

Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom

Peer-Reviewed Syllabus

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Race, Trans-Atlantic Slavery and the British Empire (ENG 730X)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate course examines connections between British slavery and empire, and pays special attention to how constructions of race emerged within this cultural history. We'll read a wide range of literary texts from 1688 through 2011, such as novels, slave narratives, memoirs, and poetry; non-fiction primary texts from the 18th and 19th centuries; and a range of contemporary theory and criticism, most especially that emerging out of Black Studies (Alexander Weheliye, Christina Sharpe, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Tiffany Lethabo King, Kathryn Yusoff, Saidiya Hartman, and Sylvia Wynter). We'll discuss historical topics such as slavery in the British colonies, especially as it relates to the rise of the novel, abolition and slave narratives, slave revolts, and the rise of British empire, all with an eye toward how history informs the work we do as scholars. More theoretically, we will examine assemblages of race, ethnicity, and national identity, especially as they emerge across multiple discourses; what it means to be human and what kind of forms dehumanization takes; the limits of the archive and attempts to imagine what was left out; Western humanism and its limitations; how the "Anthropocene" emerged out of slavery and colonialism; the afterlives of slavery; gender within the contexts of slavery and empire; and how literary texts worked to both reinforce and challenge white supremacy and anti-blackness.

The course begins with an overview of recent work in Black Studies, read alongside formative delineations of racial categories from the 17th through 19th centuries. After looking at two canonical British novels (Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*), which deal heavily with slavery and colonialism, we'll analyze a wide array of cultural texts produced during the British abolition movement. Not only will we read formative texts that helped end slavery and the slave trade, such as slave narratives by Olaudah Equiano and Mary Prince, selections from abolitionist pamphlets, and anti-slavery poetry, but we'll also read contemporary texts such as M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*. In this section we'll also read one American novel, Lenora Sansay's *Secret History*, to think about slave revolts in a trans-Atlantic context.

We will spend the final third of the semester within the field of Victorian Studies (1837-1901), and follow calls to "[Undiscipline](#)" the field. Through reading a selection of canonical and newly canonical texts, we will not only think about how the legacies of slavery are related to Victorian empire and literature post-abolition, but will more so consider how to read these texts within a diverse, globalized world-view that destabilizes the primacy of whiteness. Many of our readings for this section include articles from the recent special issue of *Victorian Studies* on "Undisciplining Victorian Studies" (2020), which will give students a good overview of very recent and relevant debates within the field. Finally, we'll end the semester with contemporary Jamaican author Marlon

James's *The Book of Night Women* (2009), set during the time of British Slavery, in order to see how contemporary Black writers are filling in the gaps left by a white archive.

Warning: Many of our readings contain intense depictions of white supremacist violence against people of color. The texts marked with an * in the reading schedule are those that are particularly distressing. Please take care of yourself as you read and think about these texts.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688)
- Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)
- Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773)
- Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789)
- Lenora Sansay, *Secret History: or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808)
- Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831)
- Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (1847)
- Mary Seacole, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (1857)
- Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883)
- Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women* (2009)
- M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (2011)
- Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, *The Age of Phillis* (2020)
- Other selected readings available on Laulima

REQUIREMENTS

Participation	15%
Weekly Reading Reflection and Discussion Questions	20%
Conference Paper	15%
Conference Paper Revisions	10%
Digital Archive Analysis	15%
Final Project	25%

WEEKLY READING POSTS / 20 %

Every day before class (with the exception of the day you present your conference paper), you will post an informal reflection on our readings, and pose two discussion questions raised by your reflection. Your reflection should be around 750-1,000 words, and should thoughtfully discuss the readings and connections among them. Similarly, your discussion questions should be substantive, detailed, and invite critical conversation on our texts. Students are encouraged to respond to these posts, and doing so will be reflected in your participation grade, but it is not a requirement. Posts are due by noon on Fridays.

CONFERENCE PAPER AND REVISIONS / 25%

Once during the semester, you will present a conference-length paper (around 8 pages) that makes an original argument about the day's reading, and puts the theoretical and/or secondary sources in conversation with our primary text(s). The paper should include at least 3 *outside* secondary or primary sources. After you read your paper, we will have a short Q & A.

As part of this assignment, you are required to revise the paper based on the comments of your peers and the professor. As part of the revision process, you must also submit a 2-3-page revision reflection that discusses what you revised and why, how it improved your paper, and what you learned about your own writing and the revision process. Your final revision should be 10 pages. Revisions are due by the last week of class, although I suggest you revise them sooner rather than later.

DIGITAL ARCHIVE ANALYSIS / 15%

This project asks you to spend time looking at and analyzing a digital archive/humanities project dedicated to British slavery and/or empire. I will give you a list to get you started, although you are welcome to keep looking and find your own. In a 7-10-page essay please address the following: how well does the archive/website/database do what it sets out to do? How does it de-center whiteness, if you think it does at all? How does it help us to see both the limits of the archive, and perhaps its potential (as in, what might still be out there)? What are the limitations of the project? How would you improve or change it, or how do you envision a digital humanities/archive project of your own? Please use one of our critical sources as a framework for your analysis. [Note: I'm happy to share the final draft of this assignment, which includes a list of possible archives for students to analyze. Please feel free to email me at annamf@hawaii.edu if you'd like to see it].

