

BLACK MATTERS

SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT

This essay has three goals. First, you should reflect on the meaning of the early slave trade—to the people involved, to scholars who have interpreted it, and to you. Second, you should think critically about how historians make judgments about events in the past. Third, you should use specific evidence from historical sources to develop an argument.

After reading the questions and before writing, do some thinking. Try out an argument for each question; try disagreeing with yourself. Talk your ideas through with another member of the class, with your roommate, your mother, or the person next to you on the bus. If you can make sense to them, you're more likely to make sense on paper. Think of specific examples of events, statements, or life stories that would show a reader what you are trying to convey. Think through the supplemental questions that accompany the essay topics, but don't feel you have to answer them; build your own argument and your own essay.

QUESTION ONE

1. Is Stephanie Smallwood correct to argue that as “[a] product of violence, the slave cargo constituted the antithesis of community” (p. 101)?

Answering this question will require thinking hard about the meaning(s) of community. Don't just use the dictionary: what would constitute a meaningful definition of community to you? What is the opposite of “community”? How can the evidence that remains to us allow us to see community, or prevent us from seeing it?

QUESTION TWO

2. When was the Middle Passage over?

Answering this question will require thinking hard about the meaning(s) of the Middle Passage, and of what historians call periodization: what were the features of the Middle Passage that make it a distinctive moment? What were its continuities with what came before and after, and what were the ruptures and endpoints? Does the answer to this question vary depending on who you are talking about?

QUESTION THREE

3. Design your own topic.

If there's something else you'd like to write about, you are free to do so, but be sure to contact us ahead of time to work out the precise features of a topic that you can answer in the length this essay provides, and the time you have to write it.

HOW TO START THE PAPER

For class in **Session 10**, you do not have to write a finished paper. You do not even have to write a complete rough draft. What you should do is write the **first paragraph** of what would be an essay, and then, in **outline** form, give **examples or quotes** that support the argument that you have laid out in the first paragraph. (If you are inspired to write a full draft, you can do that, but you do not have to.) Bring two copies of the beginning work with you. We will spend part of Tuesday's class on peer editing.

HOW TO FINISH THE PAPER

At the beginning of class in **Session 12**, you should hand in a finished essay of **7 to 9 pages**. You should also hand in your original paragraph and any peer editing materials from the class the previous week. We won't grade those, but they can be really helpful in helping us understand how you write, and giving feedback if you choose to revise this essay.

In your finished essay, be clear in your view on the theme you choose, state it clearly in the opening paragraph, and use direct quotations from the original works to demonstrate your points. (The assigned readings for this course should be sufficient for building a good argument; don't feel you need to do additional research.) The paper should be double-spaced with standard margins; extensions will be granted only for good reasons explained well in advance. Keep a clean backup copy on your computer in case something goes missing. Proper academic citation is required, but you may use whichever standard style you know best. Adherence to standards of academic honesty is required; if you have any questions about how to go about your writing or cite your sources, don't hesitate to ask.

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