

HIST 3240 - African American History and Culture to 1865

The University of North Texas, Fall 2026

CLASS MEETINGS: T/TH, 9:35 am to 10:55 am, General Academic Building, Room 105

Instructor Contact:

Name: Christopher P. Todd

Office Location: 233 Wooten Hall

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Office Hours: T/TH, 8:30 am to 9:10 pm and by appointment or Zoom (see link below)

Zoom Meeting Room: <https://unt.zoom.us/my/cptodd>

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Teaching Assistant Contact:

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Course Description

This course examines the history of African Americans from the origins of slavery in America through the death of slavery during the Civil War and Reconstruction. What justifications were there for trading in human beings as chattel? How did African-descended people in America become both part of and yet perpetually marginalized in America? How can we understand the nature of American democracy and the mythologies of American history? How much agency did African Americans have in crafting their own experience, and what does this say about the nature of both their oppression and their resistance? In what ways have African Americans contributed to the formation of American society? We will be concerned not simply with the important task of re-inserting the African American past into our national historical narrative. Rather, we will also be interested in understanding the depths to which American society has been predicated on the intersections of race, economy, and society. Throughout, we will try to answer these questions by listening to the neglected voices of African Americans themselves as we attempt to better understand this complex history that shaped our nation's past.

There are NO prerequisites for this course.

Required Materials

- Bay, Mia, Deborah Gray White, and Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *Freedom on My Mind: A History of African Americans with Documents*. 3rd ed. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013.
- Walker, David. *Walker's Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life*. New York: J.H. Tobitt, 1848. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16516>.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Project Gutenberg,

1845. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23>.*

Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1 Create arguments through the use of historical evidence.
- 2 Analyze and interpret primary and secondary sources.
- 3 Analyze the effects of historical, social, political, economic, cultural, and global forces on this period of United States history.

Course Structure

The Fall 2024 iteration of HIST 3240 will be delivered as a face-to-face course. The course will last 15 weeks. The course will meet in **General Academic Building room 105 every Tuesday and Thursday from 9:35 am to 10:55 pm.**

How this Course Works

This course uses an unconventional approach to assessing student learning called specifications grading. (If you're curious about this approach, see this [overview](#).) Specifications grading means that your final course grade will be determined by the amount of quality work you choose to do. Assignments are bundled together at each grade level based on amount of work and/or level of complexity. The A bundle of assignments requires more work, and work of greater complexity, than the B bundle, which is likewise more challenging than the C bundle. Rather than earning a grade for each assignment, you will earn your final course grade by meeting the expectations on all of the assignments within your chosen bundle. These bundles reflect a hierarchy of course objectives. Your final grade will be assigned based on which bundles of assignments you satisfactorily complete. These final grades, therefore, indicate which course objectives you demonstrate that you accomplished. You have an opportunity to think ahead about what grade you would like to earn in this course and plan your workload accordingly. However, your chosen grade is not set in stone – you can reevaluate this choice at any time.

All individual assignments will be evaluated as “meets expectations” or “does not meet expectations yet,” based on specific criteria for each assignment. You will receive credit for an assignment when it meets ALL of the criteria. There are no points, percentages, or gradations of quality in specifications grading. An assignment either meets expectations, or it does not. I will share these criteria with you well in advance of each assignment. In general, “meets expectations” should not be viewed as “minimally competent,” as is typical for a grade of C. Rather, “meets expectations” indicates you have achieved the course objective associated with that particular assignment and its specifications. In practice, “meets expectations” will describe work that, under a typical grading scheme, would receive at least a B+ or above.

Grades

The only letter grade that you will receive in this course will be your final grade, and it will reflect the “bundle” of assignments and requirements you have satisfactorily accomplished in the class. That

* If you would prefer to read these texts in physical form, you are more than welcome to purchase a copy of either text. The one I generally use is some edition of: Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., ed. *The Classic Slave Narratives*. New York: Signet Classics, 2012. It contains both narratives and is relatively inexpensive.

final letter grade is not an assessment of your intelligence, your abilities, or your value as a person. Rather, the grade reflects what you demonstrated that you learned in the course: no more, no less.

