

**American Antislavery: Antebellum Political Thought and Strategies of Upheaval
Taught in Spring 2017 (modified)**

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This course investigates dilemmas faced by oppositional social movements in the United States through an exploration of the political thought occasioned by the abolitionist movement. In the decades preceding the Civil War, antislavery political actors and thinkers confronted and wrote about a range of urgent problems, such as: How do the social struggle for new rights relate to a democratic society's original commitments and existing values? What means can an emancipatory movement justifiably employ, and which are most likely to bring about meaningful change? Under what conditions is violence justifiable? What attitude should one adopt vis-à-vis state institutions and human laws that one believes unjust and oppressive? What is the intersection between the struggle for legal freedom and other classes of rights? In this course, we examine antebellum American political thought to understand and assess these questions' theoretical stakes. We do so by engaging in close readings of books, essays, speeches, and short stories, written in particular by Frederick Douglass, George Fitzhugh, Harriet Jacobs, William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Wendell Phillips, Lysander Spooner, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Maria Stewart, Henry David Thoreau, and David Walker.

The course is divided into four segments.

1. We examine various anti-slavery arguments in the context of asking how they positioned themselves with respect to the American narrative. What was the relationship between slavery and the natural rights evoked in the Declaration of Independence? How could slavery coexist with democratic institutions? Was slavery an inextricable part of the American founding, or did the founding contain the seeds of its abolition?
2. We explore abolitionist rifts on highly contentious questions of strategy, namely on *how* they should act to achieve abolition. We will focus on three theoretically weighty questions other movements have had to confront as well: (a) What means to obtaining change are justified and moral? (b) What means to obtaining change are strategically sound? (c) What should be our attitude to unjust and oppressive human laws?
3. We examine abolitionism's intersection with contemporaneous transformations. The years before the Civil War saw the rise of the U.S. women's rights movement and of capitalistic mechanisms; the institution of slavery was often invoked as a comparison point in those contexts. How did the existence of slavery and the racial disparities within gender and class shape women's rights demands and "free labor" advocacy?
4. We read autobiographies written by Frederick Douglass and Harriett Jacobs. We read these autobiographies at the end in part so that we can draw out and pay attention to how they thematize issues we will have discussed throughout the course.

Required books for purchase

Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Yale University Press)
Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Foner (Chicago Review Press)
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave* (Harvard University Press)
Abraham Lincoln, *Political Writings and Speeches* (Cambridge University Press)
David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (Penn State University Press)

Course requirements

a) You will write a paper (\approx 12 pages) related to the course's themes, on a topic of your choosing. This paper should focus on the readings you have done in this course. You should turn in a one-paragraph summary of your topic by the end of Week 6. Papers are due June 6, at 3pm.

b) You will write and present a discussion question for one session. (You will sign up for a session on the first day.) You will share your question the rest of the students by 7pm the evening before via email (using Chalk). In class, I'll ask you to present your question to the class for three to five minutes, and to lead a conversation around it. All students are expected to have read the question by class.

c) You will turn in reading responses (\approx 1200 words each) for two sessions of your choice. Reading responses must be turned in via email by the start of the session about which they are written. (Note: Your reading responses cannot be turned in for the session of your discussion question.) Responses are not about summarizing the readings. You should put the readings assigned for that day into conversation with one another around an issue/theme they address or around a problem/puzzle they raise, and you should make and develop a coherent argument about this.

Your final paper will be worth 40% of your final grade. Your reading responses will each be worth 15% of your final grade. A participation grade—assessing your involvement in class and your discussion question—will make up the remaining 30%.

Other important matters:

Participation: This course, like all seminars, is a collective effort so your participation is crucial. The more people are active, the more we can work out the issues that you encounter. No question is too basic to be voiced in class, nor do you need to be certain of an answer to have thoughts on a topic. If there is something in a text that you find interesting, challenging or confusing, chances are others do as well! Class time should be an opportunity for you to raise problems you have about the text and to discuss concerns and interpretations with each other.

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class, unless you have a medical reason or a compelling personal reason requiring you to miss it. If you have such a reason, please contact me as soon as you know about it. An unexcused absence will severely lower your participation grade.

Plagiarism: Academic honesty requires you to hand in your own original work and to cite any source you draw on while writing the paper, whether you quote it directly or not. Any breach of this requirement is a very serious matter. Plagiarism will lead to a failing grade for the course, as well as to disciplinary action by the College. Talk to me if you have any question about the appropriate standards and about what it means to properly cite sources.

Computer use: You can use a laptop in class *only* to consult the readings and to take notes on the discussion. Even then I encourage you to print out the material; this will ease our conversation.

Access and Disability Accommodation: I am committed to making this course fully accessible to all enrolled students. If you require accommodations in order to participate fully in this course, please contact me. I may need to see your Accommodation Determination Letter provided by Student Disability Services. More information is available at: disabilities.uchicago.edu.

Reading Schedule

Readings preceded by a star (*) are available on Chalk; others are in the books listed above.

