

## SYLLABUS

# West Africa and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

HIST 372-205  
Prof. Rebecca Shumway  
Spring 2021

### Online Asynchronous

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**Office:** Holton Hall 345

**Office hours:** By appointment

**Open Q&A (Synchronous):**  
Thursdays 3:00-4:15



### Course Description:

More than twelve million people came from Africa to the Americas (North, South and Caribbean) between 1580 and 1860. Until 1800, Africans were arriving in the “New World” in consistently greater numbers than European immigrants. It is obvious, then, that African people had a huge impact on the evolution of societies and cultural forms in the Americas. But what political practices, social structures and belief systems did they bring with them from their homelands? This course examines the various heritages of the African societies that became involved in the capture and sale of captives during the era of the transatlantic slave trade. We will explore the complex ways in which African people were affected by the transatlantic trade over three centuries and consider how Africans sought to protect themselves from the endemic violence of this era.

### Goals:

The main goals of the course are to familiarize students with the principal themes and events in West African history between the fifteenth and early-nineteenth centuries and to introduce the methods that historians use to analyze the pre-colonial African past and the transatlantic slave trade. The course prepares students to think about the transatlantic slave trade as part of a complex and changing network of commerce and migration that fundamentally changed the four continents bordering the Atlantic Ocean. Students will learn to differentiate between the principal features of several African cultures and gain an understanding of the various responses of African societies to the changes introduced by transatlantic trade.

### Books to Buy:

1. Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life* (Cambridge 1990)
2. Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing* (Vintage 2017)

**Additional Readings:** Readings that are not contained in these two books will be available in electronic format on Canvas.

**Course Requirements:**

- 1) Reading Responses: 35% of grade
- 2) Quizzes: 25% of grade
- 3) Online Discussions: 25 % of grade
- 4) Film Reflections: 15% of grade
- 5) Approximate time spent on reading, research & assignments each week: 4-5 hrs.

**Grading Scale:** A=100-94; A-=93-90; B+=89-87; B=86-84; B-=83-80; C+=79-77; C=76-74; C-=73-70; D+=69-67; D=66-64; D-=63-60; F=59-0

## COURSE OUTLINE

### Week 1 (Due Jan 29): Introduction

Readings:

- Acquaint yourself with the Syllabus

To Do:

- View [this map](#) and acquaint yourself with the names of **eight** coastal regions on it.
- Quiz
- Discussion #1 – Initial Post

### Week 2 (Due Feb 5): West Africa Before the Atlantic Age

Readings:

- 1) “Caravan Commerce and African Economies,” in *Trans-Saharan Africa in World History*. Oxford, 2010.

To Do:

- View [this map](#) and identify the **desert**, **savanna** and **forest** areas.
- View [this map](#) and identify **West Africa** and **West Central**
- Film response – “Africa’s Great Civilizations,” Part 3, 28:10-52:06
- Quiz
- Discussion #1 - Response

**Week 3 (Due Feb 12): West Central Africa Before the Atlantic Age**

Readings:

- 1) "Of Courts and Titleholders," in *How Societies are Born*, University of Virginia Press, 2004.
- 2) "Dhows and Mosques: The Coast," in *East Africa Through a Thousand Years*, APC, 1972

To Do:

- Film response – "Intro to Historical Linguistics," Part 3
- Quiz
- Map Quiz

**Week 4 (Due Feb 19): Ways of Studying Slavery**

Readings:

- 1) *Slavery and African Life*, Prologue and Ch. 1
- 2) *Homegoing*, pp. 1-69

To Do:

- Quiz
- Discussion #2 – Initial Post

**Week 5 (Due Feb 26): Growth of the Slave Trade**

Readings:

- 1) *Slavery and African Life*, Ch. 2, 3
- 2) *Homegoing*, pp. 70-153

To Do:

- Film Response – "The Black Atlantic (1500-1800)," 9:35-26:00
- Quiz
- Discussion #2 - Response

**Week 6 (Due March 5): Supplying Captives**

Readings:

- 1) *Slavery and African Life*, Ch. 4, 5
- 3) *Homegoing*, pp. 157-221

To Do:

- Film Response – "Africa's Great Civilizations," Part 5, 28:00-45:00
- Quiz
- Reading Response #1

