

Vast Early America

Smith College, Fall 2020

Instructor: Jordan E. Taylor

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Meeting times: 9:20am–10:35am Eastern Time, Mondays and Wednesdays.

Office hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 4:00–5:00 PM (Eastern Time).

Description:

Early North America was a vast space, defined by a range of peoples and experiences. Focusing particularly on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North America, this course will examine the ways that Native peoples, peoples of African descent, and European colonizers came into contact, exchanged with one another, and often violently collided.

We will focus on three entangled historical processes: settler colonialism and its impact on both peoples and the environment; enslavement and its effect on humans and on the Atlantic economy; and the slow development of inclusionary and exclusionary ideas about “freedom” that found expression in violence, revolt, and revolution across the continent. North Americans of European, African, and Native descent played crucial roles in each of these processes.

Learning objectives:

Education is a process, not an outcome. My goal is that we grow together in this course. Here are some objectives I have for the semester.

- Argumentation: Students will develop or strengthen the ability to construct a meaningful argument using evidence.
- Audience: Students will demonstrate a keen awareness of audiences for their written work and will develop an aptitude for communicating with them.
- Analysis of primary sources: Students will apply historical thinking skills to effectively analyze primary sources.
- Foundational knowledge: Students will draw connections between the early American past and the present social, cultural, and political circumstances of the United States.
- Community: In the absence of an on-campus learning experience, many of us are feeling isolated. My goal is for us to create a meaningful community that can both sustain our learning throughout the semester.

Course materials:

All readings will be available online, through our class WordPress site.

Course format

This is an online course combining synchronous (meaning that we are online at the same time, talking to each other) and asynchronous (meaning that you can do all of your work at 2:00am) elements. It is possible to complete this course asynchronously, but I strongly recommend that you take advantage of synchronous elements as much as possible.

The course will make use of several digital tools:

- WordPress: Our WordPress site will serve as our course's home page and jumping-off-point. It will function as a syllabus with information about assignments, readings, and policies. You will also publish your written work as blog posts on WordPress.
- Exit tickets: For each class period, you should complete a short "exit ticket" that asks you to reflect briefly on that class's material.
 - Note: completing exit tickets will boost your participation grade.
- Perusall: We will be collaboratively annotating our course's readings using the platform Perusall. More information about collaborative annotation is available on the WordPress site.
 - Note: Participating in Perusall annotation will boost your participation grade.
- Slack: We will use Slack as an informal space to communicate about course expectations, as a place for you to discuss the course's material asynchronously, and to create a community for our course.
 - Note: Participating in Slack discussions will boost your participation grade.
- Zoom: During class times, we will meet for Zoom discussions to discuss the readings, your questions, and other topics relating to that day's topic. These will last from between 30 minutes to 45 minutes each day. I will also use Zoom to hold office hours.
 - Note: Participating in Zoom discussions will boost your participation grade. I will not be taking attendance for each Zoom discussion but will keep a general sense of who is participating and them and who is not.
- Video lectures: I will record short lectures and upload them to WordPress. I will attempt to keep these lectures short.
 - If you have questions about the lectures, you should ask them in Slack or by tagging me in an annotation in Perusall.

Grading

- Participation portfolios (15%; 7.5% for each half of the course)
- Activism project (20%)
- Blog posts (45%; 15% each)
- StoryMapJS project (20%)

Participation portfolios

You will turn in two brief “participation portfolios,” one halfway through the semester and the second at the semester’s conclusion. These will be Google forms. In this portfolio, you should lay out the extent of your engagement with the course and its materials over the relevant period. You should also provide some evidence to support that. For example, you should share your extent of participation in synchronous discussions, Slack, Perusall annotations, emails, and office hours. You are welcome to include annotations or comments that you made.

Finally, your portfolio must include a self-assessment. What letter grade do you deserve for participation? Why? You may also share any circumstances that constrained your participation in our class (though you are not required to disclose anything specific or personal).

