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam*, edited by Eve Troutt Powell and John Hunwick, ix-xxiii. Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener, 2002. [Electronic reserve]
- Alpers, Edward A. "The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean: A Comparative Perspective." In *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*, edited by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya and Richard Pankhurst, 19-50. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2003. [Electronic reserve]
- Lovejoy, Paul E. *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. 68-90 & 112-139. [Electronic reserve]

- Slave Narrative of Griga in John Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell, eds., The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2002), pp. 211-233. [Electronic Reserve]
  - Slave Narrative: Mohammed Ali ben Said. Both ben Said and Griga were captured for the trans-Sahara trade. [Electronic reserve]
- Summary*: The readings this week look more closely at three major locations of African slavery. The diaspora across the Sahara desert into the Mediterranean world, the diaspora of the Indian Ocean, and enslavement and slavery within Africa. The readings are different in nature and the time they cover, but they provide a sense of the various dimensions and locations of African slavery. Pay especial attention to the last reading. In what ways does Lovejoy argue slavery *within* Africa was transformed by sub-Saharan Africa's external slave trades? Why don't we, in the United States, know much about this week's subject?

### Week 3

September 25-26

- Kopytoff, Igor, and Suzanne Miers. "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality." In *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, 3-81. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977. [Electronic reserve]
- Piot, Charles. "Of Slaves and the Gift: Kabre Sale of Kin during the Era of the Slave Trade." *Journal of African History* 37 (1996), pp. 31-49. [Electronic reserve]
- Lovejoy, Paul E. "The Characteristics of Plantations in the Nineteenth-Century Sokoto Caliphate." *American Historical Review* 85,5 (1979), pp. 1267-1292. [Electronic reserve]
- Slave narratives: Aaron Kuku (remained in Africa) & Pietro Chilekwa (Indian Ocean with return to East Africa). [Electronic reserve]

→*Summary*: This week's readings represent three different case studies of capture and slavery within Africa. You should compare and contrast them with each other and take them as models for different kinds of slavery that coexisted within Africa. After you read these studies you should appreciate that there was no such thing as "African slavery"—you should think about African "slaveries," in the plural. What are the different features of each of these slave systems? In each case, what did masters and those who captured or sold slaves intend to do with them?

### Week 4

October 2-3

- Pier M. Larson, "Horrid Journeying: Capture, Alienation, and Home at the Heart of the Global African Diaspora," article manuscript forthcoming in the *Journal of World History*. [Electronic reserve]
- Robertson, Claire, and Martin A. Klein. "Women's Importance in African Slave Systems." In *Women and Slavery in Africa*, edited by Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein, 3-25. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. [Electronic reserve]

- Slave Narratives: Joseph Wright (Atlantic), Chisi-Ndjurisiye-Sichayunga (Africa) & Samuel Crowther (Atlantic).

→*Summary*: The readings this week focus on the experiences of slaves. The manuscript article by the professor should be read very carefully. You should spend time in discussion section this week considering what his argument is and why it is significant. The other readings introduce you to the importance of women in African slavery and to the experiences of three individuals who were captured and enslaved in their lifetimes. What do you learn about slavery in Africa and the process of capture (of “making slaves”) that you could not learn from the other readings you have done so far?

### Week 5

October 9-10

- Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, pp. 1-149. [Required book & print reserve].
- Summary*: This week and next we are reading a book about plantation slavery on Zanzibar island and along the east coast of Africa during the nineteenth century. This system of plantation slavery in Africa, in which slaves were set to the production of cloves and grains, was linked to the slave trade of the Indian Ocean and to markets for cloves in the Indian Ocean region. What crops did slaves produce? How were the plantations organized? Where were the products marketed?

### Week 6

October 17

- Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, pp. 153-268. [Required book & Print reserve]
  - Slave narrative: Swema (East Africa to Zanzibar).
- Summary*: This week we finish reading Cooper’s book on plantation slavery. Can you identify features of plantation slavery in East Africa that seem more like slavery in the Atlantic and those that are more related to kinship or family slavery found in parts of Africa? Pay careful attention to the conclusion and to what Cooper writes about how we can compare East Africa to plantation slavery in the Americas and be prepared to discuss his idea of a continuum of slavery in discussion section. The slave narrative of Swema is about a girl captured in the interior of East Africa who ends up in Zanzibar, buried alive because it was thought no money could be made from selling her into the slave trade of the Indian Ocean. Remember that most of the slaves you have been reading about in Cooper’s book would have had experiences similar to this when they were first captured. Is there anything that makes you question Swema’s story? Why?

### Week 7

October 23-24 [Mid-term due in class on Monday]

- Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 1-92.
- Berlin, Favreau, and Miller, *Remembering Slavery*, read the Introduction, pp. xiii-  
lii.
- You are encouraged to listen to the two tapes that accompany *Remembering Slavery*: at MSEL Audio Visual, Tape C no. 657.

→*Summary*: This week the reading shifts to North America, and we also read the introduction to a book of slave narratives focusing on North America. In *Many Thousands Gone*, Ira Berlin sets out to examine the evolution of slavery in North America in a variety of different locations. The premise of *Many Thousands Gone* is that slavery was different in the various areas of North America and changed its character in each of these regions over time. It is a premise broadly shared by scholars of North American slavery. In the portion of the book we are reading this week, the author discusses the earliest times of slavery in North America; in succeeding weeks we will move forward in time. As you read, take notes about the distinct features of slavery in each of the main time periods Berlin discusses. Is there anything that surprises you about slavery in this early period of North American history?

