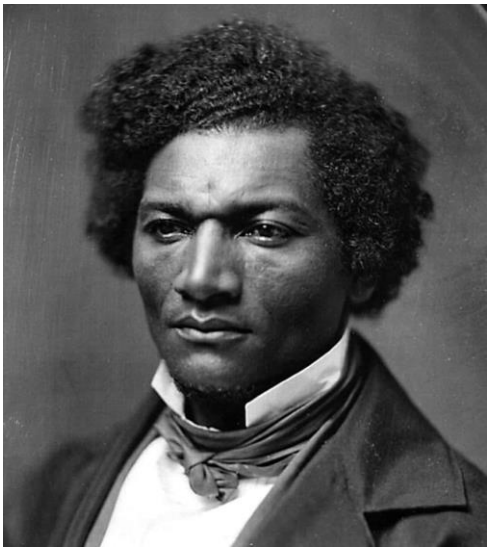
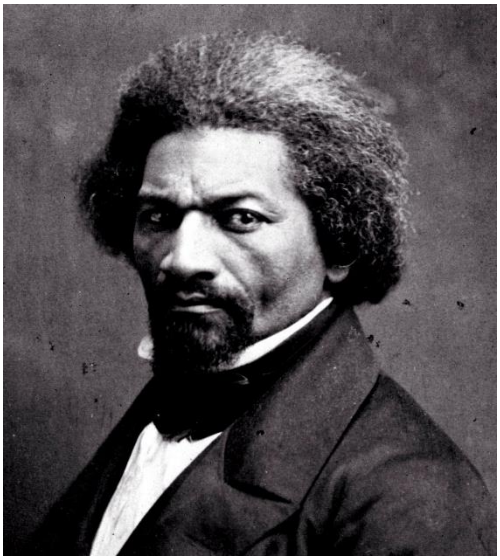


HIS 196

Black Past Lives Matter: Frederick Douglass's Rochester



Prof. John Barker & Michael Jarvis
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Office Hours: Wed. 12-2 pm (Barker)
Wed. 1-3 pm or by appt. (Jarvis)

Fall 2022
Tu Th 3:25-4:40
Robbins Library, Rush Rhees
RRL 416C

John.Barker@rochester.edu
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Overview: This introductory course is designed to introduce students to historical research, debate, writing, and public engagement using Abolitionist human rights activist Frederick Douglass and Antebellum Rochester as our common topic for inquiry and a lens through which to consider the present. Over the semester, you will learn about history as an academic discipline and how to study history at a college level. You will master the skills of 1) defining and developing a research topic, 2) critically evaluating existing historical scholarship, 3) understanding different historians' theoretical and methodological approaches, 4) identifying, evaluating and interpreting primary and secondary sources (including non-documentary evidence), 5) considering perspective and bias present in historical evidence and scholarship, and 6) constructing historical arguments and explanations orally and in written work. Over the course of the semester, you will collaborate in the creation of an original historical research project intended for a Rochester-based and national audience and develop digital media design and production skills in doing so. These team

projects will focus on unearthing and showcasing neglected parts of the African American experience before and during the Civil War. The skills you learn in this seminar will provide you with a firm foundation to build upon in subsequent courses you take here at the University of Rochester and especially prepare you to study history. At its heart, this course and your research within in demands that we recognize that Black Past Lives Matter and credit their participation in and vital contributions to shaping the United States today.

Organization: This course is, in essence, an open-ended conversation about race and history, what historians do, and how they do it. We view history as a continuing debate between scholarly interpreters, rather than as a fixed, stable script about what happened in the past. Studying Antebellum Rochester and Frederick Douglass is a means to the end of understanding history as a process and a discipline. In most weeks, our discussions will focus on a series of questions for you to consider and debate, using either material from short assignments or assigned readings. While ostensibly focused on 1830s-1860s America, your written work will also develop skills critical to historical understanding and analysis. Our classroom is also your arena for raising questions generally about academia, liberal arts, politics, identity, social justice, and the purpose of history in modern society and we conceive of this seminar as a collaborative venture in which we will all hopefully come to a better understanding of the past and present as we teach and engage each other.

