SPRING 2021 SYLLABUS
HISTORY 910: READINGS IN COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA

Wednesday, 2:00-4:00 | remote/online (zoom)

Professor Gloria Whiting | E. Gordon Fox Assistant Professor of History, UW–Madison | gwhiting@wisc.edu | 5108 Mosse Humanities Building

Professor Simon Newman | Sir Denis Brogan Professor of History, emeritus, at the University of Glasgow; Affiliate, Institute for Research in the Humanities, UW–Madison | spnewman3@wisc.edu | Room 227, IRH, 432 E. Campus Mall

Office Hours: by appointment (held virtually)

Course Description:

Historians once understood the history of “Colonial North America” as the history of the thirteen British colonies that united in the American Revolution. But a generation of historical scholarship has enormously expanded the scope and our understanding of colonial America. Many scholars posit that early North American history must include what historians have come to call “Vast Early America,” encompassing the “Atlantic World” and even a broader global approach. In this course we will grapple with the debate over what properly constitutes early America, and, while we will keep North America as our point of reference, we will continually situate the British North American colonies in their broader context.

This course is historiographical in nature—that is, it is intended to help you understand how historians have wrestled with topics in early American history over time, in terms of both their choice of subject matter and their methodological approaches. However, we will spend most of our time working through key books that have shaped the field over the past decade or so. Taking advantage of the digital format, we will engage directly with the scholars who wrote the books we read. Guest historians will attend nearly all of our course meetings to discuss their contributions to and visions of the field.

Credits:

This is a three-credit course. The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of at least 135 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which
include regularly scheduled seminar meeting times, reading, writing, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

**Requisites:**

Graduate/professional standing is required.

**Requirements:**

*Participation:* This seminar requires you to read, to write, and to discuss what you’ve read and written about. Since this is a discussion-based seminar, that third element is crucial to the success of the course. We expect that each student will participate in each discussion this semester.

This course will be taught by Prof. Whiting, with Prof. Newman. We have tried to plan the course in a way that will take advantage of the fact that it will take place online. We have selected key texts, many of them published quite recently, to focus on important themes and issues, and in most weeks we will have the author of the assigned text joining us as a virtual seminar guest and participant.

We hope that this approach will have a number of benefits. You will meet and engage with leading scholars in the field, coming to grips with some of the most significant and current work. At the same time, this approach will allow us to explore historical methodology as we discuss with these scholars how and why they researched, wrote, and argued in the ways that they did. This course thereby offers professional training that differs somewhat from more conventional graduate seminars. By placing a heavy emphasis on fostering critical debate and intellectual exchange among the seminar’s participants, and by putting students and the historians whose work they read in the same (virtual) room, we expect that participants not only will sharpen their ability to interrogate scholarly work but also will learn to engage with professional historians in productive ways.

Our plan is that, after introductions, the guest will spend about 50 minutes with us. Guests will not be doing lengthy talks or presentations, but rather will engage in a discussion of their work with class members. This will usually take up the first half of the class. Our seminar guest will then leave the discussion, and we will take a short break, after which we will reconvene for the second half of the seminar.

*Discussion facilitation:* Students will take the lead in helping to facilitate our conversation—both during the first hour, with our guest, and during the second hour, after our guest leaves. Each of you will guide the discussion twice over the course of the semester, ordinarily in conjunction with one of your classmates. In the weeks you lead discussion, you (working with your partner) will be responsible for four things: 1) finding at least three academic reviews of the central text assigned for that week (or as many as possible for the books published in 2019 and 2020); 2) preparing a one-page handout for your peers that summarizes these reviews; 3) posting on the discussion board by noon on the Monday before our Wednesday seminar a series of questions to guide our discussion; and 4) opening and directing the discussion, both in the first hour and the second. (Please note that the discussion facilitator
Writing Assignments: Recognizing the challenging circumstances in which we find ourselves this semester and seeking to capitalize on the opportunities we will have to engage with an array of eminent scholars in seminar, we have fashioned writing assignments that are a bit different from those often required in graduate reading courses. Our intention is to make expectations manageable and keep the focus on preparing for spirited discussions with our visiting experts. You will have three types of writing assignments this semester.

