



AMH3931 SLAVERY IN FILM

Professor Matthew Blake Strickland
mbstrickland@ufl.edu

Class Time & Location

MWF Period 5 (11:45 – 12:35)
FAB103

Office Hours

MW 10:30 – 11:30
FLI 020

Course Description

Our society has many misconceptions about historical people, events, and ideas in American history. Native Americans, enslaved people, the American Revolution, the Civil War, civil rights, and on and on have been subject to the misinterpretation of public school teachers, politicians, and novice “historians.” One such medium in which we receive “misinformation” comes in the form of Hollywood films. Our job as trained historians is to recognize historical falsehoods and then correct misconceptions through educating others.

In this course, we will watch several blockbuster Hollywood films. Through reading primary and secondary sources, we will analyze what these films do well (if anything) in representing the experiences of enslaved people and the institution of slavery and what they get wrong (something at which they excel). Does *12 Years a Slave* (2013) accurately portray Solomon Northrup’s experience? How does the movie *Harriet* (2019) portray Tubman compared to professional historians? Is it fine that *Roots* (1977 and 2016) takes certain fictional liberties as long as it accurately portrays the lived experiences of enslaved people? And *Django Unchained* (2012)? How the heck

do we contend with this AWESOME (yet very fictional) film? These are just a few of the questions and films we will take up in this course that, essentially, is about historical misinformation and memory in American society today.

*The films and/or readings in this class use racialized language, may depict gruesome scenes of violence, may contain nudity, and may have scenes containing consensual or non-consensual sexual encounters.

*Because of the nature of this class, no electronic devices are allowed. If you are taking notes on the films, please do so on paper. The use of phones, tablets, and/or computers can cause a bright distracting screen. These things may also cause you or others to become inattentive to the film.

Course Objectives

With this course, students will:

1. Students will critically analyze and identify historical inaccuracies, stereotypes, and misrepresentations of slavery and the experiences of enslaved people in Hollywood films.
2. Students will gain a deeper understanding of the institution of slavery, the experiences of enslaved people, and the historical context in which slavery existed in the United States.
3. Students will explore how the portrayal of slavery in film influences contemporary historical memory and public understanding of the past.
4. Students will engage with primary sources, including slave narratives, historical documents, and scholarly research, to inform their analysis of film portrayals.
5. Students will challenge historical misinformation in film by creating counter-narratives or engaging in debates that present more accurate representations of slavery and its historical significance.
6. Make concise arguments in both written and oral form.
7. Think critically and analytically regarding historical people, events, and themes.

Required Texts

Heather Andrea Williams, *American Slavery: A Very Short Introduction*

Kenneth Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner: with Related Documents*

Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom*

Other readings will be available on Canvas.

Most of the films are available through an online database called Swank Digital Campus. All UF faculty and students have access to this database through the library. Any homework assignments that require viewing films can either be completed using this database. If a particular film is not available through this database, it is the student's responsibility to find a way to complete a viewing.

Grading Scale and Assignment Summary

Attendance/Participation	15%
(5) Reading Responses	25%
(5) Film Reflections	25%
Book Review	10%
Film Analysis Essay	25%

Grade Proportion	Grade Scale	Grade Value
Attendance/Participation: 150 points (15%)	940-1,000 = A	A = 4.0
5) Reading Responses: 250 points (25%)	900-939 = A-	A- = 3.67
(5) Film Reflections: 250 points (25%)	870-899 = B+	B+ = 3.33
Book Review: 100 points (10%)	840-869 = B	B = 3.00
Film Analysis Essay: 250 points (25%)	800-839 = B-	B- = 2.67
	770-799 = C+	C+ = 2.33
	740-769 = C	C = 2.00
	700-739 = C-	C- = 1.67
	670-699 = D+	D+ = 1.33
	640-669 = D	D = 1.00
	600-639 = D-	D- = 0.67
	0-599 = E	E = 0.00

Only course grades of C or better will satisfy Gordon Rule, general education, and college basic distribution credit.

Mandatory Meeting: You are required to meet with me during office hours at least once during the semester. This meeting serves two purposes: 1) it allows me to get to know you and you to get to know me, and 2) this is an opportunity for students to get help or insight before major assignments are due. The meeting should be a short check-in (5-10 minutes). While attending these meetings will not be graded, a failure to complete this requirement will result in a grade reduction.