### **Week 7 (Due March 12): Slavery and African Life**

Readings:

- 1) *Slavery and African Life*, Ch. 6
- 2) *Homegoing*, pp. 222-300
- 3) "[About the Project](#)," and "[History of the Project](#)," on [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org)

To Do:

- View "Henry Louis Gates introduces Slave Voyages 2.0" on [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org)
- Quiz
- Film/Website Response

### **Week 8 (Due March 19): Transformations of Slavery & Society, 1650-1900**

Readings:

- 1) *Slavery and African Life*, Ch., 7

To Do:

- View [this interview](#) with Yaa Gyasi (about *Homegoing*)
- Quiz
- Reading Response #2

### **Week 9 (March 22-26): SPRING BREAK**

### **Week 10 (Due April 2): The Plantation Complex**

Readings:

- 1) "The Sugar Revolution," in *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*
- 2) "[The Barbaric History of Sugar in America](#)," *The New York Times*

To Do:

- Film Response – "Sugar: Addicted to Pleasure," 6:30-17:25
- Quiz
- Discussion #3 – Initial Post

### **Week 11 (Due April 9): Textiles and Global Commerce**

Readings:

- 1) "'Artificers' and Merchants," in *Making Money: Life, Death, and Early Modern Trade on Africa's Guinea Coast*, Ohio University Press, 2017
- 2) "[The Fraught History of African Textiles](#)," [fastcompany.com](http://fastcompany.com)

To Do:

- Quiz
- Discussion #3 - Response

**Week 12 (Due April 16): North American Connections**

Readings:

- 1) "American Rum, African Consumers, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade," in *African Economic History*, 2018
- 2) "Slavery's Converging Ground," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2017.

To Do:

- Reading Response #3
- Quiz

**Week 13 (Due April 23): Spiritual Solutions in Africa and the Diaspora**

Readings:

- 1) "The Fante Shrine of Nananom Mpow and the Atlantic Slave Trade in Southern Ghana," in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 2011
- 2) "Vodun art, Social History and the Slave trade," in *African Vodun Art*, University of Chicago Press, 1995

To Do:

- Film Response: "Seven Wonders of Brazil," 14:11-19:45; and Rituals: Latin America," 35:00-39:00
- Quiz
- Discussion #4 – Initial Post

**Week 14 (Due April 30): Morality and Exploitation**

Readings:

- 1) "Cannibals, Witches and Slave Traders," in *William & Mary Quarterly*, 2003
- 2) "Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 2012

To Do:

- Reading Response #4
- Quiz

**Week 15 (Due May 7): Family Ties**

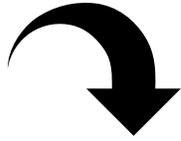
Readings:

- 1) "The Last Resort Redeeming Family and Friends," in *Fighting the Slave Trade*, Ohio University Press, 2003
- 2) "[My Great-Grandfather, the Nigerian Slave-Trader](#)," in *The New Yorker*

To Do:

- Quiz
- Discussion #4 - Response

**Week 16: Review and Catch Up** (as necessary)



## Additional Information and Policies

**University Policies:** Please refer to the following link for specific information about university policies: <http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf>

**Office Hours:** I will hold a regular "Open Q&A Session" for this class on Thursdays, from 3:00-4:15, on Microsoft Teams. I welcome you to email me any time (shumwayr@uwm.edu). You can also make an appointment for a live video conversation with me on Teams--please email me to let me know when you would like to meet.

### How to Be Successful in this Class

#### As an Online Student

Online courses can be difficult because they require a great deal of self-discipline and time management skills. However, **by following some simple strategies, you can be as successful as you want to be in this course:**

- Rent or purchase the required textbook or ebook as soon as possible
- Set aside several hours per week to work on this course
- Check into the Canvas site at least twice a week during the semester
- Don't wait until the last minute to post to discussions or submit assignments
- Read and reread carefully until you feel you understand the course concepts
- Avoid distractions while you're working on this course
- Invest time in the online discussions ... you will learn a lot from each other!
- Keep in mind that online courses are NOT easier than face-to-face courses
- [Learn how to use Canvas \(Links to an external site.\)](#) if you don't already know how
- Contact me right away if you are struggling with a concept or feel like you're falling behind

#### As a Reader

You will notice that there is quite a bit of reading in this class. Some of the readings are more difficult than others. It is very important to complete all of the readings, and the best way to do this is to leave yourself plenty of time to focus on the material. One bit of advice I received as an undergraduate student was to write down the main points while

reading. The act of writing words on paper is a great way to reinforce your memory of what you have read.

