



HIST 423: American Radicals and Reformers

Professor Caleb McDaniel

Spring 2012

Time and Place: TTh 1–2:15 p.m., Humanities 327
Office: Humanities Building 330 Phone: 713–348–2556
Email: caleb.mcdaniel@rice.edu

Course Description

This syllabus is a static version (current as of January 5, 2012) of the full syllabus available at <http://abolition.blogs.rice.edu>. Please visit the website for working links and the latest updates about this course, or send email to caleb.mcdaniel@rice.edu.

Each semester, students in HIST 423 read scholarship about a particular group of American radicals and then conduct independent research on a historical question related to course themes. In the Spring 2012 semester, we will be focusing on American abolitionism in the antebellum period.

In the four decades before the Civil War, a small but vocal group of radical abolitionists challenged Americans to destroy both slavery and racial inequality. Always a minority even in the free states, abolitionists also disagreed amongst themselves about the methods of agitation they should use, the relationship between slavery and other social evils, and much else.

In this course, we will seek to understand these radicals by reading the latest historical scholarship about them and by conducting independent research projects on some aspect of American abolitionism. In the process we will also consider general scholarly debates about American reform and radicalism and explore the methods that historians use to explain past movements, understand their aims, and gauge their effects on society at large. Among the questions we will consider are these: How is historical knowledge made? If the past is past, why are historical interpretations still so contested? What makes one historical interpretation better than another? How are interpretations of radicalism in the past shaped by the times in which historians themselves write?

Required Books

The following books are available at the bookstore on campus, with the exception of the first title, which must be purchased online from the bookseller of your choice. All required books will also be placed on reserve at Fondren Library.

- Gale Kenny, *Contentious Liberties: American Abolitionists in Post-Emancipation Jamaica, 1834–1866* (University of Georgia, 2010). Paperback edition released on December 1. ISBN: 978-0-8203-4045-6
- Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828–1865* (Louisiana State University Press, 2003), ISBN: 978-0807128381. Paper.
- Sean Wilentz, ed. *David Walker’s Appeal* (Hill and Wang, 1995). ISBN: 978-0809015818. Paper.
- John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Harvard University Press, 2004). ISBN: 978-0674013674. Paper.
- Kathryn Kish Sklar, ed., *Women’s Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830–1870* (Bedford/St. Martin’s). ISBN: 978-0312101442. Paper.
- James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company). ISBN: 978-0393330656. Paper.

Assignments

Your assignments this semester include the following.

- A 15- to 25-page original research paper, including shorter “benchmark” assignments (60% of course grade)
- Weekly short comments on assigned readings (25%)
- Contributions to seminar discussions (15%)

Research Project (60% of course grade)

Your major assignment for this course is to write an original, thesis-driven research paper on some question related to the course theme. The paper can either be an original work of history that uses primary and secondary sources to answer some question about abolitionism itself, or it can be an historiographical paper that uses scholarly sources to analyze, trace changes in, and explain the way past historians have understood a particular aspect of American abolitionism. We will talk much more about these possibilities in class. Your final paper should be 15–25 typed, double-spaced pages (including footnotes).

Because of the length and complexity of this assignment, **this is a writing-intensive course that will require substantial investments of your time outside of class.** But be aware that I will be available throughout the semester, both in and out of class, to help you succeed. Your fellow classmates will also assist you in refining your project and completing your final paper.

In order to complete this assignment, you will:

- Identify a topic for research
- Locate primary and secondary sources related to your topic
- Devise a narrower research question
- Develop an original thesis that addresses that question
- Write a paper that defends that thesis and relates it to some existing scholarship on your topic

A great deal of class time will be spent explaining in detail how to complete these steps, and much more information will be distributed on the blog or in class. You will also be required to complete a variety of smaller, “benchmark” assignments that will help you prepare for the final paper. These “benchmark” assignments include:

- An informal email to me the week by **February 14** discussing your interests or possible ideas for the research paper
- “Two Topics” Memo: a short, one-page list of two potential research topics, along with at least two primary sources and two secondary sources you have identified on each topic (due in my email inbox by **noon on February 21**)
- Proposal: a two- to three-page proposal explaining your topic, the question you want to answer about your topic, and the sources you intend to use (due in my email inbox before midnight on Sunday, **March 11**)
- “Primary Source” Memo, a short summary of one significant source document you have found for your research, to be shared with the seminar on **March 20**
- Outline of your paper due by **noon on March 29**
- “Three to Seven Page” Memo, a rough draft of three to seven pages from your paper, due by **noon on April 5**
- Complete First Draft, due by **midnight on April 12**; you will distribute the draft both to me and to a peer reviewer in the course whom I will designate, and we will meet with you during the final week of classes to discuss your draft and suggest revisions

Completion of the smaller “memo” and draft assignments are designed to help you perform well on the final paper and ease your anxiety about the final product. Moreover, since part of the objective of this seminar is to introduce you to the tasks of working historians, it’s imperative to know that drafting, outlining, planning, and getting feedback are essential parts of what historians do.

