The syllabus and lecture materials will be made available in alternative formats upon request. Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact NYU’s Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (Phone and TTY: 212.998.4980) to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. The Center is located at 726 Broadway, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10003. For additional information please refer to its website: http://www.nyu.edu/csd/.

This course introduces students to “The Black Atlantic” as a concept and pragmatic force in the world through careful discussion of the texts and ideas through which it is constituted. Our inquiry concerning “The Black Atlantic” will be guided by five conceptual questions:

**The Question of Structure**
How do people build and sustain a social system?

**The Question of History**
How is a social system transformed?

**The Question of Historicity**
How do people register social transformation?

**The Question of Subjectivity**
What makes us who we are?

**The Question of Alterity**
What makes us different from each other?

Topics to be discussed include slavery, colonialism, capitalism, freedom, and justice. This course will explore these themes through sustained engagement with the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath. This course will explore these developments through the lens of historical events that include the experience of capture and transport, the work of slave labor, the fights for Emancipation, 19th and 20th century colonialism, Jim Crow, and Freedom Movements, and finally the contemporary struggles over what this history has meant and how to remember it.

This course explores the Black Atlantic as a socio-cultural and economic space from the fifteenth-century arrival of Africans in the ‘New World,’ through the rise of slavery in the Americas, continuing on to slave emancipation and decolonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and concluding with contemporary black life in the Atlantic world. While it is organized historically, it is not a comprehensive history of the Black Atlantic. Rather, the intention here is to introduce students to important moments in the history of the Black Atlantic and to engage, through interdisciplinary writings, with questions of meaning-making. During this class we will trace the origins and importance of the concept of the Black Atlantic in the context of European imperial expansion, paying special attention to the social relations that shaped community formation among people of African descent and laid the foundations for their political and economic institutions.

You should leave this course with an introduction to the overlapping phenomena that comprise the history of the African Diaspora—modern economies, race, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and the mobilizing of power to both construct and oppose racial and economic hierarchies. You should also leave here with a clear understanding of what it means to write and read both critically and analytically in an historical mode.

Course Requirements

**Required Readings**

All of the readings listed below are required to be completed prior to our class meetings on the day they are assigned. The readings will help you to contextualize the lecture, and you will have the opportunity to discuss them closely in recitation section. While the course is organized historically, we will encounter readings from a range of disciplines and thus it is important to approach each reading with a clear sense that you are responsible for understanding its positionality. Please take careful reading notes on all texts. They—your notes—will be very important for exams. For the first 4 weeks of recitation, you are required to fill in a reading response form prior to recitation. In a week with multiple readings, choose ONE for which to submit a form. (Your TA may indicate which reading to submit.) These quick responses should serve as a guide for how to read carefully and critically in class.
The following texts are required and are available for purchase at the NYU bookstore and are on reserve at Bobst Library.

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016)

*Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* by Damian Duffy and Octavia Butler (Harry Adams, 2017) available also at Amazon.com for approx $16.

Various articles and chapters are posted on NYUClasses or accessible through a library search engine. If there is more than one reading per session, please read in the order they are listed on the syllabus.

☆ Please note, when you have a reading from NYUClasses you are required to print it out and bring it with you to class and recitation. Failing to do so will seriously affect your class participation grade.

It is your responsibility to keep copies of all written work and to regularly check NYUClasses for any updates or changes to the course schedule.

**Recitation Participation**
Recitations are an opportunity for you to more deeply engage with the assigned readings and with the ideas presented in lectures. It is also an opportunity for students to both contribute to and benefit from guided conversations around these readings. As such, participation in recitation constitutes a significant part of your final grade and should be taken seriously. Come to recitations with Reading Responses prepared and with a notebook at the ready. Be ready to contribute to an active conversation with your peers.

**Writing Assignments**
You have a series of written assignments due over the course of the semester. These assignments are designed to support our work in the classroom and recitations and must be handed in on time. It goes without saying that all written work must be original, any plagiarism will result in an “F” in the course.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Please read NYU’s statement on Academic Integrity here: [http://eas.nyu.edu/object/bulletin1012 ug.academicpolicies#ACADEMIC](http://eas.nyu.edu/object/bulletin1012 ug.academicpolicies#ACADEMIC), and visit Northwestern University’s website [http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html) on avoiding plagiarism for a comprehensive discussion of what plagiarism entails.