I will grade your participation based on your portfolio as well as my own judgment. If our assessments differ markedly, I will explain my thinking. I will judge participation based on the following rubric:

Grade	Discussion	Engagement with instructor	Communication with Peers
A range	Extensive engagement with 3–4 discussion resources (Slack, Perusall, Zoom meetings, exit tickets).	Asks questions; attends office hours; professional communication	Extensive engagement with peers
B range	Significant to moderate engagement with 2–3 discussion resources	Moderate engagement with instructor	Moderate engagement with peers
C range	Limited engagement with 1–2 discussion resources	Limited engagement with instructor	Limited engagement with peers
D–F range	No or limited engagement with discussion resources	No engagement with instructor	No engagement with peers

Activism Project

This course is, in many ways, about injustice. Based on information from our first unit, you will seek to make people in a relevant community aware of the injustices of Native land appropriation.

1. Place: Choose a place in North America that matters to you: your hometown, the place that you are currently living, Northampton, a favorite vacation spot, etc.
2. Research the early American history of that place. Who occupied that land prior to European colonization of the continent? Which European powers came to

control it (unless it remains in indigenous hands)? What colonial processes were involved in the seizure of that land?

- a. We may discuss your chosen space in class. Readings may address it. If it doesn't come up in class, please email me and we will gather 1-2 reliable sources about it. I will place some additional resources on our course site.
 - b. This is not primarily a research project, so your research should not be extensive (i.e., anything more than 1–2 hours is excessive). However, you should take notes and keep track of your sources.
 - c. Ask yourself: who used to inhabit this land? Why don't they anymore? Were Native peoples expelled? To what end? How does this town/place describe its own history?
3. Audience: Identify an audience that *should* know about this history: local primary and secondary teachers, local government officials, readers of the local newspaper, a town's Facebook group, etc.
- a. Note: you must address yourself to a specific group, and not to something as broad as "the residents of Northampton" or "the general public." Who, specifically, would benefit most from learning this information?
 - b. You may also get *really* specific about your audience. Do you think that your family needs to know this?
4. Medium: Identify a mechanism through which you will convey your research to your audience. The medium should be designed to reach your chosen audience. For example: flyers, a social media post/account, a blog post, an email, a series of protest signs, graffiti (don't do anything illegal though), a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, etc.
5. Implement: Translate your message into a medium that will reach your audience.
- a. Note: If you wish to protect your privacy, you are not required to make anything public.
6. Reflect: Write a 1-2 paragraph reflection describing your thought process with this project, why you chose the place, audience, and medium that you did, responses, and any additional thoughts. This is your opportunity to explain to me why you deserve an "A" for this project, based on the criteria below.
7. Document: Send me a photograph, a screenshot, a document, etc. that shows how you have implemented your protest.

Criteria:

- Effort: Your project should demonstrate a significant amount of effort. As a benchmark, something that seemed to take ten minutes will score lower than something that took several hours. If you're concerned that the extent of your effort isn't clear, you should describe it in your reflection.
- Research: Your project should demonstrate a clear understanding of the colonial history of your chosen locality.
- Quality of the reflection: Your reflection should explain how your project relates to course themes, topics, materials, etc. It should also provide a brief narrative of your thought process. Why did you choose the audience that you did? Why did you think that the medium you chose would reach that audience?
- Efficacy: Your project should be designed to persuade, start conversations, and provoke change. While you are not responsible for how people respond to your work, you should design a project that could feasibly cause a response.

Blog posts

You will complete three blog posts on WordPress. More information will be forthcoming on these posts.

1. Inventory post, due Sept. 16
2. Primary source post, due Oct. 14
3. Colonial landscapes post, due Nov. 30

Inventory:

How were you taught about early American history? How about the people with whom you are living or those with whom you are in communication? What do you remember? What did early American history mean temporally, geographically, and ideologically? How have you engaged with or interacted with early American history outside of the classroom? What movies, TV shows, websites, or other media have shaped your relationship to the early American past? How do you think most people understand early American history? What associations do they have? Write a 400–500-word blog post that reflects on some of the questions above.

Slavery advertisement post:

For your second blog post, you will find and analyze a newspaper advertisement about an enslaved person.