Reading Response Papers: You will submit five response papers throughout the semester where you analyze the course readings. Whether they be primary or secondary sources, your analysis should examine the arguments made in the readings and how they contribute to your understanding of that particular topic. Your responses must include ALL readings for that week, and you must do more than just summarize these readings. You must be analytical in your approach and place all weekly readings into conversation with one another. Ultimately, what does reading all of the articles and/or sources tell you that you would not have learned by just reading individual sources? While there is potential to submit more, you are only required to complete five. Furthermore, all students are required to submit a response for Kenneth Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner: with Related Documents* and Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom*. Students have a choice for the remaining three responses. Each reading response should be 3-4 pages following standard formatting. You will submit these through Turnitin to be checked for plagiarism, and you will submit a hard copy in class to be graded.

Film Reflection Papers: You will submit a reflection paper for five films we watch in class. These will be due after you submit the reading response paper and view the entire film. You must evaluate how the film contends with certain historical ideas, themes, people, and/or events. These reflection papers must also coincide with the response papers (i.e. you must write a reading response paper AND a film reflection paper for the same course topic). You are required to write a reflection on *Birth of a Nation* (2016) and *Harriet* (2019). These should be 2-3 pages following standard formatting. You will submit these through Turnitin to be checked for plagiarism, and you will submit a hard copy in class to be graded.

Book Review: Using library resources, you must find a book about slavery in America. It can contend with any of the themes and ideas we have discussed in this class from the colonial period to the American Civil War. You may not use a resource we used in class. Your chosen book does not necessarily need to be vetted by the instructor. However, if you are unsure that your book fits the requirements, reach out and your instructor will happily provide feedback. Your book must be a secondary source written by a historian or other academic. After a book has been selected, you will write a book review that 1) examines the author's main arguments, 2) analyzes the sources used, and 3) shows how the author structures their narrative. This paper must be 4-6 pages and follow standard formatting. You must bring a hard copy to class to be graded, and you must submit a digital copy on Canvas to be checked through Turnitin. Please note that if you have previously completed a book review for one of my classes, you MAY NOT resubmit the same book review. Turnitin will flag it as plagiarism.

Essay: The objective of this assignment is to analyze a film about slavery, exploring its portrayal of historical events and characters, and critically assessing its accuracy in light of official historical sources. You will select a film from a pre-determined list, watch the film, reading pertinent primary and secondary sources related to the people and/or events relayed in the film, then you will write a well-structured essay (6-8 pages, standard formatting) that analyzes the chosen film in conjunction with the historical information gathered from the official primary and secondary sources. Please note that you may not use a film that we discussed at length in class. You must bring a hard copy to class to be graded, and you must submit a digital copy on Canvas to be checked through Turnitin.

*Standard Formatting: Times New Roman; 1-inch margins on all sides; 12-point font; double-spaced; no extra indentions or line spacings beyond what is appropriate in writing mechanics.

Most assignments will be submitted as a hard copy for grading and on Canvas to be checked through Turnitin. Specific requirements will be addressed for each assignment.

Course Policies

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Attendance:

In order to ensure success in this course, it is imperative that you attend all class meetings. Attendance will be recorded at the beginning of each class. Without showing up to class, you cannot fully participate.

Tardiness:

Come to class on time. Tardiness causes unnecessary distractions for the teacher and for students attempting to engage with the course. While it may be unavoidable sometimes, no student should be late a majority of the class. I understand this is a large campus. However, you must develop a schedule that is logistically possible (i.e. that which allows you to move quickly from one place to another).

Participation:

For the purposes of this class, participation means you are **actively** contributing to the discussion. This could include probing questions, insights regarding readings, or making connections across multiple weeks in the course. All of these involve communicating to me and the rest of the class that you are prepared and engaged with the lectures and/or material.

Late Work:

All assignments should be turned in by the due date. The instructor may accept late work for a ten-point deduction for every day the assignment is late. However, it is not guaranteed that the instructor will accept late work. It is the student's responsibility to communicate problems or concerns with the instructor.

Academic Honesty:

Plagiarism constitutes intellectual theft and academic dishonesty. It is the failure to properly cite and give credit when you use the ideas, words, phrases, or arguments of other people in your writing assignments. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." For more information regarding the Honor Code, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open.

Objectivity and Classroom Respect:

People learn best when they are encouraged to ask questions and express their diverse opinions on course content which may include images, texts, data, or theories from many fields. This is especially true in courses that deal with provocative or contemporary issues. UF offers many such courses, in which students encounter concepts of race, color, sex, and/or national origin. We teach these important issues because understanding them is essential for anyone who seeks to make economic, cultural, and societal contributions to today's complex world. With this in mind, we do not limit access to, or classroom discussion of, ideas and opinions-including those that some may find uncomfortable, unwelcome, disagreeable, or even offensive. In response to challenging material, students and instructors are encouraged to ask honest questions and thoughtfully engage one another's ideas. But hostility, disruptive and disrespectful behavior, and provocation for provocation's sake have no place in a classroom; reasonable people disagree reasonably. These guidelines can help instructors and students as they work together to fulfill the mission of the University of Florida, which includes the exploration of intellectual boundaries, the creation of new knowledge and the pursuit of new ideas.

