

African Americans in North Texas: A Public History Research Seminar

HIST 4261.002 and HIST 5100.002

Mondays, 2:00pm-4:50pm | Curry 210 | Spring 2018

Instructors:

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Course Overview:

This combined course is intended to be a capstone for undergraduate history majors (though it is not limited to history majors) and a seminar for graduate students. We will study the history of Denton County's St. John's Cemetery (also known as "Old Slave Cemetery"), the community that created it, and the people who are buried there. Students will immerse themselves in readings and discussion on the Reconstruction and New South eras of North Texas history, the creation of the Jim Crow segregation regime, and African Americans' efforts to build communities and thrive in North Texas during the half-century after Emancipation. Each student will gain hands-on research experience in primary-source archives and produce original scholarship, in the form of research papers, oral histories, and digital projects that will result in an online exhibit created by the class as a whole.

The centerpiece of this work will be an investigation of the black community that created the St. John's church and cemetery. In the aftermath of emancipation, a group of black Alabamans migrated to north Texas and established a freedmen community near Pilot Point during the 1870s. This community maintained the St. John's church and a cemetery that was active from Reconstruction through the Great Depression. In the decades since the 1930s, the church disappeared and the cemetery (which became known as "Old Slave Cemetery") remained untended and largely forgotten. Recently, however, Denton County has taken responsibility for cleaning and maintaining the cemetery. The Denton County Historical Commission (our partners in this project) has granted our class access to the cemetery whose headstones record the names of people who built a thriving African American community during the years after the Civil War.

The “Online Museum”:

The end goal of our course will be to design, build, and launch an online “museum” about St. John’s and African American life in north Texas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which will pull together your original research and insights into a digital exhibit that will be publicly available online.

What that online museum will look like, what it will include, and how we will put it together will be for us to debate and determine as a class. As such, each of you will do what professional historians do: find and interpret evidence, and then decide what our research has revealed and how best to tell that story.

That means this class will be different from most history courses you have taken. In a nutshell, instead of just consuming information in this course, you will create it. This will be a project-based class, as teams of undergraduates and grad students collaborate to research, design, and create our online museum.

Please note that you are NOT expected to have any previous skills or knowledge about building a digital project. While you will have the opportunity to learn new digital skills, your job in the course will be to do historical research and analysis, and then help us decide as a class what it all means.

Communication:

Because collaboration will be such a central part of the course, we want to be as accessible to you as we possibly can be. We will hold regular office hours throughout the semester on a first come-first served basis, but we are also happy to schedule an appointment with you outside of normal office hours.

We will also make periodic announcements (including, if necessary, changes to the course schedule) through the course’s Blackboard site, which you can access at learn.unt.edu. If we ever need to contact you directly, we will send an email to your @my.unt.edu account.

Please note: It is your responsibility to check that account regularly (or set it to forward to an account that you *do* check regularly) and to monitor the Blackboard site. If you need to contact us, call the numbers above or email the addresses above. Please don’t send an email through Blackboard, because it might not reach us.

Required Readings:

- Walter Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (UT Press, 2001; ISBN 9780292708884)
- Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (Vintage, 1999; ISBN 9780375702631)

- Michelle D. Mears, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freedmen Communities in Austin, Texas, 1865-1928* (Texas Tech Press, 2009; ISBN 9780896726543)
- Chelsea Stallings, "Removing the Danger in a Business Way: The History and Memory of Quakertown in Denton, Texas," 2015 UNT M.A. Thesis (available on Blackboard)
- In addition, we will upload articles, chapters, and primary source documents to the course's Blackboard page, as noted in the following course schedule. These are also required readings.

Grading:

- **In-class discussions of required readings (25%)**
 - A seminar class is unlike the kind of lecture-heavy format you may be used to from your other History courses. In this format, you are required to complete the reading assignments and come to class prepared to discuss them in great detail. From time to time, you will be called upon to lead discussion on some topic in the readings or on group work.
- **Writing assignments (25%)**
 - You will write several short papers on the assigned books. Each assignment will differ slightly from the others, in hopes that they will help you sharpen a variety of writing skills. (Please note that your first assignment will be due next week.)
- **Research reports (25%)**
 - We will break into small groups throughout the semester to research various aspects of our final project. Each week your group will be responsible for reporting findings back to the class. (To be clear, what you'll be doing here is somewhat similar to -- but separate from -- your discussion of required readings.)
- **Contribution to final project (25%)**
 - Our final project will be an online exhibit on African Americans in north Texas during the 1870s-1930s. It will combine all of our research and will involve considerable individual and group effort.

