

H-France Salon

Volume 13, Issue 18, #8

Africa, African Diasporas, and the Early Modern Atlantic World**Rachel Jean-Baptiste**
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This is an undergraduate course that I teach on the quarter system at the University of California, Davis. It centers the continent of Africa and peoples of African descent in the formation and transformation of the Atlantic world from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries. It begins by exploring the “Atlantic world” as a concept, space, place, and period of movement, of people, ideas, and objects between Africa, Europe, and the Americas that engendered immense historical change. The course surveys the social, cultural, economic, and political consequences of this mobility, with particular attention to how societies and peoples of African descent shaped the unfolding of the Atlantic Ocean world.

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Following the travels and travails of a diverse group of African and African-descended historical actors, the course journeys through several regions in West, West-Central Africa, and Southern Africa, as well as France, Haiti, England, Brazil, and the United States. In following mainly the stories and life histories of individual men and women, we decenter the concept of “Africa” and the “African diaspora” as monolithic to uncover the complexities of identities and power relations that shaped how people sought to shape their presents and futures. In focusing on microhistories, we unearth human experiences of love, pain, gain, loss, power, powerlessness, imagination, and innovation that shaped moral and political economies for generations to come.

This is introductory and survey course covers a breadth and depth of themes: maritime and technological innovation; science; slavery and Atlantic and Africa slave trades; religion and belief; trade and commerce; sexuality, marriage and family life; the law; race and racism; resistance, revolution, and freedom; and political thought and praxis. In doing so, it aims to build critical historical thinking skills, aptitude in how to analyze and interpret primary source materials, and engagement with historiographical and epistemological thought that conveys the multidirectional and intersectional unfolding of the Atlantic world.

Course Materials:

1. Secondary texts (written by a person about events that didn't occur in their lifetime)
2. Primary source documents (an account of events that occurred in a person's life, over the course of their lifetime, or eye-witness account of event.)
3. Films, documentaries, visual sources (paintings, illustrations)

Part I: Reimagining Discovery, 1400s-1700**Week 1**

Readings this week explore the “Atlantic world” as a cross-cultural concept, space, place, period of time and introduces the thinkers, historiographical, and theoretical frameworks that provide a springboard for the centering of African diasporic peoples in knowledge production.

Course Introduction: The Atlantic Ocean World: Time, Space, and Place

John Thornton, “I am the Subject of the King of Congo: African Political Ideology and the Haitian

Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4: 2 (1993): 181-214 (CP)

Week 2**History 101: Sources, Methods, Perspectives, and Argumentation**

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History*, Chapter 1: The Power

in the Story, pp. 1-31

1492: The Controversy about Discovery

David Northrup, *Africa’s Discovery of Europe*. Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-53.

Week 3

In this week, we focus on the story of Donna Beatriz Kimpva Vita from the kingdom of Kongo (West-Central Africa, modern-day Angola), who lead a movement of Kongolese Catholicism in the 1700’s and was burned at the stake for heresy in 1706. Kongo in this period was a multicultural, multilingual, and hierarchical society. Political leaders and nobility had adopted Catholic beliefs and rituals as early as the mid-15th century, and societies wove local beliefs and Catholicism, with Portuguese Catholic clergy residing in the Kongo at the behest of the King. Kongo societies also produced a rich landscape of material cultural, notably metal religious objects in metal that incorporated Catholic and indigenous iconographies. Many of these objects are now owned and displayed in museums in Europe and the Americas. We analyze Kongolese material culture, seeking to understand what they may have meant to people at the time and to explore the question ownership and the repatriation of art to Africa in the 21st century.

West-Central Africa from 1600s-1700s (Society, Politics, and Religion): Kongo Case Study

John Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Donna Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (Introduction, Chapter 1, and 2)

West-Central Africa from 1600s-1700s, (Work, Economics, Slavery): Kongo Case Study

John Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Donna Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (Chapter 3, 5, 6)

Video: [“Visual and Material Culture in the Early Exchanges between Kongo and Europe.”](#)

Research Presentation by Cécile Fromont.

Part II: The 18th Century: Commerce and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Week 4

This week opens the narrative of European “discovery” and exploration of the Africa to explore the pathways of African historical actors’ and societies’ travel to and engagement and interaction with Europeans and European cultures in the 18th century.

How Does The Atlantic World Come About? States and Technologies

Northrop, *Africa’s Discovery of Europe* (Chapter 3)

How Does The Atlantic World Come About? Consumers, Producers, Conspicuous Consumption, and Trade

Northrup, *Africa’s Discovery of Europe* (Chapter 4)

Week 5

This week explores a little-known theme in historical knowledge: the dynamics of individual Africans and African societies that procured and provided slaves for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. We explore the story of a person known as Antera Duke from Old Calabar (modern-day South East Nigeria) who was a slave trader along the Cross River trading hub with British traders. We read excerpts from his diary, published in its original form and language and modern-day language to analyze. We also view movie excerpts dramatizing the Middle Passage to contextualize the holistic journey of those who were enslaved.

Slavery and The Slave Trade in West Africa: Case Study from Old Calabar, Southeastern Nigeria

Stephen D. Berhendt, A.J. H. Latham, David Northrup, eds. *The Diary of Antera Duke, An Eighteenth Century-Slave Trader* (Smartsite)

Introduction p. 1-9

Maps p. 17 and p. 28, Table p. 51, p. 63, and p. 74-75

Part II, p. 134-176

The Continental Passage and African Slave Trading Ports: Case Study from Old Calabar, Southeastern Nigeria

Stephen D. Berhendt, A.J. H. Latham, David Northrup, eds. *The Diary of Antera Duke, An Eighteenth Century-Slave Trader*. Part II, p. 176-219

Movies: *Adangaman* (2000), *Middle Passage* (2003)

Week 6

This week takes us to Americas, to explore legal regimes of slavery and the worlds that those who were enslaved made and remade in the Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Spanish-speaking regions. We focus legal codes that established the regulation of slave labor and the bodies and personhood of slaves in many colonies in the Americas. To understand an individual experience of slavery we zone in on *Olaudah Equiano*, through excerpts from his eighteenth-century memoir.