Built into this system is a good deal of choice as to how much you wish to learn and how hard you want to work to demonstrate and apply that learning. You might choose that passing this course with a C is sufficient for your goals—it is perfectly appropriate and worthy of respect for you to make that choice, especially if it allows you to proactively allocate your time to other endeavors at UNT or beyond. If you strive to get an A in this course and maximize your learning, you will be making the choice to challenge yourself, and you should make sure you are in a personal and academic situation to achieve that level of engagement.

Please note, grades of D will be given only in rare cases where a student meets most of the C Bundle requirements but falls short in one area. Typically, a student who does not meet the requirements of the C Bundle will fail the course.

C Bundle

If you receive “meets expectations” on all of the following assignments, you will pass the course with a grade of C:

- Introduction Paper
- 10 Weekly Reading/Lecture Quizzes
- 6 Primary Document Analysis Assignments
- 6 Reading/Lecture Summaries

B Bundle

If you receive “meets expectations” on all of the following assignments, you will pass the course with a grade of B:

- Introduction Paper
- 10 Weekly Reading/Lecture Quizzes
- 6 Primary Document Analysis Assignments
- 6 Reflection Essays
- In-Class Engagement (no more than 6 missed classes)

A Bundle

If you receive “meets expectations” on all of the following assignments, you will pass the course with a grade of A:

- Introduction Paper
- 10 Weekly Reading/Lecture Quizzes
- 6 Primary Document Analysis Assignments
- 6 Reflection Essays
- In-Class Engagement (no more than 3 missed classes)
- Final Essay

Assignments (Please do not email assignments. No assignments will be graded outside of Canvas.)

Reading Quizzes (Due Tuesdays by 11:59 pm) (All Bundles)

Every week there will be a 5-question multiple-choice quiz based on the assigned chapter in the American Yawp for that week. The quizzes will be administered on Canvas and you may use any books and/or notes you wish. You will have 20 minutes to complete each quiz. In order to receive “meets expectations” on a quiz, you must provide 4 correct answers. You will be allowed an unlimited number of attempts to complete each quiz. Please consult the appropriate “bundles” section on page 3 to see the number of assignments you must fulfill.

Primary Document Analysis Assignments (Due Every Thursday by 11:59 pm) (All Bundles)

Every week there will be an opportunity to write a 350-500-word analysis of a primary document related to the course material for that week. Please consult the appropriate “bundles” section on page 3 to see the number of assignments you must fulfill. Quizzes are due weekly according to the course schedule.

Reading/Lecture Summaries (Due Every Thursday by 11:59 pm) (C Bundle)

If you select the C bundle, every week there will be an opportunity to write a 250-word summary of the reading and lecture material for that week. **These essays are just that, opportunities for you to summarize the materials for this week.** Please consult the appropriate “bundles” section on page 3 to see the number of assignments you must fulfill. Quizzes are due weekly according to the course schedule.

Reflection Essays (A and B Bundles)

If you select the A or B bundle, every week there will be an opportunity to write a 500-750-word essay that will allow you to reflect on the reading, listening, and lecture materials for that week. Please consult the appropriate “bundles” section on page 3 to see the number of assignments you must fulfill. Quizzes are due weekly according to the course schedule. **Reflection essays go beyond the reading/lecture summaries in that you are not simply summarizing.** Rather, you will be asked to **critically reflect** on the week’s materials by grappling with a question posted by me for the week.