Our Expectations:

To be clear at the outset, you will almost certainly have to work harder and in different ways in this class than you are used to working. Unlike almost any other history course offered at this university, our class will be doing original research and publishing our findings online.

To that end, here is what we do – and do not – expect of you in the class:

- Because the class places a premium on collaboration and teamwork, we expect you to be an active and supportive participant in class discussions.
- Similarly, we – and your classmates – will expect you to be fully prepared for class discussions. That means completing and thinking about the class readings well in advance, preparing your research reports fully, and so on.

- We do not have an official attendance policy, but missing one meeting of this course is the equivalent of missing an entire week in a course that meets two or three times a week. What does that mean? It means that you cannot expect to do well in this course if you miss class more than once, or if you make a habit of arriving to class late.
- We do NOT expect any of you to already be an expert in any subject – whether it be African American history, historical research methods, contributing to a digital online exhibit, or the like. Everyone in the class will begin on the same page, and we will provide the resources and guidance needed to complete the course work.
- As such, you should ALWAYS come talk to us (and your classmates) if you have questions, concerns, or need help with anything.
- We expect everyone to be professional at all times, come prepared, and treat each other with respect and civility.

Course Learning Objectives

Over the course of the semester, we expect that you will develop and refine particular skills and abilities. Indeed, by the end of the class you'll be able to:

- Identify, explain, and contextualize key figures, events, and trends in the history of African Americans in Texas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- Place the evolution of African American life in north Texas within the larger context of the 1870s-1930s in the history of the United States.
- Conduct original research in historical archives.
- Develop new skills in various methods of historical research.
- Write an effective analytical essay.
- Develop new skills in conducting and executing a collaborative research project.

The end result, we believe, will be a high-quality digital history project that will last long after the course is completed.

Statement Regarding Academic Integrity: We encourage you to become familiar with the University's policy of academic dishonesty found in the *Student Code of Conduct* (<http://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012>). The content of the *Student Code* applies to this course, and we refer all cases of cheating and plagiarism to the Provost's office. If you do choose to cheat or plagiarize on a paper or exam you will fail the course.

Disability Statement: The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have

the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

From the UNT Dean of Students

Acceptable Student Behavior:

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.deanofstudents.unt.edu.

SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION, HARRASSMENT, AND ASSAULT: UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

UNT's Dean of Students' website offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs:

http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources_0. Renee LeClaire McNamara is UNT's Student Advocate and she can be reached through e-mail at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students' office at 940-565-2648. You are not alone. We are here to help.

Course Schedule | History 4261.002/5100.002
(Subject to change on short notice)

January 22: Introductions

- No reading.
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January 29: African-Americans in the Era of Jim Crow – Part I

- **Reading:** Andrews and Burke, [“What Does it Mean to Think Historically?”](#); McDaniel, [“How to Read for History;”](#) Litwack, *Trouble in Mind* (Chapters 1-4)
 - **Due:** Mansfield project response and review paper.
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February 5: African-Americans in the Era of Jim Crow – Part II

- **Reading:** Litwack, *Trouble in Mind* (Chapters 5-8)
 - **Due:** Litwack paper
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February 12: Life in North Texas After the Civil War

- **Reading:** Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South*
 - **Due:** Buenger paper
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February 19: Visit to UNT Special Collections // Courthouse

- **Due:** Reports on primary sources
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February 26: Freedmen Communities

- **Reading:** Mears, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home*
 - **Due:** Mears paper
 - **In Class:** Preliminary reports -- what are you finding?
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March 5: Jim Crow in Denton and North Texas

- **Reading:** Stallings, “Removing the Danger in a Business Way”
 - **Due:** Stallings paper
 - **In Class:** Presentations of proposals for how we should build the museum.
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March 12: Spring Break – No Class!

March 19: The “Nadir” of Race Relations

- **Reading:** William Carrigan, “‘A Damnable Outrage’: Mob Violence in Twentieth-Century Central Texas”; Transcripts from the UNT Oral History Program archives (available on Blackboard).
 - **Due:** Research reports -- every team reports on progress.
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March 26: Black Life During the Great Depression

- **Reading:** TBA
 - **Due:** Research reports – every team reports on progress.
 - **In class:** Reports on Omeka museums.
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April 2: Project Team Reports

- **Reading:** TBA
 - **Due:** Research reports – every team reports on progress.
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April 9: Project Team Reports

- **Reading:** TBA
 - **Due:** Presentations of initial exhibits.
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April 16: Project Team Reports

- **Reading:** TBA
 - **Due:** Class critiques of exhibits
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April 23: Project Team Reports

- **Reading:** TBA
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April 30: Assessing the project’s accomplishments and failures

- **Due:** Final Projects