These “benchmark assignments” will not receive individual grades, because the point of them is for you to get regular, informal feedback from me and your classmates before handing in the final paper. Nonetheless, they are required assignments, and failure to complete them by the stated deadlines will make it very difficult for you to produce an “A” final paper. On days when we will

be discussing student work in class, you will be asked to leave if you do not have material to present. Unless you have a medical emergency, I will not accept these benchmark assignments late, so failure to meet the deadline means you won't get feedback from me. I should be notified about any medical emergencies or potential setbacks to completing work on time as soon as they arise.

The Final Draft of your paper is due in my email inbox by **5 p.m. on May 2**. I will distribute a grading rubric beforehand that will explain exactly how I will assess your final paper. You will be able to see this rubric long before turning in the paper, and it should help guide revisions of your drafts along the way.

Comments on Weekly Assigned Readings (25% of course grade)

In addition to being a writing intensive course, this is a reading intensive course, especially in the first half of the semester. Every week will have assigned readings, and every week I will post some reading questions on the home page of this blog. By noon on the day of our meeting, you should post a comment in response to one of these questions on the blog. While you must answer one of the questions, you can also use your comment to raise other questions of interest to you about the readings or respond to another student's comment. Days when you can expect to have comments due are indicated on the schedule below.

I will give you some feedback on your comments after our February 2 meeting, including a rough grade of your comments to date. This will give you some indication of how you are doing in the comments, but only your final grade on the reading comments will count towards your grade. An "A" on this assignment means that your comments were consistently accurate, thoughtful, based on specific evidence and examples drawn from the reading, and written in direct answer to one of the questions I posed. A "B" means your comments were mostly accurate but insufficiently supported with evidence and examples or not always relevant to the questions at hand. A "C" means you posted the comment but give little evidence of thoughtful engagement with the reading—as evidenced either by widespread inaccuracy, very limited use of the texts, clear unfamiliarity with the arguments of the book, or lack of comprehension of the readings questions posed. If you receive a grade less than "C" when I give you an initial report after February 2, you need to make an appointment to speak with me personally.

Your comment should be about 300 words, though longer posts are also acceptable. It should be free of grammatical and typographical errors. It must be posted by noon on the day of our meeting unless there is an emergency that you can document to my satisfaction; late comments will not be accepted, and missing comments will lower your grade on this assignment. You should treat your post with the same seriousness and attention to detail as you would give to a response paper handed in to me, while also taking seriously your responsibility to inform and engage your fellow classmates.

Seminar Contributions (15% of course grade)

This course will be run as a seminar, which means that your participation is crucial to its success. That participation should come mainly in two forms, which will be weighted equally:

First, you should contribute regularly to in-class discussions. Many of our class periods will be spent discussing assigned texts. That means you should come prepared to talk about the required readings and should spend time thinking about any discussion questions that I circulate beforehand. Whereas in a lecture course you might take most of your notes in class, in a seminar it's a good idea to take most of your notes before class so that you will be prepared to contribute to the discussion. As you read, jot down questions about the readings, summarize their major arguments, brainstorm potential problems with the readings, etc., and then use these notes to assist you in class.

Secondly, you should give feedback to your fellow historians in the seminar about their research projects. Informally, this means attending to and commenting on student's projects whenever we discuss them in class. Formally, it means that you will be assigned as a "peer reviewer" for one of your classmates. Towards the end of the semester, you will exchange complete rough drafts with your partner, and you will be responsible for writing a thoughtful, 300–600 word memo to him/her with comments and suggestions about the draft. You will also be required to meet with me and your peer reviewer to discuss the draft.

An "A" student will make regular, consistently excellent contributions to the intellectual community of the course, though the quality of your contributions is more important than their quantity. You are free to speak with me throughout the semester about how you are doing in class, and I encourage you to do so. Your performance in this course is ultimately your responsibility.

General Policies

Attendance: Since discussion is a crucial part of this course, attendance is mandatory. Please be aware that **more than three unexcused absences** will result in a full letter grade deduction from your grade for "contributions to the seminar" for **each additional absence** since without your presence in the seminar, I cannot assess your performance on this assignment. If you miss more than once because of a chronic medical problem that arises during the course of the semester, you should contact me confidentially right away. All absences in case of medical or personal emergency must be documented to my satisfaction.

