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course title: Slavery Sites: Preservation, Commemoration, and Controversies
institution: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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**Slavery Sites:
Preservation, Commemoration, and Controversies**
LA 590, section RG1/Afro 598
Spring 2005

Wednesdays, 6:00 – 8:30 pm
Room 18, Temple Buell Hall
Instructor: Rebecca Ginsburg

About the Seminar

The physical traces of American slavery are all around us—in the fields in which enslaved people once labored, in the mansions and townhouses in which they served their owners, in the ruins of slave cabins where they raised their own families, and upon the courthouse steps on which they were sold. This interdisciplinary seminar examines some of the theoretical and practical issues that bear on official and unofficial efforts to record and commemorate slavery through the preservation and interpretation of sites and objects associated with “the peculiar institution.”

The seminar is divided into three main components. The first two weeks are intended to provide opportunity to consider the history of slavery in the United States (focusing on 19th century southern slavery), the actual experiences of enslaved people, and the environments they inhabited and labored in. The second part of the course provides us some theoretical perspectives and tools. We will ask why modern people are so interested in exploring the past. What fascination does history hold for us? Why revisit past events, especially painful ones? What is the relationship between social memory, history, and commemoration? The last section of the seminar examines actual sites or types of sites at which slavery is currently depicted and the issues and challenges surrounded with interpreting slavery for modern audiences. During the last half of the semester we will take a field trip to St. Louis to visit a commemorative site for ourselves.

Requirements and Grading

- Weekly attendance and active participation. Please let me know in advance if you will not be able to attend a session. (10% of grade)
- Weekly response papers. These should go beyond summarizing the readings and, instead, engage in critical reflection of one or two points the authors raise or, alternatively, draw out the implications of their positions. Please do not view these papers as license to “bash” the readings. Each of the authors has something to say and deserves sympathetic and careful attention. Please feel free to include your personal reflections and responses in your papers. Much of the material we’ll be reading this semester is disturbing. There is no reason not to explore the emotional side of slavery, as long as you do so in conjunction with critical readings of the assigned texts. (40%)
- A research paper of between 15 and 25 pages that explores the issues and themes raised in the readings and discussions. The paper is due on or before the day the

final is scheduled for this class. Please follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* or consult the instructor if you intend to use another format (50%)

Readings

There are seven required books. Please buy them from the campus bookstore or your favorite alternate book source, or order them from the library:

Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration and the Post-bellum Landscape* (Altamira 2003)

Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865*, (Routledge 2000)

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Yale 2001)

David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Oxford 1985)

Stephen Small and Jennifer L. Eichstedt, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Smithsonian 2002)

John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (North Carolina 1993)

Gert Oostindie, *Facing Up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery from Africa, the Americas and Europe* (Ian Randle 2001)

The rest of the readings are available on electronic reserve.

Schedule of Readings

January 19 Introduction

No readings

Part One: Background

January 26 Thinking About Slavery

- Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- Stephanie Shaw, "Mothering Under Slavery in the Antebellum South," in Evelyn Nakano Glenn et al, eds, *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* (1994)
- Thomas R. R. Cobb, "What is Slavery, and Its Foundation in the Natural Law," in Paul Finkelman, *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South, A Brief History with Documents* (2003)

Feb. 2 The Landscapes of Slavery

- Vlach, *Back of the Big House*
- Mark Walston, "Uncle Tom's Cabin Revisited: Origins and Interpretations of Slave Housing in the American South," in *Southern Studies* 24 (4), 1985
- Richard C. Wade, "The Quarters and the House" and "Beyond the Master's Eye," in *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (1964)

Part Two: Theoretical Perspectives

February 9 Slavery in U.S. History

- Patrick Hagopian, “Race and the Politics of Public History in the United States,” in Grey Gundaker, ed. *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground* (1998)
- James Olive Horton, “Presenting Slavery: The Perils of Telling America’s Racial Story,” *The Public Historian* 21 (4), Fall 1999
- Faith Davis Ruffins, “Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1821-1990,” in Ivan Karp et al, ed., *Museums and Communities* (1992)
- Ira Berlin, “American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice,” *The Journal of American History* 90 (4)

February 16

No seminar. Instead, please attend session of Anthology 589, Critical Museum Issues on “Displaying and Mitigating National Disgrace.” Chris Fennell will lead a discussion on slavery and race in the United States and Brenda Farnell will lead a discussion on the National Museum of the American Indian. The seminar meets from 5:00 – 8:00 pm in the Krannert Art Museum. I will be out of town this week at the College Art Association Annual Conference.