In-Class Engagement

A and B grade bundles. This course is designed to facilitate active engagement with the reading and listening materials. A good amount of the time we spend together in class will be devoted to discussion. **In order for everyone to reap the full benefits of these discussions, you should arrive in class having read and/or paid attention to the assignment for that day.** I encourage you to offer your own thoughtful comments about the reading material during our discussions. I also realize that not every student is outspoken. Additional ways to demonstrate your engagement include: taking productive notes during lectures; asking questions during lectures and discussions; answering questions posed by me and by other students; and otherwise being present, alert, and involved in what is happening during class.

Final Essay (Due Wednesday, Dec. 09, by 11:59 PM) (A Bundle)

If you select the A bundle, you will write a 1000-word final essay in which you will identify, analyze, and evaluate key turning points in US history that relate to our course theme of freedom.

Attendance:

Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be successful. The knowledge and skills you will gain in this course highly depend on your participation in class learning activities. Because of that, I expect you to attend all class sessions unless you are ill or have a valid reason for missing. I plan to track class attendance to help me understand how and when students are engaging in the course. If you are ill or have another valid reason for missing class, please contact me in advance of the absence.

Communication:

Office hours offer you an opportunity to ask for clarification or find support with understanding class material. I want to be as accessible to you as I can be. I encourage you to visit me to discuss any aspect of this course or whatever else is on your mind. If you cannot visit during office hours, please email me and we will find a time that works for you.

Course Conduct:

I am committed to creating a positive learning environment where diverse perspectives are recognized and valued as a source of strength. I request that you work with me to create a classroom culture based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. As a class we will approach all discussions with respect and civility. Disagreements and debates in academic discourse are expected and welcome, but personal attacks are never acceptable. I strive to ensure an open and welcoming classroom for all students. If I ever miss the mark, please don't hesitate to come and talk to me. We are all learning together.

School/Life Conflict:

Many students face obstacles to their education as a result of work or family obligations or unforeseen personal difficulties. If you are experiencing challenges throughout the semester that are impacting your ability to succeed in this course, or in your undergraduate career more broadly, please reach out to me immediately so that we can work together to form a plan for your academic success. If you are unable to attend my student drop-in hours, please email to set up a time that works for you or to arrange a meeting by Zoom.

Emergency Notifications and Procedures:

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

ADA Accommodation Statement:

I am committed to the principle of universal learning. Any student with particular needs should contact the Office of Disability Access (ODA) at the beginning of the semester. If necessary, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter that you can submit to me. Then you and I can work out the details of any accommodations needed for this course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website (<http://www.unt.edu/oda>). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Academic Integrity:

The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University's actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence. Students should be aware that "acts of dishonesty" include cheating, plagiarism, furnishing misleading information, and forgery. We will uphold the policies and regulations of the University. A finding of academic dishonesty in this course will result in a grade of 0 for the work in question. Students have the right to appeal a finding of academic dishonesty.

Late Work

I will accept late work on a case-by-case basis **whenever it makes sense to do so**. If a situation arises where you cannot submit work by the due date, please notify me that you will be submitting the assignment late. Please note, however, that I cannot accept any late work after Wednesday, December 10th at 11:59 PM. Additional UNT Policies Available on Canvas

Note: If a reading or visual requirement appears on a particular date, please read or listen to it before arriving to class.

Week 01 – Class Introduction; The African Past

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
08/18/25	Introduction to the course/syllabus; What is/Why Study African American History?; What do Historians Do? - Introduction to class and syllabus; Film, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie <i>The Danger of a Single Story</i>	
08/20/25	The African Past, 6000 BCE to 1600 CE - Chapter 1: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 2-35 - “Olaudah Equiano Describes Seventeenth-Century West African Life, 1789” - Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” 1773. Pg 31 in <i>Freedom on My Mind</i> - John Russwurm, “On the Egyptians as Africans, 1872.” Pg 33 in <i>Freedom on My Mind</i>	