Frederick Douglass – Among the most internationally famous 19th-century Americans, Douglass was a major figure in attacking and ending slavery within the United States. His autobiographical narratives and intellectual accomplishments demolished contemporary scientific racism claims and his tireless activism as an orator, newspaper publisher, community organizer, writer, debater, lobbyist, and statesman substantially mobilized public opinion against the Slave South. Between 1847 and 1872 he and his family lived in Rochester, then a hotbed of social, religious, and feminist reform. Douglass and his network of supporters and allies agitated against slavery through speeches, conventions, publishing the *North Star* and other newspapers, and by running a northern terminus of the Underground Railway to aid fugitive slaves' flight to Canada and freedom. During the

Civil War Douglass pressed Abraham Lincoln to enact Emancipation and enlist African Americans in the Union Army. Although Douglass lived in Rochester longer than in any other location, the city and especially its Black community in the 1840s and 1850s remains understudied, and unlike Jefferson, Washington, Adams, and Lincoln, no major motion picture has ever focused on this extraordinary American's life. History is always political, and the figures that nations choose to celebrate or slight speaks volumes.

ASSESSMENT

Your grade in this class is based on **class participation** (25%), a **reflective journal** that engages with weekly readings, class interaction (25%), thought prompts and experiential learning, and work linked to a group **digital research capstone project** (50%). The journal writings will be gathered and reviewed periodically over the course of the semester and will help you with strong class participation (25%). Individual and team-authored work associated with developing your **digital research capstone project**. Your class participation grade includes various short exercises, small writing assignments, and in-class debates over the course of the semester.

Class Participation: You are expected to attend every class, read the assigned material before-hand, and come prepared to answer the questions posited below and talk about what you have read. Seminars are by nature designed to be question-driven, so you will be expected to think on your feet. In contributing to discussion, quality is more appreciated than quantity. Be courteous and respectful to your peers. A history seminar is not a spectator sport: if you are silent, we will assume you are unprepared rather than brilliant but shy. If it becomes apparent that you have not done the readings or otherwise prepared for class, you will be marked as absent for that day. Unexcused absences will also cause your class participation grade to suffer.

Reflective Journaling: You will keep a journal throughout the semester with at least two entries each week that summarizes and critiques the assigned readings before class and also records your thoughts and understanding of subjects and material after class discussion. The journal is

also your place for keeping together all the research you do on your group topic and also document the work you do and skills you learn as you put together your research with other team members into a digital public project. The journal is where you let us see you thinking and individually growing over the course of the semester, and your particular contributions to the overall success of the group project. It should be personal and engaged, more than just a tally of hours spent doing stuff or reading assigned material. We will also give you specific prompts to write about in different weeks to get you to connect our course material with the world today. Your journal can take a digital form (word doc or blog posts) or you can channel your Inner Frederick Douglass and actually write in a notebook (we are happy to provide one!). KEEP YOUR JOURNALS UP TO DATE! We will periodically collect individual journals and if yours is not current you will be marked down for this.

The **Digital Capstone Project** will develop historical research and communication skills as you become a practicing public historian and agent for change. We will develop 4-6 projects collectively and incrementally throughout the semester as you identify neglected but important topics related broadly to Frederick Douglass and Rochester/New York state. Think about potential topics NOW and have one or two tentatively in mind from the start. That said, class sessions, discussions, and your exposure to primary sources may suggest other areas of investigation.

Complex collaborative projects are best developed incrementally over time. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "steady strokes fell mighty oaks." We hope you will build upon early ideas and concepts and then steadily refine and improve upon the strongest research topics that emerge. Your project grade blends your individual effort and engagement with that collectively of your project group – an arrangement that resembles professional employment scenarios in the post-college Real World.

On Oct. 27, you will turn in a written **topic proposal** identifying your topic choice, a bibliography listing at least 10 primary and secondary sources, and a statement of why this topic is of broad public significance. This will be graded and is worth 5% of your research paper grade.

The remaining digital capstone project work will be assessed collectively for the group. A **collective project prospectus** is due on Nov. 8 and is worth 5% of your grade. You will demonstrate a prototype of your project and report on its development on Dec. 1 (10% of your grade) and have a public launch of your finished project on Dec. 13, worth the remaining 30% of your grade.

COURSE READINGS:

Readings listed for a particular class should be completed by the start of that class. Besides the above books, there are numerous required articles, chapters, and excerpts for you to read on electronic reserve. You will find most of them on the course UR Student/Blackboard webpage or can get them via JSTOR (see the Rush Rhees Databases), Google Books, or the OG way: paper copies in the library stacks.

Henry Louis Gates, ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives*.

Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*

Blake McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee: The Growth of a City*, (New York: New York Classics, either edition)

Lyon, Nix and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017)

Recommended:

Nikole Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York, 2021)

TECHNOLOGY TUTORING AND CONSULTATION

This course will involve a lot of self-teaching and peer-teaching that can span from digital platforms to physical creations. The course's

recommended readings will serve as an important resource as you develop your project. For digital components, staff at the Digital Scholarship Lab can serve as key resources. The DSL is located in Rush Rhees Second Floor, next to the Humanities Center.

