

Georgia State University

History 3000: Slavery and the Constitution

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GCB 421
MW 2:45-4:25 p.m.
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Barack Obama's unlikely path to the Democratic nomination hit its first bump when right-wing pundits jumped on several incendiary sermons delivered by his pastor, Jeremiah Wright. Among other things, Wright could be seen whipping his flock into a frenzy with a potent accounting of the moral crimes of the U.S. government. Ending with a flourish, "God bless the United States of America? No, God DAMN the United States of America!" Wright's statements threatened to divest Obama of the patriotic veneer necessary to appeal to the American electorate. Obama responded with a speech. On March 18, 2008, he delivered the most remarkable speech given by a major politician on the subject of race. Devoid of platitudes and sometimes stark in its assessments of racial conflict, Obama traced one of the sources of American racism to the U.S. Constitution itself. The Constitution, Obama spoke, was "stained" with the original sin of slavery.

These are powerful words. The Constitution is sacred democratic scripture. We tend to regard our founding fathers as original lawgivers, on the same plane with historic-mythic figures like Solon and Moses. To suggest that they sinned, and that their sin stained generations of their progeny, can be scandalous.

Is Obama right? Although a talented constitutional lawyer in his own right, Obama was not presenting a sustained argument in his speech. He was illustrating how the problems of the present have deep roots in the past. As historians, it is up to us to figure out precisely what the extent of the Constitution's sinful nature is. This exploration will take us to the Constitutional Convention, to visit the debates there and in the ratification conventions of the states afterward. It will take us to the Constitution's operation between Revolution and Civil War. And it will take us beyond. As Obama himself noted, the same Constitution that permitted slavery also provided means to bring it down. We must look not only at how the government created by the Constitution operated, but also how it was imagined by antebellum Americans. This takes us out of the courtroom and legislature and into the newspapers, the street debates, and even the theater. The Constitution was more than a sacred document to antebellum Americans. It was part of their popular culture. These were the generations in which the Constitution was made, put into practice, celebrated, and ultimately made a permanent part of America.

About the Syllabus:

This syllabus is only a general plan for the course—deviations may become necessary. Deviations will be presented in writing and handed out during class. The up-to-date syllabus will always be posted on Web CT.

About the Classroom

This is a class in which discussion and lecture will be mixed and mixed frequently. You are required to attend. Any more than three absences for any reason will likely result in a lowering of your grade. And show up on time.

I do not tolerate disruptions in the classroom. Turn off all cell phones, pagers, electronica, and/or anything else that makes noise. Do not text message your friends during class, or do anything else that might distract others (and, for that matter, yourself). Failure to adhere to these rules will also result in a lowering of your grade.

About Our Goals

History 3000 is about learning skills that will help you in ALL your history courses here at Georgia State, or anywhere else for that matter. These skills are not necessarily discipline-specific. Many of them are general enough to help you throughout your college career and beyond.

We have three primary goals for the course. The first is to learn how to evaluate critically historical arguments. This involves first understanding what an argument is, what separates it from an “opinion” or a “position,” and then learning how to criticize it appropriately and responsibly. We will learn how to read scholarly articles, and how to read books, and of the differences between the two.

Second, we will learn how to read historical evidence. Reading historical documents is different from reading arguments, and it is important that we develop this separate reading skill. We will also work on research strategies to produce our own, original historical work.

Third, we will work together to improve our writing skills. Writing is like any other skill—unless practiced it will atrophy. Unless critiqued, it will plateau. We will focus on writing, revising, and preparing works for final submission. Writing is also hard and it can be frustrating. But the ability to express your thoughts clearly is one of the most valuable skills that you leave college with.

About Required Reading:

Books assigned

1. Edward Countryman, ed., What did the Constitution Mean to Early Americans? (Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999). ISBN: 978-0-312-18262-5. PAPER
2. Don Fehrenbacher, The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). ISBN: 9780195158052. PAPER
3. H. Robert Baker, The Rescue of Joshua Glover: A Fugitive Slave, the Constitution, and the Coming of the Civil War (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006). ISBN: 978-0-8214-1813-0. PAPER

Reading assignments are apportioned by week, not by class. This means that you must complete the week's reading assignments before the first class period.