### Week 8

October 30-31

- Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 95-215.  
→*Summary*: The reading this week covers major transformations in the use of slaves in North America before the war for American independence. This is the foundational period of the North American economy. Pay attention to the different types of slavery and to the fundamental importance of slave labor to the early American economy. By the time of the Revolution, slavery had become a bedrock of American society and economy, especially in the Chesapeake and the Low Country.

### Week 9

November 6-7

- Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 219-365.  
*Summary*: The reading this week considers slavery during the American Revolution and after it. How did war in North America provide enslaved people with opportunities for changing their circumstances? How extensive or limited were those opportunities? You should bear in mind that Berlin's history of slavery ends just before the last decades of slavery prior to the civil war, when the main center for slavery was in the cotton belt of the far south. You will read more about that period in Rothman's *Slave Country* and the professor will lecture about it.

### Week 10

November 13-14

- Berlin, Favreau, and Miller, *Remembering Slavery*, pp. 3-164.
- You are encouraged to listen to the two tapes that accompany *Remembering Slavery*: at MSEL Audio Visual, Tape C no. 657.  
→*Summary*: The reading this week shifts focus onto the experiences of enslaved persons: life histories told by Americans once held in slavery during the period just before the Civil War. These consist of interviews conducted with Americans, ex-slaves, who had been in captivity during their lifetimes. The interviews were conducted during the 1930s when the interviewees were elderly. Three broad topics are considered: the power relationship between master and slave, slaves' work lives, and family formation and relationships in the slave quarters. Remember that the ex-

slave interviewees whose stories you are reading had only been children during the last decades of slavery. You may want to refer back to the introduction to the book that you read three weeks ago, because it contains much important information on interpreting and understanding the interviews. What do you learn from these interviews that you did not or could not learn from reading *Many Thousands Gone*? Most importantly, what do these interviews with ex-slaves teach us about their masters? about the resilience of enslaved persons? about the role of torture in Slavery? about the effects of enslavement on Africans and African Americans in North America?

### Week 11

November 20-21

- Rothman, *Slave Country*, Preface-117.
  - Berlin, Favreau, and Miller, *Remembering Slavery*, pp. 165-185.
  - You are encouraged to listen to the two tapes that accompany *Remembering Slavery*: at MSEL Audio Visual, Tape C no. 657.
- Summary*: Rothman's book tells the multifaceted story of how the United States became a "slave country" between 1790 and 1820. Slavery was already a fundamental feature of the Chesapeake and Lowcountry economies, but slavery expanded dramatically along with the expansion of the United States. This expansion of slavery was not inevitable, but the outcome of many specific circumstances, actions, and ideas. Rothman focuses his attention on the expansion of the United States and slavery into what he calls the deep south (Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana) to about 1820. The three chapters we are reading for this week focus on three different issues: 1) The political structure of the United States and the politics of slavery's expansion; 2) Jefferson's idea of "civilizing" the southwest cotton frontier and how the idea of a civilizing mission shared by most westward-expanding whites required slavery at its center; 3) A case-study of the expansion of slavery in the early national period in the wider New Orleans region, a case that focuses primarily on the expansion of sugar. You should be prepared to discuss the main lines of Rothman's arguments in each of these chapters. One of Rothman's strengths is how he places slavery within the context of expansion and shows how bondage was at the center of a number of key processes in American history. What are the book's weaknesses? The narratives in *Remembering Slavery* focus on the topic of slave culture. To what extent were enslaved African Americans able to form and practice a distinctive culture and what were the forces prevailing against them? After reading these narratives, would you be more likely to argue that slaves enjoyed a rich culture or that their culture was robbed from them as a result of their enslavement? Why?

### Week 12

November 27-28

- Rothman, *Slave Country*, 119-224.
- Berlin, Favreau, and Miller, *Remembering Slavery*, pp. 186-207.
- You are encouraged to listen to the two tapes that accompany *Remembering Slavery*: at MSEL Audio Visual, Tape C no. 657.

→*Summary*: This week's reading in *Slave Country* examines the impact of the War of 1812 and the period of economic prosperity that followed it on the expansion of slavery in the deep south. Pay careful attention in chapter four to the war's many dimensions and to the relationship between the defeat of the Red Sticks and the expansion of slavery. Chapter five examines the expansion of cotton and sugar to about 1820 and the key role of slavery in these developments. How were roadbuilding, survey and sale of land, tariffs, merchants, the structure of congressional electoral politics, and Missouri key to the expansion of slavery? Make sure to read the Epilogue, which (on the bottom of p. 220) indicates that more than a million black people were traded westward into the slave states between 1800 and 1850—an "internal" slave trade representing more than twice the number of enslaved Africans ever landed on the shores of North America from the exterior. Although well known to scholars, this is the "hidden" slave trade of American history. The early years of this commerce, which broke apart countless African American families, is detailed in the second half of chapter five.

### **Week 13**

December 4-5

- Martin, *Divided Mastery*, pp. 1-104.

→*Summary*: The reading this week introduces you to something you probably did not expect or know about slavery in North America (which is why I chose it). The renting out of slaves by their owners was a common practice in many slave societies, including in North America. What were the benefits and liabilities for both masters and slaves of the slave hiring system? How did slave hiring define the class stratification of white Americans? What can we learn about slavery and the master-slave relationship by reading about slave hiring that we have difficulty learning from the previous readings?

### **Week 14**

December 11

- Martin, *Divided Mastery*, pp. 105-195.

→*Summary*: The second half of Martin's book about the hiring out slaves focuses on the relationships between masters and slaves in the hiring system and on the work experience of slaves who were hired out. How did enslaved persons who were hired out interact with their permanent and their temporary masters? How did they work/resist to carve out more autonomy and better work conditions for themselves?