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“Freedom, Slavery, and the Law in Atlantic Americas”

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This course wonders, what is freedom? In an exploration of the historical transformations of bondage to emancipation, participants will address why and how forced labor was defined, and theorized, from the sixteenth century to the present. Grounding the analysis in the emergence of the transatlantic slave trade and the tensions between slavery and freedom in the Americas, the course explores how gender distinctions and racial definitions influenced the legal boundaries of coercion as well as the limitations of autonomy. By exploring how particular social actors imagined the possibilities of their lives in relation to the laws of slavery and the practices of colonialism, the course provokes a re-examination of western/northern definitions of freedom and challenges students to re-evaluate the beginnings of modernity.