1. Navigate to the [America's Historical Newspapers](#)
2. Click "advanced search" near the top.
3. In the first search bar, type "negro*" (with the asterisk). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the word "negro" appeared in almost every advertisement relating to free and enslaved person.
 1. The asterisk after the word "negro" is an operator that allows the search to include words that begin with that word, but which may or may not end with other letters. In this example, it would include "negroes" as well.
4. Restrict the date to the 18th century: from 1700 through 1799.
5. Click Go!
6. Your search should return about 235,685 results. That's too many. First of all, limit results by clicking "Article Type" in the left-hand toolbar, and clicking "Advertisement."
7. Next click "Publication Location" in the left-hand toolbar, and select "More Options." Choose a place that you're interested in by clicking the checkbox next to that place's name and hitting "Apply." You can start by narrowing down by state and then by city.
8. Look through the results. You can use the right-hand image preview to narrow down which ads are most likely to be relevant. You can also adjust the time span. (don't just stop with the first page of results, this isn't Google)
9. Find an advertisement that stands out and read it closely. Think about:

1. What kind of advertisement is it? Can we tell anything about the enslaved person in question? What don't we know?
2. Where is the advertisement originating from? What do you know about slavery in that place or region? If you'd like to know more, feel free to email me.
3. How does this advertisement compare to the other advertisements you've looked at? Do any details surprise you?
4. Remember that there are real people behind these advertisements. Do they come across as real people?
5. Can you tell anything about the person or persons who placed the advertisement? Does it appear more than once?
6. What else would you like to know about this story?

N.B.: If for whatever reason you have trouble accessing America's Historical newspapers, you can access these advertisements at the following sources:

- [Freedom on the Move](#). (make sure the advertisement is from the 18th century)
- [North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements](#)
- [Virginia Gazette collection](#)

Based on your analysis of the advertisement, you will write a 250–350-word blog post describing and analyzing your advertisement and reflecting on what we can and cannot know about enslaved people from these advertisements (use the readings from Oct. 19 as a guide).

Colonial landscapes:

Step outside. If that's not possible, use Google "Street View" to explore the landscape around you. Based on readings and discussion for unit 4 on colonial ecologies, reflect on what aspects of the world around you has been the product of colonialism. Take photographs or screenshots and write a 400–500-word blog post reflecting on the relationship between your physical world and the environmental history in Unit 4. Your blog post should engage substantively with the readings and use quotations when appropriate.

Note: you may focus on anywhere in North America for this project.

StoryMapJS Project

You will create a detailed spatial timeline about an aspect of early American history using [StoryMapJS](#). StoryMapJS is a very simple, easy-to-use web application for constructing a place-driven timeline.

Your StoryMap should focus on a theme or topic that appears throughout the course, such as land, labor, race, animals, or violence. It must present an argument built from course materials. You are not providing a straightforward, simple narrative, but rather analyzing sources and using them as evidence to support a claim. It should not simply list a series of events, people, and places. It should provide a clear interpretation of the past.

Course Policies

I believe you: This is a difficult time for us all. When you share something with me, my default position will always be to trust you. I understand that this pandemic and remote learning are affecting all of us in different ways, and that not everyone will be able to work at the capacity that they would otherwise expect. Anything you share with me will, of course, be confidential.

Put your health first: If you find yourself sacrificing your mental or physical health for this class, please get in touch with me so that we can work together to avoid that.

Identity: This class respects students' rights to determine their own name(s), pronouns, and identities. If you feel that these rights are not being respected, *please* speak with me.

Religious holidays: This course respects students' observance of religious holidays. Email me.

Email and Slack communication: I expect all students to regularly check email and Slack. For simple queries, please consult the syllabus before asking me. I expect you to communicate courteously and professionally over email and Slack.

Plagiarism: Using someone else's words or ideas as your own, without clearly quoting and citing them, is plagiarism. It is a violation of the Honor Code. I will follow the college's procedures about plagiarism, which means bringing the matter to your Class Dean and the Honor Board. Please do not plagiarize.

Racist language: Some of our readings use racist language, including the n-word. Others use language that was appropriate at the time that it was written, but which is now outdated. It's important to study the history of race in America, which means occasionally reading racist language. However, we do not need to speak racial epithets aloud in class.

Privacy: Your blog posts, StoryMapJS, and Activism project will eventually be publicly visible on WordPress. You may decide whether and how your name is associated with those projects.

Reading for this class: Please expect to read 30–50 pages for each class. Readings for this course are primarily argument-driven essays and books. As you read, think about the following: what is the author's argument? Why is she making that claim? What evidence is she using to support it? How do you evaluate the argument?