1) **Questions:** Each week you will craft three thoughtful questions about the assigned reading(s) and/or the broader field. These questions should be submitted to the Canvas site by noon on the Monday before our Wednesday meeting. We encourage you to think broadly in preparing these questions. Your questions may well address the substance of the book under analysis, the evidence, the analysis, and the argument. But your questions might also address research methodologies, the kinds of archives and sources the historian employed and the ways in which these shaped the research and writing process, the historiography that shaped the works, and the ways in which these historians feel they fit in with, respond to/deviate from, and contribute to that historiography. Please note that the purpose of formulating these questions is to help you think through the material under analysis: the point is to prompt good discussion about the historical/historiographical issues at hand rather than simply to ask our guests lots of questions! If a single question generates an organic conversation that ripens over the course of thirty minutes or longer, we would see that as a success (rather than as a failure to ask more questions).

2) **50-Word Responses:** Over the course of the semester, each student will write five responses of 50 words (yes, exactly 50 words) and submit those responses to the Canvas site by noon on the Monday before our Wednesday meeting. These exercises in distilling historical scholarship should capture, as precisely but also capaciously as possible, the argument of the given week’s book. Students may choose which weeks to write these responses, but they should write these 50-word responses on weeks they are not already writing a book review or facilitating the seminar discussion.

3) **Book Review:** Each student will write one review of a book listed as “supplemental reading.” In 600-800 words, you should describe the book’s arguments, methods, and sources, as well as assess its strengths and weaknesses. This should be similar to what you would find in, say, the *Journal of American History* or the *William and Mary Quarterly*. Be sure to spend some time thinking about how the book you reviewed relates to the other work assigned for that week, as well as to the course material more broadly. We will expect you to enrich our discussion through your mastery of this related scholarship. These reviews should be submitted on the Canvas site by noon on the Monday before our meeting.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**
By taking this course, students will:

- become conversant in debates over the contours of the field of early American history.
- assess the methodologies, archives, sources, and forms of argumentation used by a diverse array of scholars in the field.
- sharpen their abilities to distill and dissect historical arguments.
- hone their oral and written communication skills.
- develop professionally by engaging in a productive manner with prominent early American historians.

Breakdown of Grade:

Seminar attendance and participation: 60%
Discussion facilitation: 10%
Weekly questions: 10%
Book review: 10%
Five 50-word assignments: 10%

Grading Scale:

A (92.50+); AB (87.50-92.49); B (82.50-87.49); BC (77.50-82.49); C (69.50-77.49); D (60-69.49); F (Below 60)

Readings:

You will need the books below, which will be read in full:


Most of the readings assigned in this course focus on particular topics within the broad sweep of early American history rather than providing a grand narrative. If you are ever feeling a bit lost and would like some background, I recommend referencing the following texts (which are not required):


**Computer Policy:**

Please turn off phones, email, messaging and other software during the zoom seminars to keep audio background noise to a minimum.

**Course Schedule:**

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**JANUARY 27: INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

**FEBRUARY 3: VAST EARLY AMERICA?**

Seminar guest: Karin Wulf, Director of the Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, and Professor of History, College of William and Mary.

We will start with a varied selection of shorter think-pieces, as well as a couple of podcasts. Taken together these will enable us to start thinking about “Vast Early America” and the different kinds of sprawling and connected societies in which early America was situated.

**Required Readings:**

[https://academic.oup.com/maghis/article/25/1/7/934265](https://academic.oup.com/maghis/article/25/1/7/934265)

Karin Wulf, “Vast Early America,” *Humanities*, 40, 1 (Winter 2019),  

Ryan Hall, “Blackfoot Country and the Case for a Vast Early America,” *UNC Press Blog*
Supplemental Readings:

- Forum: Beyond the Atlantic, *The William and Mary Quarterly* (Oct. 2006), 675-742
- David Armitage, “Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” *AHR* (1999) 426-45
- Nicholas Canny, “Writing Atlantic History; or, Reconfiguring the History of Colonial British America,” *JAH* (Dec. 1999): 1093-1114
- Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *AHR* (June 2006): 741-757
FEBRUARY 10: ENVIRONMENTS

Seminar guest: Peter Mancall, Professor of History, University of Southern California.

Required Readings:

Supplemental Readings:
- David Jones, “Virgin Soils Revisited” *William and Mary Quarterly* (October 2003): 703-42
- David Noble Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (1998)
- Richard Judd, “‘A Wonderfull Order and Ballance’: Natural History and the Beginnings of Forest Conservation in America, 1730–1830,” *Environmental History* 11, no. 1 (January 2006): 8–36
- Katherine A. Grandjean, “New World Tempests: Environment, Scarcity, and the Coming of the Pequot War,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 75–100;
- Susan Parish Scott, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, 2006)

**FEBRUARY 17: CREATING THE PLANTATION SYSTEM**

**Required Readings:**

**Supplemental Readings:**
- Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580-1865* (Chapel Hill, 1991)
- Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (1972)
• Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville, 2014)
• Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2007)

**FEBRUARY 24: THE FABRIC OF COLONIAL AMERICA**

Seminar guest: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Professor of History Emeritus, Harvard University.

