

Working Group in Histories of Slavery and Freedom in the Black Atlantic World
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In 2011, Jennifer Morgan convened an interdisciplinary working group at New York University dedicated to the theme of slavery and freedom in the Atlantic world. A critical reassessment of the “archive” emerged as one of the central concerns of participants in the seminar. These discussions yielded the “Against Recovery?” conference (2012) and, subsequently, a special issue of *Social Text* (2015): *The Question of Recovery: Slavery, Freedom and the Archive*. Conference participants and contributors to the special issue have since published pioneering articles and monographs on the history of slavery and freedom that model creative engagement with the archive.

Now, more than a decade later, Jennifer Morgan and Shauna Sweeney (then a graduate student at NYU and now a faculty member at the University of Toronto) revisit prescient questions about the archive that continue to dominate studies of slavery, emancipation, and Black life. What constraints does the colonial archive impose on the study of Black life and history? How have scholars responded to those constraints? How has the critical conversation about the archive shifted the kinds of questions that scholars of slavery and freedom pose? What kinds of new methodologies or narrative techniques have enabled scholars to craft stories that affirm Black life out of source material that primarily indexes black commodification, criminalization, marginalization? Do the questions about the archive that we first formulated during heady days of Barack Obama’s Presidency need to be rethought in the wake of a global resurgence of white supremacist power, an accelerating climate crisis, transnational antiracist and anticolonial protests, and the multi-pronged attack on Black history in both K-12 and Higher Education? Are there entirely new questions or concerns that scholars of slavery and freedom need to address?

We invite faculty and graduate students at NYU and neighboring institutions to participate in 5 seminar meetings over the course of the academic year to discuss readings and share work-in-progress. We imagine that we will continue these gatherings into the following academic year as well. We are particularly eager to engage with scholars whose research both engages productively with critical archive studies and seeks to innovate new historical methods for recovering aspects of Black history, politics, and life. In addition to collegial conversations among seminar participants, we anticipate hosting several keynote addresses by leading scholars. We hope these conversations yield a larger conference or publication, but we are primarily interested in setting in motion a space for critical conversation and shared scholarship that will speak directly to the questions currently driving the work of seminar participants.