Simply passing your eyes over every word on the page, without thinking about it, is "lazy reading." Instead, we will practice active reading. That means reading with a purpose: annotate, pause to take notes, look up words, or ask questions, skim through repetitive sections, spend more time on meaningful sections. Reading is a conversation between you and the author. Ask them questions, challenge them, and don't take everything they say for granted.

You are not expected to read every word on every page of every reading. Your goal is to understand the reading's argument as well as the nuance and complexity that surrounds that argument. You should take some time, even if it's just two minutes, after each reading to think about what you've just worked through, and why it might be important.

Some readings are marked "Skim." For those, you should read through the introduction to get their general idea, pass quickly through the body of the text, and examine its conclusion. Readings marked "Skim" can generally be completed in 10 minutes or less.

Community standards: In our second class meeting, we will discuss our course's expectations and policies. Together, we will craft a list of "community standards" that will consist of our values and expectations for this class, which I will circulate once it's finished. Because I will be enforcing these policies, I reserve the right to "veto" any policies that I feel are unworkable. Below are the topics and questions that we can use as starting points to frame these conversations.

- **Discussion:** how can we create space for meaningful discussions?
- **Respect:** how can we ensure that everyone in the classroom feels respected and valued?
- **Zoom expectations:** how do we liberate ourselves from digital distraction during class?
- **Content warnings:** how can we prevent trauma from harming students and interfering with student learning?
- **Late work and extensions:** how can we allow for students to make mistakes and respond to stressful conditions while remaining fair to everyone?
- **Other topics?** What other issues would you like to raise or discuss?

Resources

Sexual misconduct: I am a responsible reporter regarding incidents of sexual violence and misconduct. That means that I am required to report incidents of sexual violence to our campus's Title IX Coordinator. In that event, the Title IX Office will work with a small number of others on campus to ensure that appropriate measures are taken, and resources are made available to the student. Protecting a student's privacy is of utmost concern, and all involved will only share information with those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist. See <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/title-ix>

Accessibility: It is important to me that everyone is able to succeed in this course. I will work with all students to accommodate any disabilities. We are lucky to have an excellent Office of Disability Services (ODS) at Smith. Note that they will work with you even if you don't have a formal doctor's note. Please submit requests for accommodations to ODS as soon as possible. They will generate a confidential letter that indicates the specific kinds of support that you need in the classroom. Please know that you don't need to disclose your specific disability to me, and ODS will not unless you ask them to. <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services>

I try to make this course as accessible as possible. My understanding of what accessibility means is always evolving. Please help me by letting me know if I can do anything, even if it seems small, to make the class more accessible at any point in the semester. You can do this through email, in person, or through [this anonymous Google form](#). When you submit to the Google form, I will get an email with your request but with no personal information.

Writing center: The Jacobson Center for Writing is an incredible resource that offers appointments and walk-in peer tutors to help you to develop your writing abilities. They are prepared to help students with public writing.
<https://www.smith.edu/jacobsoncenter/>

Course Schedule

Week 1:

Sept. 2: Course introduction / community standards

Unit 1: Indigenous Peoples, Settler Colonialism, and Land

Week 2:

Sept. 7: Mapping Early America

Skim: Saunt, "Go West."

Read: Kupperman, "International at the Creation," (2002). (16 pages)

Read: Wulf, "[Vast Early America.](#)"

Read: Taylor (no relation), *American Colonies*, introduction.

Explore: [Native Land](#).

Sept. 9: The "Pre-"

Read: Salisbury, "The Indians' Old World," (1996). (24 pages)

Read: Richter, *Before the Revolution*, ch. 2. (29 pages)

Week 3:

Sept. 14: Encounters

Read: Barr, "A Diplomacy of Gender," (2004). (42 pages)

Sept. 16: Germs or Genocide?

Read: Kelton and Edwards, "Germs, Genocide, and America's Indigenous Peoples," (2020). (25 pages)

Content warning: these readings discuss genocidal violence against indigenous people, though not in a graphic way.

Due: blog post #1.

Week 4:

Sept. 21: Settler Colonial Violence in New England

Skim: Grandjean, "New World Tempests," (2011). (26 pages)

Read: DeLucia, "The Memory Frontier," (2012). (23 pages)

Sept. 23: Native America and Slavery

Read: Snyder, "The Long History of American Slavery," (2013).