Both your response papers and the longer Critical Essay must be written using standard Chicago Manual of Style (also known as Turabian) citation form. This form uses footnotes for references, not parenthesis. Citation format is quite specific—even if you believe that you know how to construct your citations use this website [http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/within/turabian.html](http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/within/turabian.html) as a starting point.
Papers. You have short recitation response papers due each week, you can take a pass on up to 4 of them, in other words, at the end of the semester you must have submitted 10 response papers. The first four will use the template you will find on NYU Classes. Afterwards, please write them independent of the template. These should be 250-350 words, less than 2 pages. It is a challenge to write succinctly.

You also have a longer final critical essay on the question of Commemoration. This is a 7-10 page essay due the final day of the semester.

There will be a midterm and a final exam. We reserve the prerogative to administer short quizzes, without notice

Final Grades
Recitation Participation 30%
Final Paper 30%
Exams 40%

Technology in the Classroom
It is not clear to us that using a laptop to take notes is the best way to process information. Whether taking notes on a keyboard or by hand is the best strategy is open for debate, what is not debatable is the fact that a computer screen is a powerful lure and can distract even the most well intentioned student. Please remember that professors CAN SEE YOU. And your TAs can actually see what you are doing. When you start to zone out in the multicolored glow of your screen it is always clear to us that you are no longer paying attention. Checking email, watching texts come in, posting on social media, or reading the news is also distracting to those sitting next to and behind you. We reserve the right to limit or prohibit laptop use as needed.

September 6th
Defining Terms Key Questions: What factors have shaped the development of the Black Atlantic concept in the 20th and 21st centuries? How does the Black Atlantic function as history and as a way of structuring contemporary meaning?

LECTURE: Situating Us In Time And Space/Origin Stories
Readings

September 11th and 13th
Historicity and the Black Atlantic Key Questions: How should we approach the slave trade? Are questions of morality relevant to the historical study of African enslavement in the New World? When did the Black Atlantic become institutionalized as a way to discuss the plight of African-descended peoples?
When constitutes a diasporic relationship? Is it about cultural transmissions and retentions? What evidence should scholars use to establish diasporic connections? What is the role of history in relationship to heritage?

**LECTURE: Making Human Commodities**

Readings

**LECTURE: Making Meaning Out Of Experience**

Readings
- Olaudah Equiano’s. 1789, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*, Chapters 1 and 2 [online version available through Bobst, Proquest Literature Online].

**September 18th and 20th**

**Economic systems as cultural systems** What does Enslavement mean? What does slavery “MAKE”? How does the story of enslavement get told? What alternatives are there to the stories that we may already know?

**LECTURE: What Slavery Produces—Crops**

Readings

**LECTURE: What Slavery Produces--Identities**

Readings
- Phyllis Wheatley. 1838, *Poems of Phyllis Wheatley: A Native African and a Slave*, [Bobst] On Being Brought from Africa to America, Ode to Neptune, To a Lady on her coming to North-America, An Hymn to Humanity, To SM a Young African Painter…

**September 25th and 27th**

** Freedoms Taken and The Force of Law**

What factors led to the Haitian Revolution? What were the connections between events in France and Saint Domingue in the revolutionary era? What is the relationship between Freedoms in the Americas and Colonialism on the African Continent? What is the relationship between Freedom and Slavery? What is the role of force in constituting the Black Atlantic? How was the deployment
of force instrumental for shaping the social aspirations and political possibilities of peoples inhabiting the world of the Black Atlantic?

LECTURE: The Haitian Revolution
Readings
- The Haitian Constitution, 1805. NYU Classes.

LECTURE: Conceptualizing Freedom, The Civil War and Beyond
Readings
- Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

October 2nd and 4th
The Origins of Civil Society
Question: What is the relationship between the infrastructure of legalized enslavement and the emergence of “modern” civil society? How does slavery underpin some of our most important modern institutions? Those of banking, insurance, education, etc. How do we understand legacies, responsibilities, even reparations in an Atlantic context?

LECTURE: Financial Reverberations (Legacies of Slaveownership project).
Readings

LECTURE: Carceral Reverberations
Readings

October 11th [NO CLASS ON MONDAY]
This is a heavy reading week, please start your readings early.

LECTURE: Political Reverberations
Question: How does slavery shape political and economic theory? What are the new questions we need to ask about Western political culture when we center the black Atlantic?

- Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacy of Four Continents*, Chapter 1 and 5.
- Susan Buck-Morris, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, pt 1, “Hegel and Haiti,” pp3-75. [NYU Classes]

**October 16th and 18th**

**Scramble for Africa**

*Question:* Does the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade signal new relationships between Europe, The Americas, and Africa? What are the relationships between Empire and Culture? How is Africa rendered in the Western imaginary in the 20th century in ways connected to and distinct from earlier imagery?