Week 02 – From Africa to America

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
08/25/25	The African Slave Trade, Origins - Chapter 2: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 36-71 - “A Portuguese Trader Describes a Kidnapping, c. 1440s” - “Slave Raiding on the West African Coast, 1448” - “Willem Bosman, a Dutch Trader, Describes the Details of Bargaining for Slaves, 1701” - William Snelgrave, an English Trader, “Describes the Business of Slave Trading and Two Slave Mutinies, 1734”	- Reading Quiz, Week 02 [A, B, C]
08/27/25	The Middle Passage and Its Discontents - The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, 1789. Pg 63 in <i>Freedom on My Mind</i>	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 02 [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 02 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 02 [C]

Week 03 – Narrative Perspectives: From Africa to America

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
09/01/25	Narrative Perspectives: From Africa to America - Film [IN CLASS]: “The African Trade.” History Channel International, 2000.	- Reading Quiz, Week 03 [A, B, C]
09/03/25	Film Discussion - Film discussion of the film: “The African Trade”	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 03 (the document is the film “The African Trade” [A, B, C]) - Reflection Essay, Week 03 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 03 [C]

Week 04 – Black Life in Colonial North America, 1500 - 1750

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
09/08/25	The Peoples of North America - Chapter 3: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 72-113 - Anthony Johnson, a Former Slave, Claims His Slave Property, 1655 - Interracial Sexual Relations and their Consequences- The Case of Elizabeth Key, 1655-1656 - An Act to Discriminate Between Africans and Others in Maryland, 1664	- Reading Quiz, Week 04 [A, B, C]
09/10/25	Plantation Slavery in Colonial North America - Documents in <i>Freedom on My Mind</i>, pgs. 105-112	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 04 [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 04 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 04 [C]

Week 05 – African Americans in the Age of Revolutions*

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
09/15/25	The Crisis of the British Empire - Chapter 4: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 114-155 - Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, 1775 - Slave Petitions, American Revolution - Lemuel Haynes, "Liberty Further Extended, 1776" (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 151-2.) - Boston King, "Memoirs of a Black Loyalist, 1789" (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 153-4.)	- Reading Quiz, Week 05 [A, B, C]
09/17/25	Plantation Slavery in Colonial North America	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 05 [A, B, C]

* I have jury duty on Monday, September 14th. If I am released on Monday (meaning, after being subjected to *voir dire* on Monday by lawyers and/or the judge and I am found unsuitable, I will be dismissed and won't have to serve on a jury for that week) then I will be in class on Tuesday. If I am chosen to serve on a jury, I will miss class on Tuesday and possibly Thursday. (I was told that serving on a petit jury usually lasts a week, though it can be longer.) Let's pray that I will be excused on Monday (thus, I will not have to serve the rest of the week).

	-	- Reflection Essay, Week 05 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 05 [C]
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Week 06 – African Americans in the New Nation, 1783 - 1820

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
09/22/25	The Forces for Freedom and Slavery in the New Nation - Chapter 5: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 156-197 - Jane Coggeshall, “Petition for Freedom, 1785” (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 191-2). - Absalom Jones and Others, “Petition to Congress on the Fugitive Slave Act, 1799” (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 192-3). - James Forten, “Letters from a Man of Colour, 1813” (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 193-4). - “Sentiments of the People of Color” (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 194-5).	- Reading Quiz, Week 06 [A, B, C]
09/24/25	Free Black Communities Emerge in the North	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 06 [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 06 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 06 [C]

Week 07 – Life in the Age of Cotton, 1790 - 1860

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
09/29/25	Slavery Expands - Chapter 6: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 198-237 - Lewis Clarke, “Questions and Answers about Slavery” (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 233-4). - Bethany Veney, “Narrative of Bethany Veney, A Slave Woman, 1889” (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 234-5). - Mary Reynolds, “The Days of Slavery, 1937” (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 236-7).	- Reading Quiz, Week 07 [A, B, C]
10/01/25	The Domestic Slave Trade	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 07 [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 07 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 07 [C]