The Making of New World Slavery

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*

Prologue: Making Slavery, Making Race, pp. 1-15

Sue Peabody, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law in the Atlantic World, A Brief History with Documents*

French Crown, The Code Noir, p. 31-36

Spanish Slave Codes in the Americas, p. 106-113

Portuguese Crown, p. 134-136

Movie: *Roots* (1977)

The Middle Passage and New World Slavery and Life

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African, by

Olaudah Equiano (Chapter II, IV, and V)

Week 7

This week continues on the theme of the worlds that those who were enslaved made and through the concepts of creolization and Africanization, processes that encompass cross-cultural formations. To analyze these processes, we read excerpts from *Olaudah Equiano's* memoir in which he talks about his shifting identities.

Creolization and Africanization: New World Identities

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African, by *Olaudah Equiano* (Chapter VII-X, p. 128-201)

Part III: Evolution and Revolution in the 1800s

Week 8

This week focuses on Sara Baartman--often represented as The Hottentot Venus and as she came to be displayed in the sexualized racism of European iconography-- to try to understand her experiences and consciousness in travelling through Cape Town, Paris and London in the nineteenth century. We read a narrative of her life the historians who wrote it called a "Ghost Story" and "Biography." We also view a documentary, and an excerpt from a movie about her to explore questions of power, representation, voice, and post-colonial theories.

African Women and Trans-Atlantic Routes: Narrating Sara Baartman's Life History in Cape Town, Paris, and London

Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography*

Introduction-Chapter 2, p. 1-57

Chapter 4-6, p. 82-169

Images: p. 69, 76-77, 94, 112, 125, 165, 168

Sexuality, Race, and Imperialism: Sara Baartman, Colonialism and Post-Colonial Legacies

Documentary: The Life and Times of Sara Baartman. Movie Excerpt: Black Venus.

Week 9

This week focuses on the wide-ranging roles and routes that African women, often little-mentioned in histories of the Atlantic World, played in the political economy of the Atlantic

World. Readings take us to Gorée Island, Senegal and Benguela, West-Central Africa, as well as a movie journey to the United States and the story of Pocahontas to explore global and comparative histories of indigenous women in the Atlantic Ocean world.

African Women and Trans-Atlantic Urban Roots and Routes: Gorée, Senegal and Benguela, West-Central Africa

Lorelle Semely, *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire. Chapter 2: "Signares Before Citizens", p. 69-113*

Mariana Candido. "Engendering West Central African History: the role of urban women in Benguela

in the 19th century." *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 7-36

Mariana Candido. "Women's Material World in the Nineteenth-Century Benguela." In *African Women in Atlantic Africa, 1680–1880: Power, Labour and Mobility*, edited by Adam Jones and Mariana P. Candido, pp 70-85. Oxon, UK: James Currey, 2019.

Movie Excerpt: *Pocahontas*

Week 10

This week focuses on the concepts of "emancipation" and "freedom" as conceptualized by varied persons who were enslaved in varied locations in the Americas- Martinique, Saint Domingue, Brazil, Ecuador and the United States in the eighteenth century. We read excerpts from legal cases and laws in these varied locals to understand the individual pathways that those who were enslaved took to assert control over their lives, and how people deployed the law in theory and in practice.

Emancipation and Freedom: Individual Pathways

Sue Peabody, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law in the Atlantic World, A Brief History with Documents*

A Tavern Keeper Sues for her Freedom in Martinique (Binture v. la Pallu), 1705-1714, pp. 36-42

A Woman of African and European Ancestry Seeks Her Freedom in Saint Domingue, 1771-1775, pp. 54-57

The Freedom Suit of the Slave Liberata, Desterro, Santa Catarina (Brazil) 1813, pp. 141-145.

Emancipation and Freedom: The Law in Theory and Practice

Sue Peabody, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law in the Atlantic World, A Brief History with Documents*

The Somerset Case: England's Freedom Principle (1772), p. 68-74

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery (1780), p. 74-78

Constitution of the United States of America (1787), p. 78

Proclamation of the People against the Purchase of Freedom for Slaves, Ecuador (1792), p. 11-113

Freedom from Abuse, Ecuador (1794), p. 114-117

Week 11

The Haitian Revolution was a complex and transformative process and series of events that had global repercussion, and we explore these complexities by focusing on the life and afterlife of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Along with some secondary texts, we read excerpts from C.L.R. James's classic text *Black Jacobins*, both as a secondary source about the Revolution and a primary source of post-colonial Marxist thought. For global and comparative perspectives, we watch an excerpt from a 1968 movie called *Burn* about a slave revolt and creation of a republic in a fictional Caribbean locale.

The Haitian Revolution: Toussaint L'Ouverture and Political Thought

John D. Garigus and Laurent Dubois, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804, A Brief History*

with Documents. The Revolution Begins, pp. 63-85

C. L. R. James *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Chapter

4: The San Domingo Masses Begin; Chapter 6: The Rise of Toussaint.

Movie: *Burn* (1968)

The French and Haitian Revolutions: Remaking The Atlantic World

John D. Garigus and Laurent Dubois, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804, A Brief History*

with Documents. War and Independence, pp. 167-196

Charles Forsdick, "Refiguring resistance: historiography, fiction, and the afterlives of Toussaint L'Ouverture" in *The Black Jacobines Reader*, Edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Hogsbjerg

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