

Walking London's Empire of Slavery

Course Code FFWO082UACB

Class venue central London venues, see below

First meeting Saturday 3rd May, 1.00pm – 5.30pm
Then : Sats 17th May, 31st May. 14th June, 28th June

Fees : £120; £60 concs

Course Leader Jane Trowell, PLATFORM

You can enrol via Birkbeck by telephone 020 7631 6651 (full fee, debit/credit card enrolments only), 9am–5pm, Monday–Friday. www.bbk.ac.uk

Course outline

Explore London's role in the trade triangle of guns and gin, transatlantic slavery and sugar through guided walks, museum visits and discussion, in the light of contemporary issues in race and politics.

On five afternoons we will uncover the wider web of trading and cultural relations at sites including the East India Docks, National Maritime Museum, British Museum and London's financial district – the Square Mile. This course is led by PLATFORM.

Aims

The course aims to:

- * Explore the history and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, in the context of present-day globalisation and questions of global equality, and in contemporary culture and arts**
- * Investigate the psychoses of slavery, both for the slavers and the enslaved, and their descendents.**
- * Utilise artefacts and the skills of specialists from the National Maritime Museum and other venues to bring these issues to life**
- * Examine the role of the heritage industry and museums in presenting history to the public**

Teaching Methods

This course is primarily taught through site visits, guided walks and investigation of objects/traces in the built environment. A variety of teaching and learning methods will be used including mini-lectures, student-led presentations, debate and discussion, and relating personal experience to the political and cultural issues at hand. Students will be expected to take an active part in shaping and animating the course.

Outcomes

You should be able to:

- * Map out the major issues around the slave trade and its impacts and legacy
- * Articulate theories around contemporary race, culture and class whose histories stretch back to the slave trade and slavery
- * Establish skills of critical and visual analysis
- * Apply methods that better enable you to use collections, artefacts and historic places as sites for critical learning and enquiry
- * Understand better your own position within social constructs of race and power

Week 1: Where are we?

Meet at Birkbeck College, Room tbc, 43 Gordon Square

The first session introduces the course and introduces key issues that will be arising over the next four sessions. Facts, terms and ideas which form the backbone to the course will be discussed, including conflicting histories of slavery, slave testimony, imperialism, post-imperialism and wider contexts of global trade and conquest. Additionally, we will debate the uses, dangers and misuses of artefacts and the built environment as a learning resource. Finally we will prepare for the following week's visit to the British Museum, including a walk around the area.

Required Reading: Whose Heritage?... by Stuart Hall from Third Text Vol 49

Recommended Reading: Class and Race from "Where we stand: class matters" by bell hooks

Week 2: The British Museum.

Meet on BM main steps under portico.

The British Museum houses a landmark and often controversial collection of artefacts and artworks from round the world, including the continent of Africa.

This session discusses the social and cultural context in which the BM was founded and built, in relation to Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and

how artefacts relating to the history of transatlantic slavery came into the collection.

Issues of interpretation and curatorship will be examined, as well as museum and government policies on returns and reparations.

Required Reading: The Transatlantic Slave Trade from “London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade” by James A Rawley

Recommended Reading: Chapter 1 from “The Corporation that Changed the World” by Nick Robins

Week 3: East and West India Docks.

Meet East India DLR stop

This session takes the form of a walk from East India Dock to West India Dock, where we examine the wider trade context for the slave trade. This involves a crucial meeting of two trade routes: the profits and practices of the East India Company in south-east Asia, India and China, and those made by the Royal African Company and its competitors in Africa, the Caribbean and Americas. We will spend the second half of the walk in the Museum in Docklands, itself housed in the former sugar warehouses of West India Dock.

Required Reading: Chapter 2 from “The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings” by Oloudah Equiano

Recommended Reading: Rebellions from “Black Ivory...” by James Walvin

Week 4: National Maritime Museum and around.

Meet at the Cutty Sark, Greenwich.

In this session we will handle artefacts from the Museum's collection which

relate to the actual traded goods of the slave trade. From physical traces of the enslaved people themselves, through to the gin and guns which Europeans sold to African slavers, and the sugar, cotton and rum which the slave plantations generated in the Americas, we will examine the nuts and bolts of the trade and its power relations.

Required Reading: King Sugar from “Bury the Chains” by Adam Hochschild

Recommended Reading: Introduction and Chapter 1 from “Black Skin, White Masks” by Frantz Fanon

Week 5: The City of London.

Meet at Liverpool St Station, Bishopsgate entrance.

This final walk looks at the political and financial interests behind the establishment of the slave trade but also its abolition. The role of the Bank of England, the interests of slave traders such as the Barclay brothers, Henry Tate, Lloyds Shipping, as well as sites of abolitionist gatherings will be explored. The complexities and tensions within abolitionists will be discussed, including the influential campaigning of African Britons such as Olaudah Equiano and Robert Wedderburn. We will also review our progress through this course and examine what has been left unexplored as well as what we have achieved.

Assessment

Reading review – 5-minute student presentation

- * critical review of a reading/piece of text that you choose from those discussed in class
- * also to be submitted in writing in up to 500 words by (date tbc)
- * accounts for 50% of possible marks for the term (25% verbal, 25% written)

and ONE of the following options.

Class journal

- * critical notes reviewing any two of the five walks/sessions
- * which documents and reflects upon what you are learning on this course.
- * The journal can take the form of a real physical diary which shows your accumulated reflections and questioning or can be a reflection that you undertake at the very end of the course on the whole process.
- * to be submitted by (date tbc)
- * accounts for 50% of possible marks for the term

OR

Exhibition review

- * Select an exhibition or museum display that you have visited and which is currently on show
- * Write a critical piece on its aims, successes and failures in the context of ideas discussed in “Walking London's Empire of Slavery”.

- * 1,500 words
- * to be submitted by (date tbc)
- * accounts for 50% of possible marks for the term

OR

Object analysis

- * Select an artefact from the National Maritime Museum, or another relevant London collection.
- * Write a critical analysis of the object in relation to its social, political and cultural context as discussed in the course.
- * Your presentation should be accompanied by appropriate images.
- * 1,500 words
- * to be submitted by 16th July
- * accounts for 50% of possible marks for the term