In addition to the assigned books, you will also occasionally be asked to look up readings online (which I will specify in handouts) or will receive additional readings from me.

About Grading:

There are required, graded materials for this class.

Essay #1	15%
Essay #2	15%
Discussion/Online Writing Env.	20%
Midterm Examination	20%
Conference Presentation	30%

You are required to turn in two **essays** by the date indicated on the syllabus. You will have your choice of topics which will be distributed, along with a grading rubric, during the course of the semester.

class discussions will occur every week. Your contribution to these discussions will be measured both by your answers to my questions and the questions you pose. In addition to discussion, you will be posting small writing assignments on the "online writing environment." These posts will be scored and will affect your discussion grade.

You are required to participate in the **online writing environment (o.w.e.)**. In order to join the online writing environment, go to <http://www.wac.gsu.edu/wow> and select History 3000. Then select my name (Profesor H. Robert Baker) Once you click this link, you will be taken to a login screen. At the bottom of the login, there is a link to sign up. You will create

your own logins and passwords. Make sure to use your real name, so that we can identify you and give you credit for your assignments.

You will note that there are 9 o.w.e. assignments listed for this course. In order to get full credit, you must complete 7 of them. You will also note that they are due the day before class by 6:00 p.m. No late assignments will be accepted, so make sure you complete the assignments well ahead of time.

The **midterm exam** will comprehensively cover readings and lecture topics. More specific information will be distributed before the exam. Bring a blue book to the exam.

The **conference presentation** will be on an original project of your own that deals with one of the themes of the course. You must gather sources, consider interpretive frameworks, and outline a proposal for a project. Your paper will be as long as it needs to be (8-10 pages is a good mark). 70% of your **conference presentation** grade will be based on the paper itself (a rubric will be distributed). The remaining 30% will be based on your formal presentation. Each student will be part of a three person panel that will present on a particular theme. Presentations will be 5-10 minutes in length, and will be formal. At the end of each panel, the audience will ask questions of the participants.

Grading Scale

You will receive letter grades to evaluate your performance. I use the following grading scale:

A = 4.0	C+ = 2.3
A- = 3.7	C = 2.0
B+ = 3.3	C- = 1.7
B = 3.0	D+ = 1.3
B- = 2.7	D = 1.0

About Academic Honesty

You are also expected to follow the guidelines for academic honesty set out in the student handbook (see <http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwcam/>), but should you have any questions or concerns about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please see me.

This has become an increasing problem with the advent of the internet. People are far too used to cutting and pasting, retrieving information and not bothering to credit its source. When you do this, you have been academically dishonest.

Think of it this way. Plagiarism is theft. If you cut and paste sections of an internet article into your essay and do not enclose it in quotes and credit the author by citing the original source, then you are stealing it. Let me go further. If you rewrite the words of the article but essentially repeat what is said there without citing the source, you are stealing it. This is plagiarism

In short, the best defense against accusations of plagiarism is to cite, cite, cite. Credit all the sources you use. It gives your reader confidence in your research to know where you went for information.

If I discover that you have plagiarized on any of your assignments, I will be forced to turn you in. Possible penalties include failing the assignment, failing the course, and expulsion from the college. It is no light matter.

So, if you have any questions about what might constitute plagiarism, come and see me about it.

Citations should follow the Chicago Manual of Style, notes-bibliography style. You can find a guide to these kinds of citations at:

<http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagofd.php>

Drops and Withdrawals:

If you are registered for a course that you do not want to take, you should drop the course. There are a few important dates that you should be aware of:

- You have **until August 22** to drop a course through GoSolar (the class won't even appear on your transcript).
- **Between August 23 and September 30** you may withdraw from a course but it will appear on your transcript as either a W or a WF (counted as an F for GPA purposes).
- **After October 1** you may withdraw but you automatically get a WF.
- You may also be administratively withdrawn for nonattendance.
- As always, double check the dates above with GoSolar and/or the registrar.