UR Writing, Speaking, and Argument Center (WSAP): Over the course of the semester while developing your reaction and research papers, you are allowed -- and very much encouraged -- to work with writing tutors and specialists in the College WSAP, located in Rush Rhees G-122. They will help you to improve your prose and organization and can serve as ideal readers/sounding boards as you develop your research projects. As a fortune cookie I once opened stated, "Good writing is clear thinking made visible." The writing center staff can help you to achieve this ideal -- if you work with them. YOU MUST MAKE APPOINTMENTS IN ADVANCE to work with writing tutors, so plan ahead.

Rush Rhees Research Librarians: You are also encouraged to consult Rush Rhees research librarian Lara Nicosia (lnicosia@library.rochester.edu; 585-275-9298) early and often while developing your research paper. Lara is a specialist in U.S., British, and European history sources and can help you at all stages of the research project, especially in finding relevant source materials.

Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSCP): The University of Rochester has a number of archival materials and items in their special collections related to Frederick Douglass and Rochester's history in general. We encourage you to explore these holdings as you think about understanding the city's significance and designing dynamic and exciting exhibits.

Credit Hours: The College's credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award four credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of three periods of fifty minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIS 196 are expected to devote at least one hour each week to identifying the main lines of argument in course readings, using online tutorials and software manuals to teach themselves digital techniques, conducting in depth research on their topics in local archives, and building their final projects.

Academic honesty: All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined athttp://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/. For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association's "Defining Plagiarism."

While you are required to collaborate in this course, we will take into account your specific contributions and you must submit a number of assignments on an individual basis. If you are ever unclear as to our expectations regarding academic honesty, please ask. In this course, we will cover specific challenges and best practices for citing and referencing within Public History.

Please include the UR honor pledge at the end of every paper you submit: "I affirm that I have not given or received any unauthorized help on this assignment, and that this work is my own."

A Note on Communication: It is your responsibility to get to class on time and to submit all your work on time or early in paper or electronic form. We check our email regularly during the work week and are usually good about responding to **correct and courteously worded** missives, but don't expect instant responses and do not assume we got your email. Informal and poorly punctuated/capitalized emails annoy us. Also, please communicate with BOTH of us, so we as co-instructors are both aware of your questions, needs or concerns. Finally, do not simply "disappear" if you find yourself overwhelmed or struggling: we can only work with you if we know this is happening, and an early timely intervention can do far more than damage control at semester's end.

Inclusion: The University of Rochester, this course and we are committed to inclusion and welcome students of all backgrounds and abilities. Services and reasonable accommodations are available to students with temporary and permanent disabilities, to students with DACA or undocumented status, to students facing mental health issues, other

personal situations, and to students with other kinds of learning needs. Please let us know if there are circumstances affecting your ability to participate in class. Some resources that might be of use include:

