

Low-Stakes Assessments in a History Course

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

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The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: Low-Sakes Assessments

Before lecture on Tuesdays: on-line **quiz**

- mostly multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, multiple-correct questions
- mostly on scholarship
- intended to guide reading, emphasize key facts, test comprehension, integrate and apply new ideas and information.
- graded almost entirely by SAKAI.

Before lecture on Thursdays: on-line **reading response**

- students write a paragraph or two
- mostly focused on documentary evidence
- intended to elicit reflection, evaluation, analysis
- graded by TA (very quickly, about 1 minute each)

After recitation each week: response to synthetic question on **discussion board**

- answer to broad synthetic question connecting secondary scholarship, primary evidence, and major themes from lectures for the week.
- select group leaders post responses to the question or respond to each other
- graded by TA (students submit their best responses).

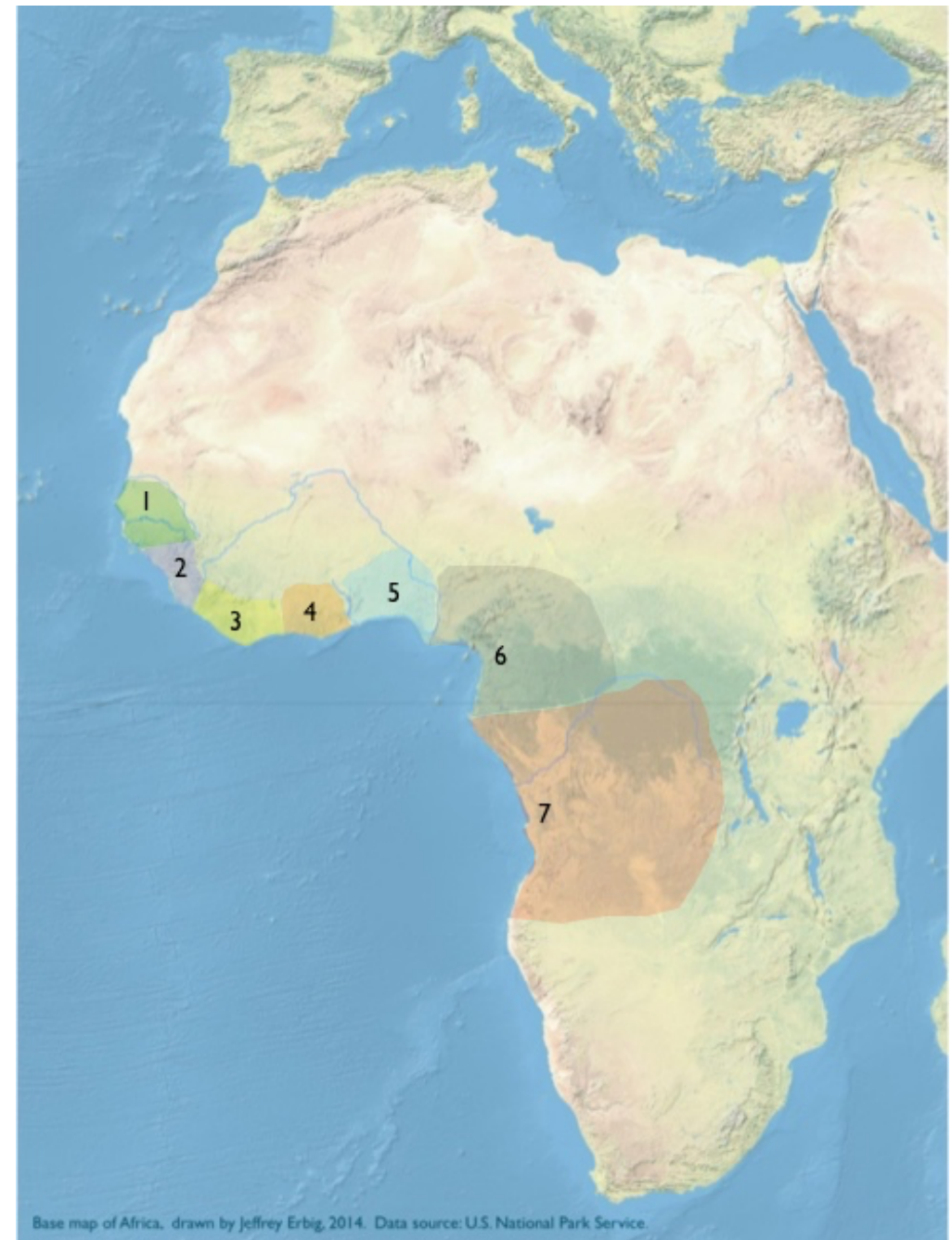
Also: essay-form midterm and final exams, two short interpretive essays

How to write good quiz questions in a history class?

