

Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
Seminar Description for 2022
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“The Long Fight for a Free Caribbean, 1700s-1959”

Through our series of readings, we will consider political and social themes of Caribbean history before and after slavery, connecting them to similar histories in Latin America and the United States. This course will be of interest to ELA teachers as well as French and Spanish teachers, as we will regularly highlight works of literature that emerged from these histories. In the first weeks of discussion, we will read about the depths of plantation slavery in the region. While debates in previous decades disagreed about various elements of the social, cultural, and political legacy of enslaved people’s diverse backgrounds, we will explore readings that represent the most recent scholarship about the African Diaspora in the Caribbean, which examines these questions with new specificity.

The seminar will consider not only how trans-Atlantic slavery served as the foundation of capitalism but also how it infiltrated every element of life, from diet, to literature, to popular culture to global politics, particularly across the Atlantic in Britain and France. Towards the middle of the course, we will consider how the end of slavery arrived differently to islands across the Caribbean. Through the questions raised by the history of 19th-century Caribbean life – food security, the fight for meaningful political power, and the meaning of independence – we will develop themes that not only move beyond the caricature of Caribbean history as “paradise” but also speak to struggles against racism and the long history of liberation contests that continue in the present day.