instructor: Rebecca Ginsburg

course title: Slavery Sites: Preservation, Commemoration, and Controversies

institution: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Slavery Sites:
Preservation, Commemoration, and Controversies
LA 590, section RG1/Afro 598
Spring 2005

Wednesdays, 6:00 – 8:30 pm
Room 18, Temple Buell Hall
Instructor: Rebecca Ginsburg

About the Seminar
The physical traces of American slavery are all around us—in the fields in which enslaved people once labored, in the mansions and townhouses in which they served their owners, in the ruins of slave cabins where they raised their own families, and upon the courthouse steps on which they were sold. This interdisciplinary seminar examines some of the theoretical and practical issues that bear on official and unofficial efforts to record and commemorate slavery through the preservation and interpretation of sites and objects associated with “the peculiar institution.”

The seminar is divided into three main components. The first two weeks are intended to provide opportunity to consider the history of slavery in the United States (focusing on 19th century southern slavery), the actual experiences of enslaved people, and the environments they inhabited and labored in. The second part of the course provides us some theoretical perspectives and tools. We will ask why modern people are so interested in exploring the past. What fascination does history hold for us? Why revisit past events, especially painful ones? What is the relationship between social memory, history, and commemoration? The last section of the seminar examines actual sites or types of sites at which slavery is currently depicted and the issues and challenges surrounded with interpreting slavery for modern audiences. During the last half of the semester we will take a field trip to St. Louis to visit a commemorative site for ourselves.

Requirements and Grading
• Weekly attendance and active participation. Please let me know in advance if you will not be able to attend a session. (10% of grade)
• Weekly response papers. These should go beyond summarizing the readings and, instead, engage in critical reflection of one or two points the authors raise or, alternatively, draw out the implications of their positions. Please do not view these papers as license to “bash” the readings. Each of the authors has something to say and deserves sympathetic and careful attention. Please feel free to include your personal reflections and responses in your papers. Much of the material we’ll be reading this semester is disturbing. There is no reason not to explore the emotional side of slavery, as long as you do so in conjunction with critical readings of the assigned texts. (40%)
• A research paper of between 15 and 25 pages that explores the issues and themes raised in the readings and discussions. The paper is due on or before the day the
final is scheduled for this class. Please follow the Chicago Manual of Style or consult the instructor if you intend to use another format (50%)  

Readings  
There are seven required books. Please buy them from the campus bookstore or your favorite alternate book source, or order them from the library:
  
  Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration and the Postbellum Landscape* (Altamira 2003)  
  
  
  Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Yale 2001)  
  
  David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Oxford 1985)  
  
  
  
  Gert Oostindie, *Facing Up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery from Africa, the Americas and Europe* (Ian Randle 2001)  
  
  The rest of the readings are available on electronic reserve.  

Schedule of Readings  
January 19 Introduction  
No readings  

Part One: Background  
January 26 Thinking About Slavery  
  
  • Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*  
  
  
  
  Feb. 2 The Landscapes of Slavery  
  
  • Vlach, *Back of the Big House*  
  
  • Mark Walston, “‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin Revisited: Origins and Interpretations of Slave Housing in the American South,” in *Southern Studies* 24 (4), 1985  
  
  • Richard C. Wade, “The Quarters and the House” and “Beyond the Master’s Eye,” in *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (1964)  
  
Part Two: Theoretical Perspectives  
February 9 Slavery in U.S. History

February 16
No seminar. Instead, please attend session of Anthology 589, Critical Museum Issues on “Displaying and Mitigating National Disgrace.” Chris Fennell will lead a discussion on slavery and race in the United States and Brenda Farnell will lead a discussion on the National Museum of the American Indian. The seminar meets from 5:00 – 8:00 pm in the Krannert Art Museum. I will be out of town this week at the College Art Association Annual Conference.

February 23 The Past
• Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*

March 2 Memory

March 9 Tourism

Part Three: Slavery Sites
March 16 Plantations I
• Eichstedt and Small, *Representing Slavery*

March 23 Plantations II, and other settings
• Barbara Burlison Mooney, “Looking for History’s Huts: An Exhibition Review of Extant Slave Housing,” forthcoming in *Winterthur Portfolio*


*Please submit a short abstract and bibliography of your proposed research topic by March 30*

March 30  Slavery and Museums
• Lisa G. Corrin, ed. selections from Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson (1994)


April 6  Artistic Representations of Slavery
(Note: We will need to re-scheduled this class due to my being out of town at Society of Architectural Historians’ Annual Conference this day.)
• Marcus Wood, Blind Memory

April 13  class cancelled. Instructor out of town at Vernacular Architecture Forum

April 20  Some International Perspectives
• Oostindie, Facing Up to the Past

April 27  Memorials to Slavery
• Shackel, Memory in Black and White

May 4  Public Controversies
• Adam Goodheart, “The Bonds of History,” Preservation (September/October 2001)

• See website http://www2.gwu.edu/~folklife/bighouse/ and follow the links to read about the controversy surrounding the Back of the Big House exhibit. Also see the following articles on reserve, all from The Washington Post:
Op-Ed, “Afraid to Face History” December 30, 1995
And read Cook v. Billington, also on reserve

- Dan Eggen, “In Williamsburg, the Painful Reality of Slavery,” Washington Post, July 7, 1999