Course Title: HIS 304-10: *Slavery and Capitalism in American History*  
(3 credits)

Where?: Online  
When?: June 2021 Term (June 7 through July 9)  
3:15 to 5:15 p.m. on every Mon, Tue, Wed, Thur  
From July 6 through August 7, 2020

Professor: Dr. Michael J. Douma  
Office Location: Hariri 311  
Office Hours: Email me and I will respond quickly. I am also available to chat.

**Scope:** Was American slavery efficient? Was it profitable? Was slavery capitalist or its opposite? These questions, which are now very much in debate in professional historiography and in the media, are also the leading questions the course will address. In this course, students will explore the economic history of American slavery and question its relationship with capitalism. They will learn how historians have approached the study of slavery through an economic lens, and how they have balanced this with normative concerns. This is a seminar course, so it is largely organized around readings and discussion. No prerequisite in economics is required.

**Course objectives:**

1. Through discussions of economic studies of slavery, this course will teach some basic knowledge of economics and the history of economic thought.  
2. Through in-class exercises using primary sources, students will gain experience interpreting materials of the past, and learn to develop and stand by their own views.  
3. Assigned readings provide an overview of a variety of diverse topics relating to slavery, markets, finance, and management. While some common major themes will be covered, the course goes beyond the common fare of American history survey courses by pointing to important but less commonly studied phenomenon of buying and selling slaves, the economics of runaway slaves, the capital cost and depreciating of slaveholding.  
4. Through a practical research project on building a slave prices database, students will engage with and contribute to the study of the history of American slavery and capitalism.

**Grading:**

**Attendance**  
This is an online seminar with a small number of students. It meets for only 20 class periods. To maintain a strong sense of class community and discussion, it is important that you
attend each session. Students may miss two class periods at the most. Each absence beyond that will result in a reduction of one-half letter grade for the final grade in the course.

Graded Assignments:
Discussion Review Paper #1  30 percent
Discussion Review Paper #2  30 percent
Slave Prices Group Project 40 percent
Total 100 percent

Required Readings:

Mostly articles available via Georgetown’s library.
But also these books:


University Guidelines:

Exemptions will be granted for missed class periods due to the observance of any major religious holiday, emergencies, family illnesses, and other reasons as recognized by the undergraduate dean.

All possible attempts will be made to accommodate any disability.

No cheating. You should know what plagiarism is.

Should classes be canceled, the instructor will email the class to make alternative arrangements.

Writings Assignments:

*Discussion Review Papers* (2 papers at 5 pages each)
Each student will sign up to lead two discussion periods per semester. On the day of the discussion, the student is responsible for turning in a four-page paper which summarizes and responds to the assigned readings. Discussion leaders might consider reading more than just the assigned readings for the week and consider larger historiographical issues at play. The paper may present your opinions or original ideas about a topic, but your views should be backed by historical evidence. When two or more students have signed up to become discussion leaders for a particular class, the students should meet-up outside of class to prepare leading the discussion.

**Slave Prices Project:**

A classroom project for this course will be to collaborate on building a database for slave prices in the northern states: Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Delaware, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Large databases on slave prices have been produced for studying the economics of slavery in the American South, and in the Caribbean, but no similar database exists for slave prices in the North. This is unfortunately because a comparative study of slave prices might tell us a lot about why slavery flourished in some contexts and failed in others. For this project, students will scour archival sources for slave price sales. For a final paper of 5 to 8 pages, each student will describe their effort to find the data and how they interpret it. The paper will be graded based on the effort and creativity put into accumulating data, the analyses of the data, the hypotheses of what is to be tested and what the data might explain. Articles and books assigned during the semester can be cited in the final document.

**Course Schedule and Readings:**

**July 6: Introductions**

**July 7: Defining the Subject**

   (too difficult – consider replacing on syllabus)


**July 8: American Slavery in a Global Context**


July 9: Contemporary Views

George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South; or the Failure of Free Society* (1854).
[https://archive.org/details/sociologyforsout00fitz/page/n12](https://archive.org/details/sociologyforsout00fitz/page/n12) (332 short pages)

Week 2

July 13: The Slave Price Data Project

(No reading for this day. We will discuss the assignment to collect slave price data)

July 14: Contemporary Views of Slavery in the South


July 15: Classic Scholarship (review paper: Anushka Desai)


July 16: Classic Scholarship


Week 3

July 20: Quantitative Study


July 21: Domestic Slave Trade (review paper: Gabe)


July 22: Slave Prices (review paper: Anushka Desai)

Laurence Kotlikoff, “The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans, 1804-1862” Economic Inquiry 17:496-518.


July 23: Maximizing Work (Review paper: Noah Moss)


R.K. Vedder “The slave exploitation (expropriation) rate” Explorations in Economic History, 12(4) (1975), 453:


Week 4

July 27: The Efficiency Debate


July 28: Slave Labor and Free Labor (Review Paper: Noah Moss)


Gonzalez… article

July 29: Government and Slavery (review paper: Gabe)


**July 30: Runaway Slaves**


Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, *Deadweight Loss and the American Civil War: The Political Economy of Slavery, Secession, and Emancipation.* (chapter 6)

**Week 5**

*August 3: The Southern Economy*


*August 4: The Southern Economy*


*August 5: New History of Capitalism*


*August 6: Responses to the NHC*


Maybe too long