Course Schedule

*This schedule may change.

W 8/23 Introduction to Slavery and Film	- Access the syllabus [Canvas]
F 8/25 Introduction to Slavery and Film	Readings: - Brenda Stevenson, "Filming Black Voices" [Canvas]
M 8/28 Lecture: Slavery in Early America	Readings: - Williams, <i>American Slavery</i> , chs. 1-2
W 8/30 <i>Roots</i> and Narrative Documentary	In-Class Viewing: - <i>Roots</i> (2016) episode 1
F 9/1 <i>Roots</i> and Narrative Documentary	In-Class Viewing: - <i>Roots</i> (2016) episode 1
M 9/4 Labor Day	No Class
W 9/6 <i>Roots</i> and Narrative Documentary	Readings: - John Thornton, "Historical Truth and Fiction" [Canvas] - Donald R. Wright, "The Effect of Alex Haley's 'Roots' on How Gambians Remember the Atlantic Slave Trade" [Canvas]
F 9/8 Creating Racial Stereotypes in Early Hollywood	In-Class Viewing: - Various scenes from <i>Birth of a Nation</i> (1915) - Various scenes from <i>Gone With the Wind</i> (1939) - Various scenes from <i>Song of the South</i> (1946)
M 9/11 Creating Racial Stereotypes in Early Hollywood	Readings: - Brian Gallagher, "Racist Ideology and Black Abnormality in the Birth of a Nation" [Canvas] - Ron Briley, "Hollywood's Reconstruction and the Persistence of Historical Mythmaking" [Canvas]
	DUE: Book Review
W 9/13 <i>Amistad</i> and The Slave Trade	In-Class Viewing: - <i>Amistad</i> (1996)

	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- John Thornton and John Saillant, "Amistad and African Slavery" [Canvas]- Joseph K. Adjaye, "Amistad and the Lessons of History" [Canvas]- Steven Mintz, "Spielberg's Amistad and the History Classroom" [Canvas]- Steve Lipkin, "When Victims Speak" [Canvas] <p>DUE: The Slave Trade Reading Response Paper</p>
F 9/15 Instructor Absence	No Class
M 9/18 <i>Amistad</i> and The Slave Trade	In-Class Viewing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Amistad</i> (1996) You will need to finish viewing the final ~50 minutes of the film for homework. [available on Swank Digital Campus]
W 9/20 <i>Amistad</i> and The Slave Trade	DUE: <i>Amistad</i> Film Reflection Paper
F 9/22 Lecture: Lived Experiences of Enslaved People	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Williams, <i>American Slavery</i>, ch. 3-4
M 9/25 <i>Birth of a Nation</i> and Slave Resistance	In-Class Viewing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Birth of a Nation</i> (2016) Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Kenneth Greenberg, <i>The Confessions of Nat Turner: with Related Documents</i> [ALL] <p>DUE: Slave Resistance Reading Response Paper [REQUIRED]</p>
W 9/27 <i>Birth of a Nation</i> and Slave Resistance	In-Class Viewing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Birth of a Nation</i> (2016) You will need to finish viewing the final ~20 minutes of the film for homework. [NOT available on Swank Digital Campus]
F 9/29 <i>Birth of a Nation</i> and Slave Resistance	DUE: <i>Birth of a Nation</i> Film Reflection Paper [REQUIRED]
M 10/2 <i>12 Years a Slave</i> and Bringing Slave Narratives to Film	In-Class Viewing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>12 Years a Slave</i> (2013) Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Solomon Northup, <i>12 Years a Slave</i> [Canvas]- Erica L. Ball, "The Unbearable Liminality of Blackness" [Canvas]