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT / 25%

In order to ensure the final project is productive for your own academic and career goals, we will collectively come up with the project together. This may include multiple options, and the final requirements will ultimately be decided by the professor. Some options may include, but are not limited to, an analysis of a primary text we didn't read in class; a standard 15-20-page research paper related to a topic from the course (this could be an extension of your conference paper); or a discussion of how the topics from the course relates to your own areas of interests. Please be thinking about what would be most useful for you and your own research and/or career goals. We will decide on a project by the middle of the semester. [Note: I'm happy to share the final draft of this assignment, which includes three varying options for students to consider, all which ask them to apply Black studies. Please feel free to email me at annamf@hawaii.edu if you'd like to see it].

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Blackness and the Limits of "The Human"

Alexander Weheliye, Introduction and chapter one, from *Habeas Viscus* (2014)

Zikayyah Iman Jackson, "On Becoming Human," from *Becoming Human* (2020)

Peter Fryer, "The Rise of English Racism," from *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984) (pgs. 135-167)

William Blake, "The Little Black Boy" (1789)

Week 2: Race, Slavery, and Colonialism I

Kathryn Yusoff, Preface, "Geology, Race, and Matter," and "Golden Spikes and Dubious Origins," from *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018)

Christina Sharpe, "The Wake" and "The Weather" from *In the Wake* (2016)

Peter Fryer, "The Rise of English Racism," from *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984) (pgs. 168-193)

Week 3: Race, Slavery, and Colonialism II

Tiffany King, Introduction and chapter two, from *The Black Shoals* (2019)
Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being” (2003)
Lisa Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents” from *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015)
Charles Darwin, “On the Development of the Intellectual and Moral Faculties during Primeval and Civilised Times,” from *The Descent of Man* (1871)

Week 4: Slavery, Colonialism, and the Rise of the British Novel I

* Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688)
Joanna Lipking, “New World of Slavery – An Introduction” from the Norton Critical Edition of *Oroonoko*
* “Observers of Slavery 1654-1712” and “Colonizers and Settlers: First Views” [collections of primary documents] from the Norton Critical Edition of *Oroonoko*
* Ottobah Cuguoano, selections from *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils of Slavery* (1787)

Week 5: Slavery, Colonialism, and the Rise of the British Novel II

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)
“Illustrations of Friday’s Rescue” from the Broadview Edition of *Robinson Crusoe*
“Defoe on Slavery and the African Trade” [A collection of primary documents] from the Broadview Edition of *Robinson Crusoe*
Edward Said, “Narrative and Social Space,” from *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)

Week 6: Early Black Literary Production

Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773)
Ignatius Sancho, selected letters (1782)
Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, *The Age of Phillis* (2020)

Week 7: Slave Narratives and the Middle Passage

* Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789)
* Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (1-36) (1788)
[Slave Ship in 3D Video](#), from *Slave Voyages*

Week 8: The Slave Trade and Abolition

* N. Sourbe Philip, *Zong!* (2008)
William Cowper, “The Negro’s Complaint” (1789)
Hannah More, “The Black Slave Trade” (1786)
Thomas Clarkson, selections from *The History of the Abolition of the Slave-Trade* (1808)

Week 9: Gender, Enslavement, and the Limits of the Archive

* Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831)
Susette Lloyd, selections from *Sketches of Bermuda* (1835)
* Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts” (2008)
* Marisa Fuentes, Introduction and chapter 5, from *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016)
James Walvin, “Women” from *Black Ivory* (1999)
Look at the websites [Slave Voyages](#) and [Early Caribbean Digital Archive](#)

Week 10: Slave Revolts and Resistance

Leonora Sansay, *Secret History: or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808)

Maria Edgeworth, “The Grateful Negro” (1804)

* C.L.R. James, “The Property,” from *The Black Jacobins* (1938)

Vincent Brown, selections from *Tacky’s Revolt* (2020)

Week 11: Slavery and Empire in the Victorian Novel I

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (1847)

Ronjaune Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff and Amy R. Wong, “Undisciplining Victorian Studies” (2020)

* Vincent Brown, “Worlds of Wealth and Death,” from *The Reaper’s Garden* (2008)

Week 12: Slavery and Empire in the Victorian Novel II

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (1847)

Ann Pratt, selections from *Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum and What I saw There* (1860)

Tyrese Coleman, “[Reading Jane Eyre While Black](#)” (2017)

Olivia Loksing Moy, “Reading in the Aftermath: An Asian American *Jane Eyre*?” (2020)

Week 13: Negotiating Blackness and Britishness in the Victorian Era

Mary Seacole, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (1857)

J. J. Thomas, selections from *Froudacuity: West Indian Fables Explained* (1889)

Nasser Mufti, “Hating Victorian Studies Properly” (2020)

Week 14: Colonialism, Indigeneity, and the Limits of White Feminism

Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883)

Moshoeshoe, “[The Cape of Good Hope](#)” (1856), from *One More Voice*

Sechele, [Statement and Attestations](#) (1853), from *One More Voice*

Tiyo Soga, “[Jubilee of the Venerable Patriarch Brownlee](#)” (1867), from *One More Voice*

Ryan Fong, “The Stories Outside the African Farm: Indigeneity, Orality, and Unsettling the Victorian” (2020)

Week 15: Re-Imagining Slavery Today

* Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women* (2009)