Week 08 – Free Black Life in an Age of Democratic Expansion, 1820 - 1860

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
10/06/25	Back Life in Jacksonian America - Douglass, Frederick. <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i>. Project Gutenberg, 1845. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23.	- Reading Quiz, Week 08 [A, B, C]
10/08/25	Discussion of <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> -	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 08 (the document is the Douglass Narrative) [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 08 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 08 [C]

Week 09 – Antislavery Begins, 1730 - 1833

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
10/13/25	The Emergence of Antislavery and Colonization Walker, David. <i>Walker's Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life</i>. New York: J.H. Tobitt, 1848. [published in 1829] https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16516.	Reading Quiz, Week 09 [A, B, C]
10/15/25	Discussion of <i>Walker's Appeal</i>	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 09 (the document is <i>Walker's Appeal</i>) [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 09 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 09 [C]

Week 10 – Proslavery Articulations and Antislavery Radicalism, 1830 - 1850

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
10/20/25	A Rising Tide of Racism and Violence - Chapter 7: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 238-281 - Garnet, Henry Highland. "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America." In <i>Walker's Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life</i> New York: J.H. Tobitt 1848 https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/8.. - Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 278-9).	Reading Quiz, Week 10 [A, B, C]
10/22/25	Colonization	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 10 [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 10 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 10 [C]

Week 11 – African Americans and the Road to Disunion, 1840 - 1860

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
10/27/25	Fugitive Slaves - Wilbur H. Siebert, “Light on the Underground Railroad,” <i>The American Historical Review</i>, Vol. 1 No. 3 (April 1896), pp. 455-463 -	- NO Reading Quiz, Week 11 [A, B, C]
10/29/25	Colonization - George Fitzhugh, “Negro Slavery, Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society - Plantation Management,” DeBow’s Review, (February 1853) -	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 11 [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 11 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 11 [C]

Week 12 – Liberation: African Americans and the Civil War, 1861 - 1865

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
11/03/25	Lincoln’s Aims - Chapter 8: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 282-321 - Alfred M. Green, “Let Us ...Take Up the Sword” (1861) (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 313). - Abraham Lincoln, “The Emancipation Proclamation” (1863) (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 316-7). - Susie King Taylor, “Reminiscences of My Life in Camp” (1902) (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 315-6).	- Reading Quiz, Week 12 [A, B, C]
11/04/25	Black Men and the Fight for the Union	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 12 [A, B, C] - Reflection Essay, Week 12 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 12 [C]

Week 13 – Narrative Perspectives: The Struggle for Freedom

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
11/10/25	Film: “Glory.” United States: Tri-Star Pictures, 1989. - Glory - No Reading for this week - No Primary Sources for this week	- No Reading Quiz for this week [A, B, C]
11/12/25	Class Discussion: <i>Glory</i> and the Struggle for Freedom	- No Primary Document Analysis for this week [A, B, C] - No Reflection Essay for this week [A, B] - No Reading/Lecture Summary for this week [C]

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14 – Reconstruction

Date	Topic/Materials: Secondary Primary Visual	Assignment
11/17/25	The End of Slavery - Chapter 9: <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pgs 322-365 - Sojourner Truth, “Equal Voting Rights” (1867) (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 356-7). - Proceedings of the American Equal Rights Association, “Debate: Negro Male Suffrage vs. Woman Suffrage” (1869) (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 357-60). - A. Clark, “Address of the Colored State Convention to the People of Iowa in Behalf of Their Enfranchisement” (1868) (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 362-3). - Thomas Nast, “Colored Rule in a Reconstructed(?) State” (1874) (in <i>Freedom On My Mind</i>, pg. 364).	- Reading Quiz, Week 14 [A, B, C]
11/19/25	The End of Reconstruction	- Primary Document Analysis, Week 14 [A, B, C]

		- Reflection Essay, Week 14 [A, B] - Reading/Lecture Summary, Week 14 [C]
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