DUE: Slave Narratives Reading Response Paper

<p>W 10/4 <i>12 Years a Slave</i> and Bringing Slave Narratives to Film</p>	<p>In-Class Viewing: - <i>12 Years a Slave</i> (2013) You will need to finish viewing the final ~30 minutes of the film for homework. [NOT available on Swank Digital Campus]</p>
<p>F 10/6 Homecoming</p>	<p>No Class</p>
<p>M 10/9 <i>12 Years a Slave</i> and Bringing Slave Narratives to Film</p>	<p>DUE: <i>12 Years a Slave</i> Film Reflection Paper</p>
<p>W 10/11 Lecture: Bringing Slavery to an End</p>	<p>Readings: - Williams, <i>American Slavery</i>, ch. 5-6</p>
<p>F 10/13 Instructor Absence</p>	<p>No Class</p>
<p>M 10/16 <i>Harriet</i>, The Underground Railroad, and Biography</p>	<p>In-Class Viewing: - <i>Harriet</i> (2019) Readings: - Catherine Clinton, <i>Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom</i> [ALL]</p> <p>DUE: The Underground Railroad Reading Response Paper [REQUIRED]</p>
<p>W 10/18 <i>Harriet</i>, The Underground Railroad, and Biography</p>	<p>In-Class Viewing: - <i>Harriet</i> (2019) You will need to finish viewing the final ~25 minutes of the film for homework. [available on Swank Digital Campus]</p>
<p>F 10/20 <i>Harriet</i>, The Underground Railroad, and Biography</p>	<p>DUE: <i>Harriet</i> Film Reflection Paper [REQUIRED]</p>
<p>M 10/23 <i>Lincoln</i> and Emancipation</p>	<p>In-Class Viewing: - <i>Lincoln</i> (2012) Readings: - Barry Schwartz, “Collective Memory and History: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality” [Canvas]</p>

-
- Chandra Manning, “The Shifting Terrain of Attitudes Towards Abraham Lincoln and Emancipation” [Canvas]
 - David Brooks, “Why We Love Politics,” *NYT* [Canvas]
 - Eric Foner, “Lincoln’s Use of Politics,” *NYT* [Canvas]
 - Kate Masure, “Passive Black Characters,” *NYT* [Canvas]

DUE: Emancipation Reading Response Paper

W 10/25
Lincoln and
Emancipation

In-Class Viewing:
- *Lincoln* (2012)

F 10/27
Lincoln and
Emancipation

In-Class Viewing:
- *Lincoln* (2012)

M 10/30
Lincoln and
Emancipation

DUE: *Lincoln* Film Reflection Paper

W 11/1
Free State of Jones and
Fighting for Equal
Rights

In-Class Viewing:
- *Free State of Jones* (2016)

Readings:
- Victoria Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi’s Longest Civil War*, chs. 5-8 [Canvas]

DUE: Fighting for Equal Rights Reading Response Paper

F 11/3
Free State of Jones and
Fighting for Equal
Rights

In-Class Viewing:
- *Free State of Jones* (2016)
You will need to finish viewing the final ~40 minutes of the film for homework.
[available on Swank Digital Campus]

M 11/6
Free State of Jones and
Fighting for Equal
Rights

DUE: *Free State of Jones* Film Reflection Paper

W 11/8
Instructor Absence

No Class

F 11/10
Veteran’s Day

No Class

M 11/13

In-Class Viewing:

<i>The Woman King</i> and Centering Africa	- <i>The Woman King</i> (2022) Readings: - Dov Ronen, “On the African Role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Dahomey” [Canvas] - Robin Law, “The ‘Amazons’ of Dahomey” [Canvas] - Augustus A. Adeyinka, “King Gezo of Dahaomey, 1818-1858” [Canvas] DUE: Centering Africa Reading Response Paper
W 11/15 <i>The Woman King</i> and Centering Africa	In-Class Viewing: - <i>The Woman King</i> (2022) You will need to finish viewing the final ~35 minutes of the film for homework. [available on Swank Digital Campus]
F 11/17 <i>The Woman King</i> and Centering Africa	DUE: <i>The Woman King</i> Film Reflection Paper
M 11/20 Thanksgiving	No Class
W 11/22 Thanksgiving	No Class
F 11/24 Thanksgiving	No Class
M 11/27 <i>Django Unchained</i> and Revisionist History in Film	In-Class Viewing: - <i>Django Unchained</i> (2012) Readings: - Yarimar Bonilla, “History Unchained” [Canvas] - Jarrod Dunham, “The Subject Effaced” [Canvas] DUE: Revisionist History Reading Response Paper
W 11/29 <i>Django Unchained</i> and Revisionist History in Film	In-Class Viewing: - <i>Django Unchained</i> (2012)
F 12/1 <i>Django Unchained</i> and Revisionist History in Film	In-Class Viewing: - <i>Django Unchained</i> (2012)

M 12/4

Django Unchained and
Revisionist History in
Film

DUE: *Django Unchained* Film Reflection Paper

W 12/6

Course Conclusion

Bring a computer/tablet/phone to class to complete the course evaluation.

W 12/13

Final Essay

Submit your final essay to my office by 12pm.