Read: Brett Rushforth, "'A Little Flesh We Offer You,'" (2003). (32 pages)

Unit 2: Slavery, Race, and Labor

Week 5:

Sept. 28: Race and Slavery before 1619

Skim: Phillip Morgan, "Virginia Slavery in Atlantic Context," (2019). (23 pages)

Read: Jennifer Morgan, *"Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder,"* (1997). (26 pages)

Sept. 30: The Middle Passage

Skim: Rediker, *"History from below the Water Line,"* (2008). (14 pages)
Content note: a brief discussion of suicide on p. 293; racial violence and violence involving sharks.
Read: Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, ch. 2.
Explore: [Slave Voyages](#).

Week 6:

Oct. 5: 1619, Colonial Virginia, and the "Origins Debate"

Read: Hannah-Jones, ["Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true,"](#) (2019).
Read: Painter, ["How we think about the term 'enslaved' matters,"](#) (2019).
Read: Goetz, *"Rethinking the 'Unthinking Decision,'"* (2009). (15 pages)
Read: Edmund Morgan, *"Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox,"* (1972). (25 pages)
Note: This reading uses 1970s terminology to refer to the indigenous people and enslaved people it examines.
Skim: Rice, *"Bacon's Rebellion in Indian Country,"* (2014). (25 pages)
Due: activism project.

Oct. 7: Race and Indigeneity

Read: Shoemaker, *"How Indians Got to Be Red,"* (1997). (20 pages)
Read: Merrell, *"The Racial Education of the Catawba Indians,"* (1984). (22 pages)

Week 7:

Oct. 12: Fall Break

Oct. 14: Forest day

Week 8:

Oct. 19: Slavery in the Northeast

Read: Warren, *"The Cause of Her Grief,"* (2007). (19 pages)
Content warnings: racialized sexual violence throughout this essay.
Read: Waldstreicher, *"Reading the Runaways,"* (1999). (30 pages)
Explore: [Taylor, Enquire of the Printer](#). (2020)
Due: participation portfolio #1.

Unit 3: War, Rebellion, and Revolution

Oct. 21: Slave Revolts

Read: Thornton, *"African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion,"* (1991). (13 pages)
Read: Sharples, *The World That Fear Made*, introduction (2020).
Explore: Brown, ["Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760–1761."](#)

Week 9:

Oct. 26: Revolts in Spanish America

Read: Gutierrez, "The Pueblo Revolt and Its Aftermath," (1991). (12 pages)

Read: Saunt, *West of the Revolution*, ch. 2.

Due: blog post #2.

Oct. 28: The Second Hundred Years' War

Read: Taylor, *American Colonies*, ch. 18.

Read: Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, ch. 2. (24 pages)

Week 10:

Nov. 2: Slavery, Indigeneity, and the American Revolution

Read: Parkinson, *Common Cause*, excerpt.

Skim: Okoye, "Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries," (1980). (26 pages)

Read: Ostler, "[The Great Fear of 1776](#)," (2019).

Nov. 4: The American Republic and Settler Colonialism

Read: Snyder, "Conquered Enemies, Adopted Kin, and Owned People," (2007). (34 pages)

Content note: this article contains some graphic descriptions of wartime violence.

Skim: Gopnik, "[We Could Have Been Canada](#)," (2017).

Read: Dowd, "Indigenous Peoples without the Republic" (2017). (23 pages)

Unit 4: Colonial Ecologies

Week 11:

Nov. 9: New England's Colonial Ecologies

Read: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, preface, ch. 1–3. (55 pages)

Nov. 11: New England's Colonial Ecologies

Read: Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 4, 6. (44 pages)

Week 12:

Nov. 16: The Great Plains

Read: Hämmäläinen, "The Politics of Grass," (2010). (37 pages—ok to skim parts)

Nov. 18: Animals

Read: Anderson, "King Philip's Herds," (1994). (24 pages)

Unit 5: Making Meaning

Week 13:

Nov. 23: Abundance, Reciprocity, and Greed

Read: Kimmerer, "Maple Nation," and "The Honorable Harvest."

Read: Turner, "Thanksgiving."

Week 14:

Nov. 30: Memory and Colonialism

Read: Hartman, "Lose Your Mother"

Read: O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, introduction.

Due: blog post #3.

Dec. 2: Conclusions

Dec. 7: (no class held)

StoryMapJS project due.

Participation portfolio #2 due.