1) Course Description

Slavery has existed from ancient Mesopotamia to the present. Across the western hemisphere, slavery’s legacy has been crucial in the formation of national histories, particularly in the United States, the Caribbean, and Brazil. Nevertheless, the persistence of enslavement through history—even to the present day—remains poorly understood. Why do societies accept the practice of enslavement and the use of unfree labor? What roles do different societies reserve for free or unfree labor? And why do some societies ostensibly reject slavery while others continue to embrace it? Beginning with the rise and expansion of slavery in the Mediterranean world, we will focus on early Greece and Rome, with attention to ecological, political, and economic history, and why slavery has continuously flourished in the region from antiquity to the present day. We will attempt to look at Greek and Roman history through the eyes of slaves themselves, and the extent to which they were able to maintain their personhood despite enslavement. Finally, we will examine the legacy of Greek and Roman slavery in the eyes of Thomas Jefferson, Kara Walker, and others, allowing students to situate the growth of the “peculiar institution” in Greece and Rome in the broader context of western history.

2) Course objectives

Students will be able to answer:

a) What were the economic, environmental, and political conditions that encouraged the expansion of slavery in the ancient world?

b) How did slaves understand their condition? How did they attempt to resist?

c) What do approaches for studying slavery in later periods contribute to our understanding of ancient slavery?

d) What are the broader historical legacies of slavery in antiquity?

3) Books


Hesiod, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, trans. S. Lombardo (Hackett, 1993)


Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon* (Amistad, 2018)


Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Routledge, 1989) [Sourcebook with readings]

A course packet will be available for purchase from the NYU bookstore.
4) Grading

Your grade is based on the following assignments: weekly reading responses (50%); your final project (40%); and participation in class discussions (10%).

Reading responses: You are required to submit a 500 word typed reflection on each week’s reading. At least 3 should be a review or critique of an academic article in the week’s reading. These are due Wednesday each week following class (e.g., the response for the class held on Mon., Jan. 25 is due on Wed., Jan. 27). Please cite sources (and provide bibliography) in MLA or Chicago format.

Final project: The final project is due the last day of class. You are assigned to reconstruct the life of a slave from any of our ancient sources, making close use of both our primary and secondary readings. You are free to take moderate liberties here (aside from papers with MLA or Chicago citations/bibliographies, you could also write a story, scholarly life history, or personal biography). Students are required to meet with me to discuss their project by the end of week 12. Maximum length is 3,500 words.

Participation: You are strongly encouraged to join in on class discussions; you can also participate by showing evidence that you have done the reading if I call on you. All students are required to keep a respectful tone, especially given our subject matter.

5) Disability disclosure statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

6) Academic integrity, plagiarism, and cheating

Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects). [Statement adapted from the website of the College of Arts & Science, https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html].
7) Course Schedule

**CP** = Course packet  **F**=Fisher  **W** = Wiedemann

Week 1: Ancient slavery and contemporary history

Week 2: What is slavery?
- Theoretical discussions: CP-4 (Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1-2); Roman Law: W-1 (Digest [Florentius] 1.5), W-3 (Gortyn Code 1.1-49); W-5 (Gaius *Inst.* 1.1.8-55); W-14 (CTh 2.8.5); Contemporary debates: CP-5 (O. Patterson [1982], Slavery and Social Death, 1-14); CP-6 (K. Vlassopoulos [2011] “Greek Slavery: From Domination to Property and Back Again”); F p. 1-9, 86-98.

Week 3: The origins of slavery in Greece and Rome
- Slavery in the ancient Near East: CP-7 (Hammurabi Code no. 117); CP-8 (Exodus 22.2-3, Leviticus 25.39-46); Slavery, servitude, and peonage: W-15 (Paus. 4.14); W-16 (Ath. Pol. 2, 6, 12.4); W-17 (Aul. Gel. 20.1), W-18 (Livy 6.27), W-19 (Livy 8.28); W-80 (Ath. 6.263b-265c, 271b-72a); CP-9 (Hipponax fr. 27 West); CP-10 (Herodotus 1.30-33); Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1865); CP-11 (D. Blackmon [2008] Slavery by Another Name, 1-10); F p. 10-21.