February 23

The Past

- Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*

March 2

Memory

- Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989)
- Charlene Mires, “In the Shadow of Independence hall: Vernacular Activities and the Meanings of Historic Places,” *The Public Historian* 21 (2) (Spring 1999)
- David Thelen, Memory and American History, *The Journal of American History* 75 (4) (March 1989)
- David Lowenthal, “The Timeless Past: Some Anglo-American Historical Preconceptions,” *The Journal of American History* 75 (4) (March 1989)
- Paul Connerton, “Social Memory,” in *How Societies Remember* (1989)

March 9

Tourism

- John Urry, “The Tourist Gaze,” in *The Tourist Gaze* (1990)
- John MacCannell, “Sightseeing and Social Structure,” in *The Tourist* (1976)
- Edward M. Bruner, “Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the Black Diaspora,” *American Anthropologist* 98(2) (1996)

Part Three: Slavery Sites

March 16

Plantations I

- Eichstedt and Small, *Representing Slavery*

March 23

Plantations II, and other settings

- Barbara Burlison Mooney, “Looking for History’s Huts: An Exhibition Review of Extant Slave Housing,” forthcoming in *Winterthur Portfolio*

- Jean Muteba Rahier and Michael Hawkins, “ ‘Gone with the Wind’ *versus* the Holocaust Metaphor: Louisiana Plantation Narratives in Black and White,” in Thomas J. Durant Jr. and J. David Kottnerus, eds. *Plantation Society and Race Relations: The Origins of Inequality* (1999)
- Michael A. Chaney, “Touring the Spectacle of Slavery at Magnolia Gardens Plantation,” *Southern Quarterly* 40(4) (2002)
- Eric Gable, et al, On the Uses of Relativism: Fact, Conjecture, and Black and White Histories at Colonial Williamsburg,” *American Ethnologist* 19(4) (1992)
- Rex M. Ellis, “Interpreting the Whole House,” in Jessica Foy Donnelly, ed. *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (2002)

Please submit a short abstract and bibliography of your proposed research topic by March 30

March 30

Slavery and Museums

- Lisa G. Corrin, ed. selections from *Mining the Musuem: An Installation by Fred Wilson* (1994)
- Warren Leon, “A Broader Vision: Exhibits that Change the Way Visitors Look at the Past,” in Jo Blatti, ed. *Past Meets present: Essays about Historic Interpretation and Public Audiences* (1987)
- Edward A. Chappell, “Museums and American History,” in Theresa A. Singleton, ed., “*I, Too, Am America,*” *Archaeological Studies of African-American Life* (1999)

April 6

Artistic Representations of Slavery

(Note: We will need to re-scheduled this class due to my being out of town at Society of Architectural Historians’ Annual Conference this day.)

- Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*

April 13

class cancelled. Instructor out of town at Vernacular Architecture Forum

April 20

Some International Perspectives

- Oostindie, *Facing Up to the Past*

April 27

Memorials to Slavery

- Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*

May 4

Public Controversies

- Adam Goodheart, “The Bonds of History,” *Preservation* (September/October 2001)
- See website <http://www2.gwu.edu/~folklife/bighouse/> and follow the links to read about the controversy surrounding the Back of the Big House exhibit. Also see the following articles on reserve, all from *The Washington Post*:

- Marc Fisher, "Library of Congress Scraps Plantation Exhibit," December 20, 1995
- Editorial, "A library on tiptoe," December 22, 1995
- David Nicholson, "The Costs of Cultural Blackmail," December 24, 1995
- Op-Ed, "Afraid to Face History" December 30, 1995
- Linton Weeks, "Plantation Life Display Revived," January 4, 1996
- Mary Ann French, "The Fertile Ground of 'Plantation'," January 18, 1996
- And read *Cook v. Billington*, also on reserve
- Christopher D. Geist, "African-American History at Colonial Williamsburg," *CRM*, No. 8 (1997)
 - R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. "Stinging Portrayal of Slavery," *Washington Times*, July 10, 1999
 - Dan Eggen, "In Williamsburg, the Painful Reality of Slavery," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1999