Part I: Slavery, race, and the American narrative

1. March 28. Introduction: American slavery

Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*

“An Appeal to the British People” (pp.31-37 only)

“Lecture on Slavery No. 1 (pp.164-170)

*Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 1-17, 21-26, 334-342

*David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*, pp. 3-44

*bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, Chapter 1

2. April 4. Natural law, natural rights, and the politics of declarations

*Declaration of Independence

*Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, Chapter 1-6

*William Harper, *Memoir on Slavery* (pp.3-12, 19-24)

*George Fitzhugh, *Sociology of the South* (pp.25-26, 82-83, 88-90, 93-95, 105-108, 172-189, 213-216) *Cannibals All!* (pp.12-13, 69, 204-206)

*Thomas Jefferson, *Notes from Virginia*, Query XIV and Query XVIII

*William Garrison, “Declaration of Sentiments” (1833) & speeches delivered on July 4th, 1854

3. April 11. The Constitution and the promise of democracy

*U.S. Constitution, provisions relating to slavery

*Roger Taney, opinion in [Dred] *Scott v. Sanford*

*William Garrison, “The Constitution and the Union”

Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*: “The Constitution and Slavery” (pp.129-133), “Change of Opinion Announced” & “To Gerrit Smith” (pp.173-175), “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro” (pp.188-206), “The Dred Scott Decision” (pp.344-358)

Abraham Lincoln, *Political Writings and Speeches*: “Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act” (pp.30 [“The Missouri Compromise...”] to pp.35), “Speech on the Dred Scott Decision” (pp.44-53), Excerpts from 1st, 4th and 5th Lincoln-Douglas debates (pp.228-232), “Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate” (pp.68-88), “On Thomas Jefferson” (pp.89-91)

*Charles Mills, “Whose Fourth of July?”

Part II: Abolitionism and political action

4. April 18. Revolt and agency

David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (pp. 2-82, 107-110)

*Maria Stewart, *Essays and Speeches*, “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality” (pp.28-30, 37-41), “An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall” (pp.56-64)

Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*: “The Heroic Slave” (pp.219-247)

5. April 25. The means of abolition: Persuasion, non-resistance, and violence

*Adin Ballou: *Christian Non-Resistance*, Chapters 1, 4 (excerpts) and 6 (excerpts)

*William Garrison, selected articles from *The Liberator*: “Editorial regarding Walker’s Appeal,” “Declaration of Sentiments Adopted by the Peace Convention,” “The Practical Working

of Non-Resistance,” “War Essentially Wrong,” “Harsh Language,” “John Brown and the Principle of Non-Resistance”

Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*: “An Appeal to the British People” (pp.38-39 only), “Is It Right & Wise to Kill a Kidnapper?” (277-280), “Peaceful Annihilation Is Hopeless” (344), “West Indian Emancipation” (358-369), “Capt. John Brown is not insane” (372-376), “Speech on John Brown” (417-421)

*Henry Wright: “No Rights, No Duties” and letter to Garrison

6. May 2: Obligations toward political government and human law

*Adin Ballou: *Christian non-resistance*, Chapter 7

Abraham Lincoln, *Political Writings and Speeches*: “The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions” (pp.11-20), “On Government:” pp.221-22

*David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” & “Slavery in Massachusetts”

*Wendell Phillips, *Should Abolitionists Vote?*

*Lysander Spooner, *The Unconstitutionality of Slavery*, Chapters 1-2 and Chapter 15

*Wendell Phillips, *Review of Lysander Spooner’s Essay*, pp.3-4 and 9-18

Part III: Intersections of antislavery struggles

7. May 9: Free labor, socialism and capitalism

*George Fitzhugh, *Sociology of South* (pp.7-51, 164-168) and *Cannibals All!* (pp.15-25, 30-32, 222-224, 235-236)

*William Harper, *Memoir on Slavery* (pp.14-18, 30-35)

Abraham Lincoln, *Political Writings and Speeches*, pp.235-239

*Horace Mann, *Slavery: Letters and Speeches*, pp.32-41

*Karl Marx: “Address of the International Working Men’s Association to Lincoln,” and *Capital*, Vol. 1 (340-344, 375-383; 414-416; 873-876; 895-900; 924-928; 1019-1020; 1031-1034)

*Maria Stewart, “Why sit ye here and die?”

8. May 16: The rise of the women’s rights movement

*Stephanie McMurry, “Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in SC”

*Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840 to 1866*: pp.78-81, 94-116, 164-169, 240-259, 285-288

*Sarah Grimke and Angelina Grimke, *On Slavery and Abolitionism*: Sarah Grimke, “Letters on the Equality of the Sexes” (8, 12-13); Angelina Grimke, “Letters to Beecher,” (11-13)

*Sojourner Truth: “Ain’t I a woman?,” “What Time of Night is it,” and “Keeping the Thing Going while Things are Stirring”

*Frances Harper: “We Are All Bound Up Together,” “Colored Women of America”

Part IV: Two autobiographies

9. May 23: Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Chapters 2, 4-12, 15-17, 18 (only pp.200-205), 20, 22 (only pp.269-272 and 284-285), 23, 25.

10. May 30: Harriet Jacobs

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: Preface, Introduction, chapters 1-11, 13-21, 24, 26-29, 32-33, 35, 37.