

History 2301E
2014-2015 Community-based Research Project

“London and Canada’s Antislavery Movement”

Introduction

A major theme in the US survey course is the history of slavery, and of the Civil War (1861-65) that led to slavery’s abolition. As our text for the course, *Give Me Liberty!* points out, American freedom and American slavery were intertwined. America’s “original sin”, to use Barack Obama’s term for the institution of slavery, lies at the centre of a long history of oppression and struggles for racial equality and civil rights, reaching through the twentieth century to our own time.

As Canadians, it is sometimes easy for us to regard the system of racial slavery as something that happened a long time ago, in places far from us. But racial slavery was an institution in the Canadas. Canada also held an important place in the transatlantic movement against slavery. By focusing on the community of London (Ontario) and its connections to antislavery movements in the United States and across the Atlantic world, our class project will place the discussion of American racial slavery and American movements for racial justice in a global framework.

The project involves work with community partners who participate in the process, contribute to the framing of research questions, and share an interest in the outcome of our research. The class project provides the opportunity to conduct archival research, to use printed primary sources, and to explore the historiography of slavery and antislavery. By working with local community partners, and by working on material for the project website, you will be introduced to the emerging fields of public history and digital history.

The project asks you to think about the construction of historical knowledge and the contemporary relevance of History. How do we know what we know about the past? What is forgotten, and what is remembered? How do historians help to frame the problem of modern slavery, and what does history offer to 21st-century abolition movements?

For more information on Community-based Learning at Huron, check the HUC website [here](#)

For more information on Community-based Research at Canadian universities, check [here](#)

What is the project?

The class project will explore, document, contextualise and present research findings on the antislavery movement in 19th-century London. Here is an overview, but keep in mind that the details will depend on your work and direction.

1. **Research** begins with the community that worshipped in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (currently known as London’s “Fugitive Slave Chapel”). Digitise and transcribe a small collection of letters related to the church, conduct research to place London’s AME church in context, and use this as a starting point for further work on London’s black abolitionist community. Other primary archival materials can be introduced into the project as the research develops.
2. Work with **community partners** to explore new research, sources, and public engagement.
3. **Visit** the Library and Archives of Oberlin College, an historic antislavery institution in Oberlin, Ohio. Oberlin was an important part of the underground railroad, and was connected to

London, Canada, through a number of anti-slavery teachers and ministers, black and white, who worked in Canada through the American Missionary Association.

4. Create a **research website** for the project (digitised documents, census data, a digital map, and other material.)

5. **Host a public event** that showcases our work and helps others think about slavery both in the past and in the present. The event is scheduled for April 7th, and will feature Dr. Carol Faulkner (Syracuse), representing historiansagainstslavery.org

6. **Write a paper** about your part in the project and your experience in relation to course themes and objectives.

What is my part in the project?

The trip to Oberlin is a class-wide activity, as is the public event. In addition, you will be asked to consult a detailed list of project tasks early in the first term, and to sign up to work on the areas of the project that are of most interest to you. Even though your project work may take place in small groups, each student will write an individual reflection paper. Details about project tasks, timelines, and assignments, will be provided in class.