**Required Readings:**

**Supplemental Readings:**
• Patricia Samford, “The Archaeology of African American Slavery and Material Culture,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53, 1 (1996), 87-114
• Sarah H. Hill, *Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry* (Chapel Hill, 1997)
• Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *As Various As Their Land: the everyday lives of eighteenth-century Americans* (New York, 1993)


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**MARCH 3: THE CITY UPON A HILL**

Seminar guest: Mark Noll, Research Professor of History, Regent College.

**Required Readings:**


**Supplemental Readings:**

- John F. Berens, *Providence and Patriotism in Early America, 1640-1815* (Charlottesville, 1978)
• David J. Silverman, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community Among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha’s Vineyard, 1600-1871* (New York, 2005)


• Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill, 1998)

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**MARCH 10: INDIGENOUS EARLY AMERICA—A MICRO-HISTORICAL APPROACH**

**Seminar guest:** Joshua Piker, Professor of History at the College of William and Mary, and editor of *The William and Mary Quarterly*.

**Required Readings:**


**Supplemental Readings:**


• Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

• Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015)


• Claudio Saunt, *Black, White and Indian* (New York, 2005)
• David L. Preston, *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667–1783* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009)

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**MARCH 17: mid-semester reading break**

No class meeting

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**MARCH 24: DEATH, CULTURE, AND SLAVERY**

**Seminar Guest:** Vincent Brown, Professor of History and of African & African American Studies, Harvard University

**Required Readings:**

**Supplemental Readings:**

- Karla Gottlieb, *‘The Mother of Us All’: A History of Queen Nanny Leader of the Windward Maroons* (Trenton, NJ: 2000)
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938)

**MARCH 31: AN OCEAN OF COMMODITIES**

**Seminar guest: Ben Marsh, Reader in History, University of Kent.**

**Required Readings:**


**Supplemental Readings:**

- David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (2009)
- Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985)

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**APRIL 7: BEYOND THE THIRTEEN COLONIES**

**Seminar Guest:** Cécile Vidal, Professor of History at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

**Required Readings:**


**Supplemental Readings:**

- Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, eds., *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Society, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* (Knoxville, Tenn.: 1991)
- Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gaineville, Fla.: 2007)
• Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury, eds., The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade (Philadelphia, 2013)

APRIL 14: A REVOLUTION FOR WOMEN?

Seminar guest: Rosemarie Zagarri, Professor of History at George Mason University.

Required Readings:

Supplemental Readings:
• Linda Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (Chapel Hill, 1980)
• Mary Beth Norton, Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society (New York, 2011)
• Mary Beth Norton, Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Boston, 1980)
• Sarah M.S. Pearsall, “Recentering Indian Women in the American Revolution,” in Susan Sleeper-Smith, ed., Why You Can’t Teach United States History without American Indians (Chapel Hill, 2015), 57-70.
• Ruma Chopra, “Loyalist Women in British New York City, 1776-1783 in Thomas Foster et. al., Women in Early America (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 210-224
• Holly A. Mayer, Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community During the American Revolution (Camden, S.C.: 1999)
• Carol Berkin, Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for American Independence (New York, 2005)

APRIL 21: INDIGENOUS EMPIRES

Seminar guest: Michael McDonnell, Professor of History, University of Sydney.

Required Readings:

**Supplemental Readings:**
- Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)
- Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Métis, and Mining in the Western great Lakes, 1737-1832* (Nebraska, 2000)
- James H. Merrell, *The Indians’ New World: Catawbas and their neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, 1989)

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**APRIL 28: FOUNDING FATHERS IN THE WAKE OF BLACK LIVES MATTER**

Seminar guests: Annette Gordon-Reed, Professor of Law and History, Harvard University, and Peter Onuf, Professor of History Emeritus, University of Virginia.

**Required Readings:**

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Adam Serwer’s article in The Atlantic exploring the controversy surrounding the 1619 Project

Supplemental Readings:

- David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975)
- Paul Finkelman, Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson (Armonk, N.Y., 2001)
- Miller, John Chester. The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery (Charlottesville, 1991)
- Gary B. Nash, Race and Revolution (Madison, WI, 1990)
- Sean Wilentz, No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation’s Founding (Cambridge, Mass., 2018)
- David Waldstreicher, Slavery’s Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification (New York, 2009)
- Gordon S. Brown, Toussaint’s Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution (Jackson, Miss., 2005)