Two kinds of questions about facts.

Match the following regions of Africa with their corresponding number on the map

- A. Sierra Leone
- B. Senegambia
- C. West Central Africa
- D. Windward Coast
- E. Bight of Benin
- F. Bight of Biafra
- G. Gold Coast



Two kinds of questions about facts.

Go to the Voyages Database at www.slavevoyages.org and run a search to determine the total volume of captives embarked from each of the following regions. Sort the regions in order from most captives embarked to least.

A. Sierra Leone

B. Senegambia

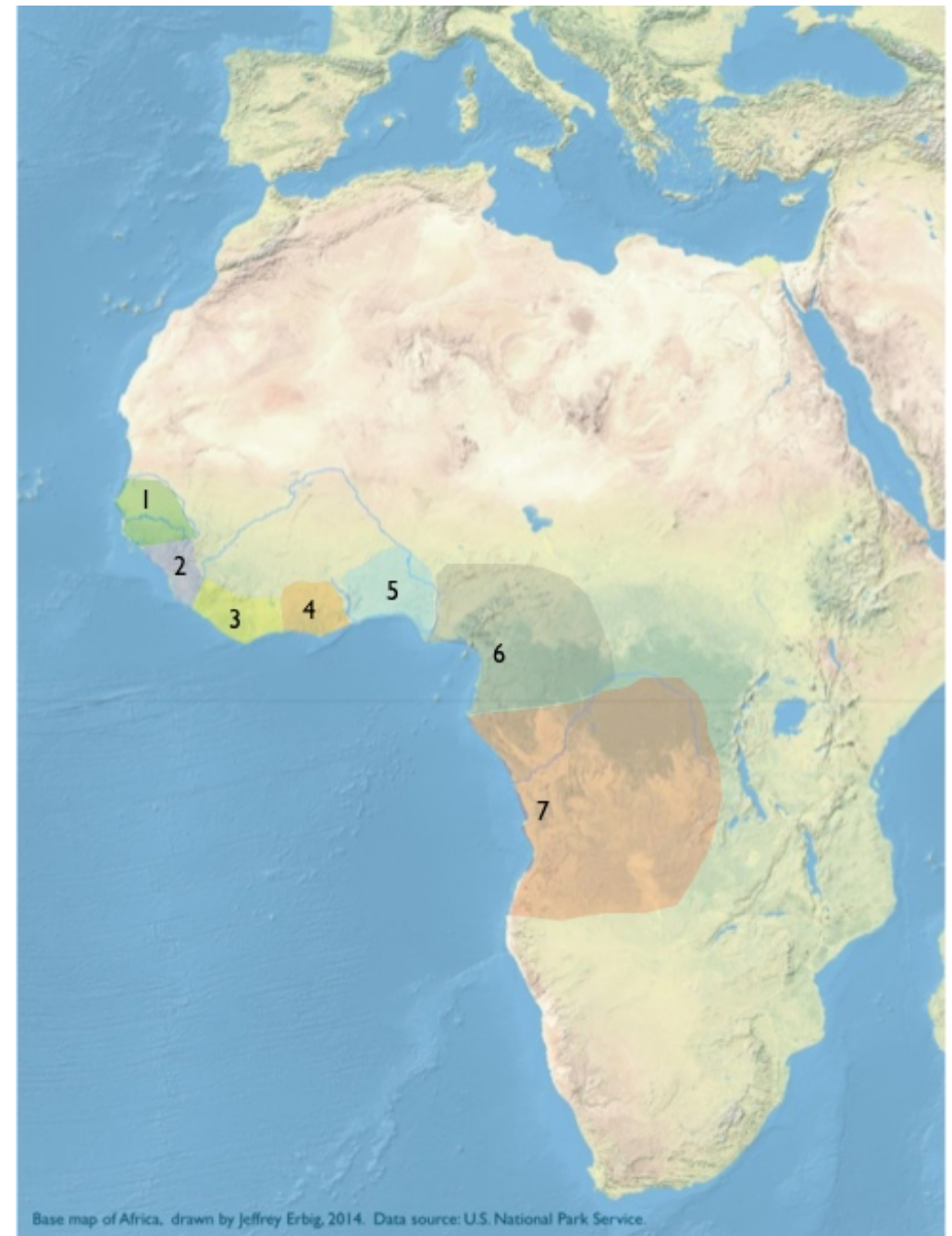
C. West Central Africa

D. Windward Coast

E. Bight of Benin

F. Bight of Biafra

G. Gold Coast



A question connecting arguments in a chapter about Brazil with a chapter about Hispaniola

Although Christopher Columbus and other early Spanish colonists attempted to establish sugar production in Hispaniola (a.k.a. Santo Domingo), these efforts were rarely significant and stopped. In contrast, Brazil quickly grew into a major sugar-producing colony for the Portuguese. What accounts for this change (select all answers that apply)?

- A. Hispaniola was unsuited to sugar production
- B. The Indians native to Hispaniola suffered high mortality rates
- C. Columbus was mostly interested in establishing a trading post empire off the coast of Asia
- D. Travel time from Africa to Brazil was about half of that to the Caribbean
- E. Portugal dominated the slave trade in this period

Applying an argument to a new scenario (rather than just repeating the argument)

Imagine that you were an enslaved person who was uprooted and transported from the Upper South to the Deep South during the Second Middle Passage. According to Berlin's account in the chapter we read for today, which of the following would you likely have experienced?

- A. Desire to reconstruct social lives, through churches, family ties, or otherwise
- B. Ever-increasing work requirements from planters
- C. Increasingly violent treatment from overseers, who were now mostly white
- D. Feelings of nostalgia about your family's African homeland
- E. Separation from your family members as you were traded to different people

Using a scholar's argument to analyze a piece of evidence

