



# AMH3931

## SLAVERY & RACE IN FILM

Professor Matthew Blake Strickland  
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### **Class Time & Location**

MWF Period 4 (10:40-11:30)  
FLI 117

### **Office Hours**

MW 11:30-12:30  
FLI 220

### **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.

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\*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%

Percent	Grade
93-100	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+

83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
0-59	E

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. If you want my feedback, you must submit a hard copy in class, as well.

**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. If you want my feedback, you must submit a hard copy in class, as well.

**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)

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shows how the author structures their narrative, and 3) analyzes the sources used. This paper must be 4-6 pages and follow standard formatting. You must submit a digital copy on Canvas to be checked through Turnitin. If you want my feedback, you must submit a hard copy in class, as well. 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 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.

All assignments will be submitted on Canvas to be checked through Turnitin. If you want my feedback, you must submit a hard copy in class, as well. I will not provide feedback on digital submissions.

## **University Policies and Resources**

### **Attendance policy**

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>.

### **Students requiring accommodation**

Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

### **UF course evaluation process**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

### **University Honesty Policy**

University of Florida students are bound by the Honor Pledge. On all work submitted for credit by a student, the following pledge is required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Student Honor Code and Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code, as well as the process for reported allegations and sanctions that may be implemented. All potential violations of the code will be reported to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If a student is found responsible for an Honor Code violation in this course, the instructor will enter a Grade Adjustment sanction which may be up to or including failure of the course. For additional information, see <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>.

### **In-class recording**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party-note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

### **Resources available to students**

#### ***Health and Wellness***

- U Matter, We Care: [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu); 352-392-1575.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1575.
- Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center; [352-392-1161](http://www.shcc.ufl.edu).
- University Police Department: <http://www.police.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1111 (911 for emergencies).

#### ***Academic Resources***

- E-learning technical support: [learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:learning-support@ufl.edu); <https://elearning.ufl.edu>; 352-392-4357.
- Career Connections Center: Reitz Union; <http://www.career.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1601.
- Library Support: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>.
- Academic Resources: 1317 Turlington Hall; 352-392-2010; <https://academicresources.clas.ufl.edu>.
- Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall; <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.

## Course Schedule

\*This schedule may change.

M 1/13 Introduction to Slavery and Film	- Access the syllabus [Canvas]
W 1/15 Introduction to Slavery and Film	Readings: - Brenda Stevenson, "Filming Black Voices" [Canvas]
F 1/17 <i>Roots</i> and Narrative Documentary	Readings: - Williams, <i>American Slavery</i> , chs. 1-2  In-Class Viewing: - <i>Roots</i> (2016) episode 1
M 1/20 MLK	No Class
W 1/22 <i>Roots</i> and Narrative Documentary	Readings: - Williams, <i>American Slavery</i> , chs. 4-6  In-Class Viewing: - <i>Roots</i> (2016) episode 1
F 1/24 <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]
M 1/27 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) - Various scenes depicting blackface and racial tropes
W 1/29 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]  <b>DUE: Book Review</b>
F 1/31 <i>Amistad</i> and The Slave Trade	In-Class Viewing: - <i>Amistad</i> (1996)  Readings:

- 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]

**DUE: The Slave Trade Reading Response Paper**

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M 2/3  
*Amistad* and The Slave Trade  
In-Class Viewing:  
- *Amistad* (1996)

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W 2/5  
*Amistad* and The Slave Trade  
In-Class Viewing:  
- *Amistad* (1996)

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F 2/7  
*Amistad* and The Slave Trade  
**DUE: *Amistad* Film Reflection Paper**

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M 2/10  
*Birth of a Nation* and Slave Resistance  
In-Class Viewing:  
- *Birth of a Nation* (2016)  
  
Readings:  
- Kenneth Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner: with Related Documents* [ALL]

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**DUE: Slave Resistance Reading Response Paper [REQUIRED]**

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W 2/12  
*Birth of a Nation* and Slave Resistance  
In-Class Viewing:  
- *Birth of a Nation* (2016)  
You will need to finish viewing the final ~20 minutes of the film for homework.  
[NOT available on Swank Digital Campus]

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F 2/14  
*Birth of a Nation* and Slave Resistance  
**DUE: *Birth of a Nation* Film Reflection Paper [REQUIRED]**