Classroom Civility: I expect everyone to treat other members of this course with respect, just as you have the right to expect the same from me. As part of that respect, please refrain from distracting activities during class, which include interrupting your classmates during discussion, or using cell phones or laptop computers to "text" or conduct personal business.

Honor Code: The Honor Code covers all work performed in this class, and all suspected cases of plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Council. If you are unclear at any time about what constitutes an Honor Code violation in this course, it is your responsibility to clarify the issue with me before any ambiguous case arises. Please take the time to read the Honor Council's explanation of what constitutes plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty; don't assume you know the definitions of those terms until you read [the Honor System Handbook](#) carefully.

Schedule

In most cases, except where indicated below, we will be using Tuesdays to talk about and work on our research papers, and Thursdays to discuss assigned readings. However, please examine the schedule carefully so that you are aware of departures from this pattern. Also please note that there are two events outside our normal class meeting time that you are required to attend: a lecture on January 18 at Rice and a lecture at the Museum of Natural Science on March 6, for which transportation and tickets will be provided.

January 10

Course introduction and mini-lecture: “What Abolitionists Were Up Against”

January 12: The Causal Question

Davis Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 250–267, [OWL-Space](#)

January 17: The Causal Question, Cont.

Blog Comment Due

James L. Huston, “The Experiential Basis of the Northern Antislavery Impulse,” *Journal of Southern History* 56, no. 4 (November 1990), 609–640, [link](#)

Joseph Yannielli, “George Thompson among the Africans: Empathy, Authority, and Insanity in the Age of Abolition,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (2010), 979–1000, [link](#)

In addition to these two articles, you will be assigned one of the following three articles to read closely; you may skim the other two.

- James B. Stewart, “Heroes, Villains, Liberty, and License: The Abolitionist Vision of Wendell Phillips,” in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 168–191, [OWL-Space](#)
- Mary Hershberger, “Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (June 1999), 15–40, [link](#)
- Robert H. Abzug, “William Lloyd Garrison and the Birth of Abolitionism,” in *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 129–162, [OWL-Space](#)

January 18: Special Meeting

As part of this course you are required to attend a special event on January 18, 5 p.m., Humanities 117. James Brewer Stewart, an expert on past abolitionists, will be delivering a lecture on abolitionism now.

January 19

James Brewer Stewart will be visiting our class to discuss his lecture from the previous day and his paper, which will be available on [OWL-Space](#).

January 24: Working with Primary Sources

Kathryn Kish Sklar, ed., *Women's Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830–1870* (Bedford/St. Martin's), p. 1–76, plus Documents 6–12 & 14–15, required text.

January 26: Working with Primary Sources

Blog Comment Due

Ronald G. Walters, “The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism,” *American Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (May 1973), 177–201, [link](#)

Carol Lasser, “Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 1 (2008), 83–114, [link](#)

January 31: The Influence Question

Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, pp. 268–296, [OWL-Space](#)

Begin reading James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company), required text.

February 2: The Influence Question, Cont.

Blog Comment Due. Finish Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*, all pages.

February 7: Library Visit

February 9: Interracial Abolitionism

Blog Comment Due. Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828–1865* (Louisiana State University Press, 2003), all pages.

February 14

Further discussion of using primary sources. Please email me this week with a brief statement of your interests and ideas for the research project.

February 16: Interracial Abolitionism, cont.

Blog Comment Due. John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Harvard University Press, 2004)

February 21: Two Topics Memo due by noon

February 23: Working with Primary Sources, cont.

Blog Comment Due. Finish Sean Wilentz, ed. *David Walker's Appeal* (Hill and Wang, 1995), required text.

February 28-March 1: SPRING BREAK!

March 6: Historians at Work

James Oakes will be present in class, and you should also make plans to attend his lecture at the Museum of Natural Science at 6:30 p.m. Transportation will be provided.

March 8: To Be Announced

March 11

Proposals due by midnight on March 11. During this week we will schedule one-on-one meetings to discuss your progress on the paper. We will not be meeting as a group on Tuesday, March 13.

March 15

Blog Comment Due. Gale Kenny, *Contentious Liberties: American Abolitionists in Post-Emancipation Jamaica, 1834-1866* (University of Georgia, 2010), required text.

March 20

Your Primary Source Memo is due on March 20. There will be no meeting on Thursday, March 22 because of the University recess.

March 27: Making an Outline

March 29: Outline Due by Noon

April 3

We will be working on drafting your 3–7 Page Memo and discussing the writing process in class.

April 5: 3–7 Page Memo Due by Noon

April 10

During this week we will schedule one-on-one meetings to discuss your progress on the paper. We will not be meeting as a group.

April 12: Full drafts due by midnight

April 17–19: Peer Review Meetings

May 2: Final Paper Due by 5 p.m.