Background: John Stedman came to Suriname in the 1770s to help defeat a group of maroons, but his experiences in the colony led him to sympathize with people enslaved there. His account, published almost twenty years later, featured a series of engravings, including several disturbing images of women. View this [example](#): William Blake, “Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave” (engraving, London, Dec. 2, 1793) published in John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative, of a five year's expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Suriname* (London, 1796), vol. 1, fig. 36.



Consider this image in light of Hendrice Altkink's essay on representations of women in anti-slavery propaganda. Which of the following attributes of this image support Altkink's argument about anti-slavery discourse and imagery? *Select all that apply.*

- A. The centerpiece of this image is an enslaved woman's body
- B. The image calls attention to the woman's wounds and also to her near nakedness
- C. The image represents the emotional responses of enslaved men as marginal to the flogging
- D. This image is drawn from the vantage point of an observer, rather than the woman herself

Conclusions?

Many benefits, some limitations

Benefits:

guides reading: not just “read this text” it suggests “how to read this”
and tests their comprehension

increases time, I think, that the devote to reading. high proportion at
least looks at it.

rewards effort

multiple attempts allow them to engage texts in different ways. identify
and correct misconceptions

gives more feedback than they otherwise would have had.

more control of grade in small increments (stress, control)

making quizzes, etc, focuses my attention on what their experience
reading is going to be like, how we are using sources as tools: what I
want them to get out of their homework.

frees up class time for other things:

Limitations

requires lots of advance planning of a form I'm unaccustomed to.
subject to limitations, inelegance, and ignorance SAKAI, crashes, etc.
(not really a problem this week).

history is not a discipline in which abstract concepts can be analyzed
with randomized variables abstract scenarios are very hard to construct
in a machine-gradeable format. Vs. teaching arithmetic.

higher-order analytical questions are harder to write
(ie. most important skills we are trying to teach)

writings and oral communications skill are essentially outside of this
technology.

but students don't necessarily know how much time is being devoted to
grading these: so short-essay responses can be low-stakes for both of
us writing assignments. emphasis is more habit of writing, than on the
craft of writing.

Can do some: Put your thesis statement in bold. Give three reasons,
numbered.

Choose a quote: put it up and discuss it.

Use quiz to