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M 2/17  
*12 Years a Slave* and Bringing Slave Narratives to Film  
In-Class Viewing:  
- *12 Years a Slave* (2013)  
  
Readings:  
- Solomon Northup, *12 Years a Slave* [Canvas]  
- Erica L. Ball, "The Unbearable Liminality of Blackness" [Canvas]

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**DUE: Slave Narratives Reading Response Paper**

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W 2/19  
In-Class Viewing:

*12 Years a Slave* and  
Bringing Slave  
Narratives to Film - *12 Years a Slave* (2013)  
You will need to finish viewing the final ~30 minutes of the film for homework.  
[NOT available on Swank Digital Campus]

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F 2/21 **DUE: *12 Years a Slave* Film Reflection Paper**  
*12 Years a Slave* and  
Bringing Slave  
Narratives to Film

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M 2/24 In-Class Viewing:  
*Harriet*, The - *Harriet* (2019)  
Underground Railroad,  
and Biography Readings:  
- Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* [ALL]

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**DUE: The Underground Railroad Reading Response Paper [REQUIRED]**

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W 2/26 In-Class Viewing:  
*Harriet*, The - *Harriet* (2019)  
Underground Railroad,  
and Biography You will need to finish viewing the final ~25 minutes of the film for homework.  
[available on Swank Digital Campus]

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F 2/28 **DUE: *Harriet* Film Reflection Paper [REQUIRED]**  
*Harriet*, The  
Underground Railroad,  
and Biography

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M 3/3 In-Class Viewing:  
*Lincoln* and - *Lincoln* (2012)  
Emancipation  
Readings:  
- Barry Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality" [Canvas]  
- 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 Masare, "Passive Black Characters," *NYT* [Canvas]

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**DUE: Emancipation Reading Response Paper**

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W 3/5 In-Class Viewing:  
*Lincoln* and - *Lincoln* (2012)  
Emancipation

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F 3/7 In-Class Viewing:  
*Lincoln* and - *Lincoln* (2012)  
Emancipation

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M 3/10  
*Lincoln* and  
Emancipation

**DUE: *Lincoln* Film Reflection Paper**

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W 3/12

Readings:  
- Williams, *American Slavery*, chs. 3-4

In-Class Viewing:  
- *Roots* (2016) episode 2

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F 3/14

In-Class Viewing:  
- *Roots* (2016) episode 2

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**M-F 3/17-21  
Spring Break**

**No Class**

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M 3/24  
*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**

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W 3/26  
*Free State of Jones* and  
Fighting for Equal  
Rights

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

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F 3/28  
*Free State of Jones* and  
Fighting for Equal  
Rights

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

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M 3/31  
*Free State of Jones* and  
Fighting for Equal  
Rights

**DUE: *Free State of Jones* Film Reflection Paper**

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W 4/2  
*The Woman King* and  
Centering Africa

In-Class Viewing:  
- *The Woman King* (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**

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F 4/4  
*The Woman King* and  
Centering Africa

In-Class Viewing:  
- *The Woman King* (2022)

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M 4/7  
*The Woman King* and  
Centering Africa

In-Class Viewing:  
- *The Woman King* (2022)

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W 4/9  
*The Woman King* and  
Centering Africa

**DUE: *The Woman King* Film Reflection Paper**

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F 4/11

Readings:  
- Williams, *American Slavery*, chs. 5-6

In-Class Viewing:  
- *Roots* (2016) episode 3

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M 4/14

In-Class Viewing:  
- *Roots* (2016) episode 3

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W 4/16  
*Django Unchained* and  
Revisionist History in  
Film

In-Class Viewing:  
- *Django Unchained* (2012)

Readings:  
- Yarimar Bonilla, "History Unchained" [Canvas]  
- Jarrod Dunham, "The Subject Effaced" [Canvas]

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**DUE: Revisionist History Reading Response Paper**

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F 4/18  
*Django Unchained* and  
Revisionist History in  
Film

In-Class Viewing:  
- *Django Unchained* (2012)

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M 4/21  
*Django Unchained* and  
Revisionist History in  
Film

In-Class Viewing:  
- *Django Unchained* (2012)

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W 4/23

**DUE: *Django Unchained* Film Reflection Paper**

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*Django Unchained* and  
Revisionist History in  
Film

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F 4/25

Final Paper Due

You must submit your final paper on Canvas by 11:59pm