Week 4: Slavery in Early Iron Age Greece

Week 5: Understanding the slave trade
- Slave auctions: W-12 (Strb. 7.3.12), W-13 (Varro *DLL* 8.9), W-14 (CTh 4.8.5), W-50 (CIL 622355A), W-103 (Strb. 11.23); W-104 (Digest 21.1.31.21); W-105; CP-12: IG 1 3 421-30; Warfare: W-113 (Dio. Sic. 23.18); W-114 (Polyb. 10.17.6-15); The slave trade: CP-13 (C.S. Parmenter [2020], “Journeys into Slavery along the Black Sea Coast, c. 550-450 BCE”).

Week 6: Slaves in the economy
- Mining: W-87 (Xen. *Por.* 1); Manufacturing: W-85 (Lys. 24.5-6), W-86 (Dem. 27.9-10), W-90 (Lys. 12.19), W-91 (Aesch. 1.97); Agriculture: W-144 (Pliny *NH* 18.4); W-145 (Pliny *NH* 18.8); W-146 (Pliny *Ep.* 3.19); W-147 (Columella 1.7); W-148 (Varro Ag. 1.17); W-149 (Columella 1.8); W-151 (Cato Ag. 5); W-202 (Cato Ag. 2); Economics: CP-14 (W. Scheidel [2005], “Real Slave Prices and the Relative Cost of Slave Labor in the Greco-Roman World”); F p. 34-57.

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Week 7: Slavery and personhood

Are slaves people? W-7 (Digest [Macer] 48.19.10); W-8 (Gaius Inst. 2.86-91); W-177 (Lys. 4.12-17); W-178 (Digest [Ulpian] 48.18.1); W-187 (CTh. 9.12.1); CP-15 (E. Genovese [1974], Roll, Jordan, Roll: 25-49); Manumission agreements: W-22 (Ps.-Dem. 59.29-32); W-23 (Fouilles de Delphes 3.6 no. 36); W-26 (Fouilles de Delphes 3.3 no. 333); W-27 (Harpocratio s.v. apostasiou); W-40 (Digest 38.1 [Ulpian]); W-224 (IG 51 1390); Wealthy freedmen: W-47 (Pet. Sat. 75-76); Review: F p. 58-70, 77-78.

Week 8: Living under enslavement

Oikos and familia: W-205 (Xen. Oec. 13); W-206 (Ar. Oec. 1.5); W-238 (Sen. Ep. 47); W-239 (Sen. Ben. 3, 18-28); CP-16 (E. Genovese [1974], Roll, Jordan, Roll, 87-97); Family life: W-65 (App. 2.17); W-168 (CTh. 4.12); W-193 (Xen Oec. 9); CP-17 (Old Oligarch 1.10-13); CP-18 (D. Barry [2017] The Price for their Pound of Flesh, 33-53).

Week 9: Resistance and rebellion

Resistance: W-209 (Pliny Ep. 3.14); W-212 (Digest 11.4.1 [Ulpian]); W-214 (Bruns 159.3); W-219 (ILS 8731); W-220 (ILS 8726); W-221 (ILS 9454); CP-19 (J. Trimble [2016], “The Zoninus Collar and the Archaeology of Roman Slavery”); Rebellion: W-227 (Livy 32.26); W-228 (Livy 39.29); W-229 (Dio. Sic. 34.2 et al.); W-230 (Dio. Sic. 36); W-231 (Plut. Cras. 8-11); W-232 (App. 1.14); W-80 p. 84-86, 90 (Ath. 6.265d-266e, 272f).

Week 10: The aesthetics of enslavement


Week 11: Slavery from the ancient Mediterranean to the early Modern Atlantic


Week 12: Contextualizing slave narratives


Week 13: Biographies and life histories

CP-31 (S. Smallwood [2007], Saltwater Slavery, 33-64); Z.N. Hurston, Baracoon.

Week 14: Slavery’s legacy

CP-32 (P. Wheatley [1771], “To Maecenas”); CP-33 (T. Jefferson [1999/1785], Notes on the State of Virginia, 137-55); 10-minute oral presentations of final projects.