## How to Communicate in this Class

I welcome you to email me any time ([shumwayr@uwm.edu](mailto:shumwayr@uwm.edu)). You can also make an appointment for a live video conversation with me on Teams--please email me to let me know when you would like to meet. I will hold a regular "Open Q&A Session" for this class on Thursdays, from 3:00-4:15, on Microsoft Teams. I will respond as soon as I can to your call, email, or message, and certainly within 24 hours. It may take me a bit longer if you send me a message at night or on the weekends, but I will be as responsive as possible!

I will be communicating with you via the [messaging system in Canvas \(Links to an external site.\)](#), so you will want to [make sure that your notifications are set to receive emails \(Links to an external site.\)](#) when you have a message waiting for you.

## Canvas Help

We will be using Canvas for most of the work in this course. To be successful, you'll need to know how to take quizzes, participate in online discussions and submit assignments online. If you have any trouble with Canvas, please feel free to contact me, [consult the student help files \(Links to an external site.\)](#), or [contact Canvas directly \(Links to an external site.\)](#) for support. After all, you are in this course to learn about history, not to be mired in technical trouble!

## Assignments

### Quizzes

You will be asked to take weekly quizzes over the course of the semester. The quizzes are intended to test your understanding of the key terms in assigned readings and/or Instructor Presentations. You will have the list of terms in advance, so you can study the terms before taking the quiz. Each quiz will be in Canvas and will be comprised of several multiple-choice questions. You will have 15 minutes to complete each quiz. To facilitate learning, you can retake each quiz once.

### Online Discussions

You will be asked to participate in online discussions multiple times during the semester. The online discussions provide an opportunity for us to explore, interpret, apply, and share ideas related to the history of West Africa and the transatlantic slave trade, which makes online discussions a key component of the course. Each online discussion will be comprised of **two parts**: 1) an initial post of 300 words, and 2) **two response posts** of 150 words each. You will be provided with a specific and unique prompt for each part of the online discussion. You can learn a lot from each other, so you are expected to **read all of the discussion posts**.

## Reading Responses

In lieu of a term paper, you will be composing a series of interconnected 'reading responses.' These assignments will require you to think about different reading assignments in terms of how they are connected by a common theme or issue. You will be asked to submit four reading responses over the course of the semester. Each reading response will build upon the previous one, so you will be both revising your previous work and adding new ideas based upon each week's readings and discussions. You will be provided with a specific and unique prompt for each reading response.

## Film Reflections

Since we cannot travel to Africa, viewing segments of documentary films will help provide a sense of what the people and places we are reading about actually look and sound like. You will be asked to post a short response after viewing each of the film segments assigned. The film reflection assignments will help you recall what you see and hear in the film and help me to learn what you found most interesting, or what you may have questions about.

## Late Policy

Given the many hardships created by the Covid19 pandemic, late work will be accepted without penalty. It is in your best interest to keep up with the weekly assignments and turn in work by the due date.

**Academic Misconduct:** Academic misconduct is an act in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation, uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise, forges or falsifies academic documents or records, intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others, engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance, or assists other students in any of these acts. Prohibited conduct includes cheating on an examination; collaborating with others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules of the course; submitting a paper or assignment as one's own work when a part or all of the paper or assignment is the work of another; submitting a paper or assignment that contains ideas or research of others without appropriately identifying the sources of those ideas; stealing examinations or course materials; submitting, if contrary to the rules of a course, work previously presented in another course; tampering with the laboratory experiment or computer program of another student; knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed.

**Disability Statement:** If you will need accommodations in order to meet any of the requirements of this course, **please contact me as soon as possible.** Verification of disability, class standards, the policy on the use of alternate materials and test accommodations can be found at the following: <http://uwm.edu/arc/>