**LECTURE:** Acquisitions Of Africa—scrambles.

Readings
- *The Treaty of Berlin (1885)*

**LECTURE:** Disposable populations and genocidal experiments.

Readings

**October 23 and 25th**

**Renaissances and Nationalism—Culture and Anti-Colonial Critique in the Early Twentieth Century Atlantic**

*How do formerly enslaved people navigate their own relationship to the Caribbean and to Africa? What is the relationship between an African past and the notion of a collective present? How do Diasporic peoples produce and defy 20th century racial solidarity?*

**LECTURE:** Ethnographic Display and Response

Readings
- *NYTimes* articles on Ota Benga. *Please read in order of date of publication* [NYClasses]
- Pamela Newkirk, Part 1, *Spectacle: The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga*

**LECTURE:** Anti-Colonial Movements

Readings
October 30th & Nov 1
Black Modernities: Dubois, Garvey MLK and Africa
Civil Rights and Anti-colonial Freedom Movements: How does Ghana connect to MLK to Huey Newton to Angola?

LECTURE: Pan-Africanism and Freedom Movements
Readings

Lecture: African Freedom and American Radicalism
Prep for Mid Term Exam

Nov 6th MID-TERM EXAM In Class

Nov 8th
FILM SCREENING IN LECTURE
- Óri (Beatriz Nascimento & Raquel Gerber, 1989),

Nov 13th and 15th
Racial Capitalism?: Creativity, Commerce, and Consumption in the late-20th through 21st Centuries
What is racial capitalism in the contemporary moment? What is Post-Racialism? What can afro-billionaires of the black Atlantic tell us about capitalism, race and ideology? Given what we have learned about the transatlantic slave trade, how have configurations of racial capitalism changed over time? What do the readings suggest about how racial capitalism is organized now? How do you view the concept of ‘post-Blackness’ in light of national and global formations of capital? Is the concept valid? Why or why not?

LECTURE: RACIAL DEMOCRACY AND RACIAL HIERARCHY IN BRAZI
**LECTURE:** Retellings and aspirations

**Readings**


---

**Nov 20th [CLASS CANCELLED ON THE 23rd--Be Thankful]**

**LECTURE:** Consuming Pleasures—Shopping and Travels

*In Recitations.* Film Viewing; Stephanie Black. *Life and Debt,* (New York: New Yorker Video, 2003)

**Readings**


---

**Readings**

- “The Sapeurs,” The Fader.com, [http://www.thefader.com/2012/10/05/the-sapeurs-style-wars/#/0](http://www.thefader.com/2012/10/05/the-sapeurs-style-wars/#/0)
- [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903927204576574553723025760.html](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903927204576574553723025760.html)
- ‘From Marcy to Barclays’: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g69xgcH6DHg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g69xgcH6DHg)
- ‘Life and Times: Barclays Documentary,’ [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBvyEGQeHnk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBvyEGQeHnk)

---

**Nov 27th and 29th**

**Reparations and Redress**

What debts are owed? Can any of them be repaid? Should the afterlife of slavery be compared to other losses? Are balance sheets even possible here? What is the relationship between economies built on slavery and contemporary understandings of wealth, well being, poverty, and economic exclusions?
LECTURE: **Measuring Gains and Losses**

LECTURE: **What does it mean to consider reparations?**
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Case for Reparations.*

---

**December 4th and 6th**
**Memorials and Memories**
*How do we remember the dead? What are the politics of commemoration, of naming the heroes and the victims of history? What is produced by marking sacred ground? How do memorials rewrite historical truths?*

**Lecture:** Burial Grounds and Sacred Grounds
- Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures,” *Small Axe,* (2013) NYUClasses

**Lecture:** Charlottesville, Jamaica, and NY City. Remembering and memorializing

---

**Dec 11th**
**The Black Atlantic or The Diaspora … ?**
*How do we tell this story? What is the importance of critical language when describing historical phenomenon?*

**LECTURE:** Defining Diasporas/Telling Histories
Re-Circulations

What are some of the intellectual and affective (emotional) difficulties of grappling with the slave past in the contemporary moment? How does one accept tragedy without losing sight of hope for a liberatory political future?

LECTURE: The Complicated Notion of Home

Readings

  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/south_atlantic_quarterly/v101/101.4hartman.htm](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/south_atlantic_quarterly/v101/101.4hartman.htm)

Critical Essay due 7-10pp  Why Memorialize?  See the NYUClasses site for details.

Final Exam Monday Dec 18th 8am-9:45am