A last word

Have fun with it. History is analysis and interpretation, but it is also an act of imagination. So good travels.

Calendar of lectures, discussions, and assignments

Date	Topic	Readings and Assignments
Aug. 18	Class Introductions	None
Aug. 20	Discussion: what does it all mean?	Unit 1—3 Views of History (available on ULearn) <u>August 19, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Aug. 25	Lecture: slavery and constitutionalism in the New World	<i>What Did the Constitution Mean to Early Americans?</i> , 3-29
Aug. 27	Discussion: what makes a historical argument?	<i>What Did the Constitution Mean to Early Americans?</i> , 31-111. <u>August 26, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Sep. 1	Labor Day	Labor Day
Sep. 3	Discussion: what makes a historical debate?	<i>What Did the Constitution Mean to Early Americans?</i> , 113-63 <u>September 2, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Sep. 8	Peer review group meetings	<u>Due: draft of essay #1</u>
Sep. 10	Lecture: on the road to Philadelphia...	<i>guide to reading scholarly articles</i> <u>Due: Essay #1</u>
Sep. 15	Discussion: The Proslavery Constitution	William Wiecek, “The Blessings of Liberty”: Slavery in the American Constitutional Order.” (available on ULearn)
Sep. 17	Discussion: basic elements of constitutionalism	Unit 2—the constitution and slavery (available on ULearn) <u>September 16, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Sep. 22	What’s in a book?	<u>Bring ALL books to class</u>
Sep. 24	Debate: was the Constitution proslavery?	Fehrenbacher, <i>The Slaveholding Republic</i> , 1-48. <u>September 23, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Sep. 29	Midterm	Midterm
Oct. 1	Lecture: the international dimension of slavery	Fehrenbacher, 49-134 (skim).
Oct. 6	Discussion: what was the slave trade?	Fehrenbacher, 135-204. <u>Due: Library Quiz</u>
Oct. 8	Discussion: congressional power and historical responsibility	David L. Lightner, “The Founders and the Interstate Slave Trade,” <i>Journal of the Early Republic</i> 22 (Spring 2002): 25-51. Available on JSTOR <u>October 7, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Oct. 13	Discussion: Fugitive Slaves and the Constitution	Fehrenbacher, 205-252.
Oct. 15	Discussion: Constitutional Culture and Fugitivity	Baker, <i>The Rescue of Joshua Glover</i> , xi-25. <u>October 14, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Oct. 20	Lecture: the police power and states’ rights	Baker, 26-111.
Oct. 22	Discussion: was the Fugitive Slave Act constitutional?	Baker, 112-188. <u>October 21, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>

Date	Topic	Readings and Assignments
Oct. 27	Peer review group meetings	<u>Due: draft of Essay #2</u>
Oct. 29	Lecture: comity and slavery	<u>Due: final draft of Essay #2</u>
Nov. 3	Discussion: slavery in the territories	Fehrenbacher, 253-344 <u>Nov. 2, due: o.w.e. assignment</u>
Nov. 5	Lecture: race and slavery	Unit 4—slavery’s cultural upkeep
Nov. 10	Open office hours	Open office hours
Nov. 12	Open office hours	Open office hours
Nov. 17	Group review	<u>Due: draft of Conference Paper</u>
Nov. 19	Open office hours	Open office hours
Nov. 24	Group review	<u>Due: second draft of Conference Paper</u>
Nov. 26	Thanksgiving Break	Thanksgiving Break
Dec. 1	Conference: slavery and the constitution	Conference: slavery and the constitution
Dec. 3	Conference: slavery and the constitution	Conference: slavery and the constitution
Dec. 8	Conference: slavery and the constitution	Conference: slavery and the constitution

Bibliography:

coming soon...