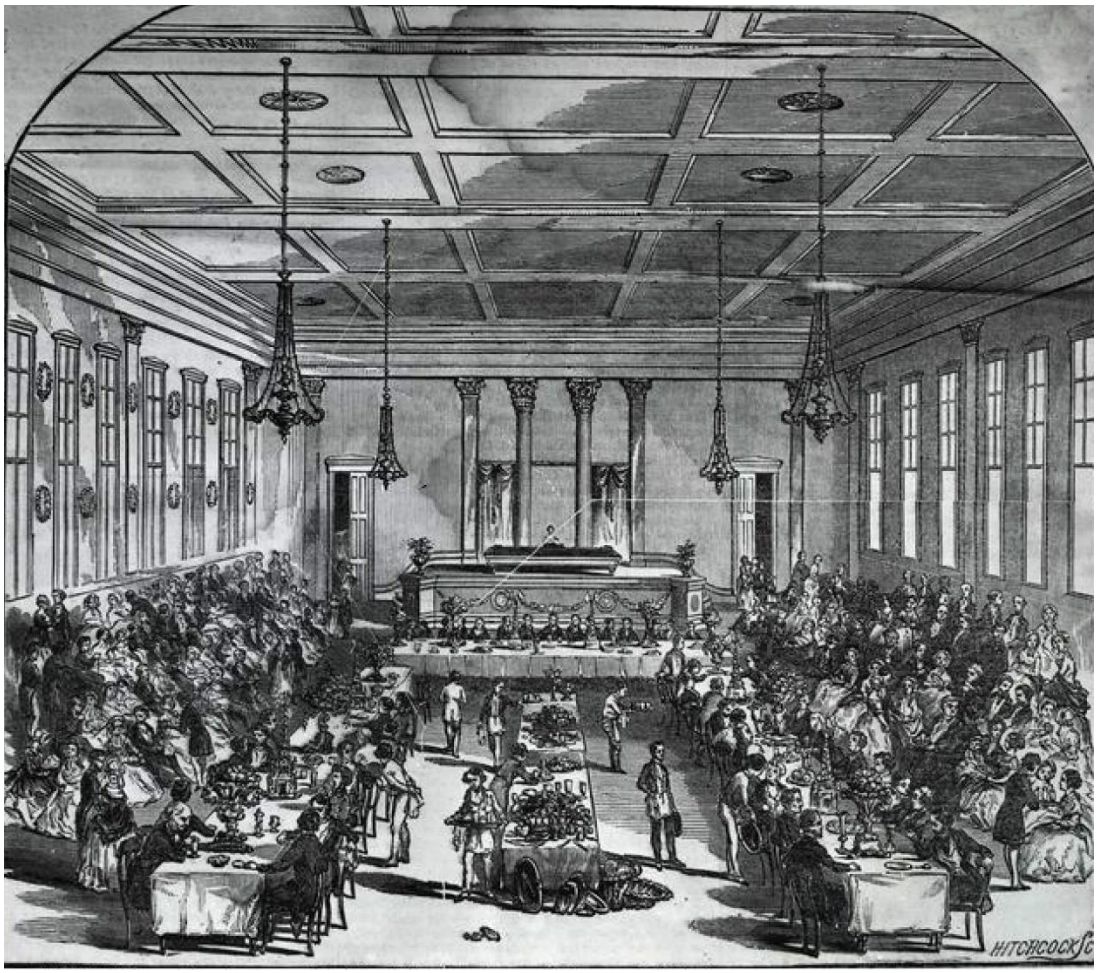
- In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. (disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall)
- Undocumented/DACA Student Support Contacts
- University of Rochester CARE Network
- University Health Center UCC (University Counseling Center)
- Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

Accommodation If you have a disability for which you require an academic accommodation, you are encouraged to contact the Office for Disability Resources and me. We will work together to find a solution. Access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. The director of disability resources is Amy Wight (amy.wight@rochester.edu). The access coordinators are Pamela Spallacci (pamela.spallacci@rochester.edu) and Elizabeth Carpenter (elizabeth.carpenter@rochester.edu). The access assistant is Anne Staub (anne.staab@rochester.edu). The Office of Disability Resources is located in Taylor Hall, can be reached via telephone at 585-276-5075, and maintains a website at http://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/.

Grading Scale For the papers and other assignment graded out of 100 points, we use the following scale:

* A: 93–100
* A-: 90–92
* B+: 87–89
* B: 83–86
* B-: 80–82
* C+: 77–79
* C: 73–76
* C-: 70–72
* D+: 67–69
* D: 63–66
* D-: 60–62
* E: Failure (59 or below)

For more information on the undergraduate grading scheme, please see: Grading Schemes — AS&E, Office of the University Registrar, https://www.rochester.edu/registrar/grading/scheme.html.



Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Meetings

Week I – Introductions

Aug. 31 (Th) - Introduction to History, Rochester, Frederick Douglass, and 19th c. America.
**** Questionnaire Due Before Class – come prepared to talk about your own background, interests, and talents**

Week II -- Getting to know Frederick Douglass, Rochester, Public History, and Each Other

Who was Frederick Douglass? What was Rochester like in the 1840s? What is Public History? Who is it for (intended audience)? Who creates it? How is it communicated? What role do historians play?

Sept. 6 (Tu) Black Past Lives Matter: American History/African American History.
READ: "Democracy," "Race," and "Justice" in *The 1619 Project*

Sept. 8 (Th) History, Research, and Public Engagement.
READ: *Introduction to Public History,* ch. 1.

Weeks III & IV – Frederick Douglass's America

Sept. 13 (Tu) Introductions: The United States, 1824-1845 (lecture)
READ "Capitalism," *The 1619 Project*

Sept. 15 (Th) Introductions: Frederick Douglass the Slave
READ – Gates, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, all

Sept. 20 (Tu) The Battle over Slavery & Frederick Douglass the Activist
READ: Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass,* Part II, chs. 1-12 and "Politics," "Citizenship," *The 1619 Project*

Sept. 22 (Th) United States in Crisis, 1845-1861 (lecture)

Week V - Rochester

Sept. 27 (Tu) Rochester, "The Young Lion of the West,"1800-1850 (lecture)

Sept. 29 (Th) Antebellum Rochester & Douglass
READ McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee*,
GUEST LECTURE, Rich Newman, RIT

Week VI - Historians, History Wars, and the Raw Stuff of History

Oct, 4 (Tu) Researching Frederick Douglass's Rochester
READ *Intro to Public History,* ch. 2.
MEET IN RBSC

Oct. 6 (Th) Researching Frederick Douglass's Rochester II
FIELD TRIP to Rundell Library (Downtown) & FD's home sites.

