

HIST 2361: Capitalism and Slavery

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Scholars have argued that there is an intimate relationship between the contemporary wealth of the developed world and the money generated through four hundred years of chattel slavery in the Americas and the transatlantic slave trade. Is there something essential that links capitalism, even liberal democratic capitalism, to slavery? How have struggles against slavery and for freedom and rights, dealt with this connection? This course will investigate the development of this linkage, studying areas like the gender dynamics of early modern Atlantic slavery, the correlation between coercive political and economic authority, and the financial implications of abolition and emancipation. We will focus on North America and the Caribbean from the early 17th century articulation of slavery through the staggered emancipations of the 19th century. The campaign against the slave trade has been called the first international human rights movement – today does human rights discourse simply provide a human face for globalized capitalism, or offer an alternative vision to it? Questions of contemporary reparations, rising colonialism and markets of the nineteenth century, and the 'duty' of the Americas to Africa will also be considered. Readings will include foundational texts on capitalism and a variety of historical approaches to the problem of capitalism within slavery, from economic, cultural, and intellectual perspectives. There are no prerequisites, although HIST 130, 2133, or 263 all serve as introductory backgrounds.