KEY RESOURCE: Rochester Public Library Digital Collections:
https://roccitylibrary.org/digital-collections/

Weeks VI & VII - Race, Gender, and Slavery

Oct. 11 NO CLASS, FALL BREAK

Oct. 13 (Th) Antebellum Women: Anna Douglass, Julia Griffiths & Seneca Falls. *Declaration of Sentiments*.
PRELIMINARY INDIVIDUAL PROJECT TOPIC PROPOSALS DUE.

Oct. 18 (Tu) Rochester's OTHER Fugitive Slave: Harriet Jacobs.
READ: Gates, ed. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, first half

Oct. 20 (Th) Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, second half

Week VIII - Making History

Oct. 25 (Tu) Doing Public History
READ: *Introduction to Public History,* chs. 3 & 5

Oct. 27 (Th) Brainstorming: TOPIC PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT DUE– in class, propose your potential research topic to your peers, with sources to be used, end educational goal, and media format.

Assignment: design your own individual project prospectus (physical or digital) and pitch to present to the class. The 2+ page, single-spaced prospectus should address **what** topic you're covering and what sources

you'll use, **who** you want to engage, **when and how** (schedule, steps) you'll research, design, and make it, **and why** you think it's important for the public to know about this subject. Your 10-minute pitch should cover all this and win over the rest of the class to your idea.

Weeks IX & X – Deciding, Designing, Developing

What is your project going to be & do? How are you going to make it? What is our timeline and workflow? What components (physical, digital, participatory, material, visual, interactive) will it include? Who will lead and work on which aspects? How will it reach multiple imagined audiences? What useful models can you draw upon?

Nov. 1 (Tu) Revisiting FD & Rochester Sources and Forming Groups. General class discussion of pitches and projects; divide into project teams and develop/refine a **collective prospectus** for Nov. 8 class.
MEET IN RBSC to consult potential sources

Nov. 3 (Th) **-** Class/group discussion of Message, Media, "**5W, 1H, 1SW,**" & Team Design Roles

FOR NEXT CLASS: Create a Team Project Prospectus. This should include:

1) Project Name
2) Statement of the gap/problem/need your research addresses
3) coverage of design basics of Why/What/Who/When/How and So What?
4) identification of currently existing similar Public/Digital History sites that you could draw from or improve upon
5) a detailed work plan going forward, identifying the skills and resources you will need to acquire, how you plan to acquire them, roles and responsibilities of individual team members, and a realistic schedule for research, implementation, production, and dissemination.

Nov. 8 (Tu). Getting Technical – Introductions to WordPress and ArcGIS
GUEST SPEAKER – Blair Tinker, Digital Scholar Lab.

Group Project Prospectus Due

Nov. 10 (Th) – Working Groups session and Group Pitch Presentations

Week XI – From Design to Development

Nov. 15 (Tu) Progress and Problems? Come prepared to talk about the progress your group has made and issues you've run into.

Nov. 17 (Th) Individual Group Meetings with Barker and Jarvis

Week XII – Indigenous Terrestrial Expropriation Commemoration Week

Nov. 22 (Tu) Meet in your individual work groups to coordinate.

Nov. 24 (Th) NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING

Week XIII – Prototype Presentation

Nov. 29 (Tu) Regroup after break and prepare for your prototype presentation on Thursday.

Dec. 1 (Th) Presentations of Project Prototypes (15 minutes each limit)

Week XIV – Refining, Fixing, Improving

Dec. 6 (Tu) Group meetings to reflect on Prototype feedback

Dec. 8 (Th Group work sessions, meet with Barker and Jarvis individually

Week XV – Going Public

Dec. 13 (Tu) FINAL Presentations & Project Launch Party

Final Journal entry: Reflect broadly on how you now better understand how particular pasts are communicated via public history. How has your understanding of history changed over this semester? What skills, sensitivities, and perspectives have you acquired while designing and building our exhibit? Do you consider your exhibit a success as a means of learning and as a way of teaching the public about African American and/or Rochester's past? Would you now consider a career in museums or public history attractive? Important?