

HL2027

Early American Literature
Professor Christopher Trigg

Seminar: Thursdays, 14:30-17:30
LHS-TR+4

Description

To whom do I owe my allegiance? What is the highest power that rules over me? Do I possess control over my own fate? Where is my home? Life in colonial and revolutionary America forced many men and women to ask themselves these questions. In this course, students will examine the answers of some of the most significant figures in early American literature.

With adventurer playwright Aphra Behn, students will reflect on the transformative promise of the New World. How did Virginia offer ordinary men and women the chance to live like royalty? In the life of Olaudah Equiano, the class will encounter the other side of the colonial enterprise: how could a man of royal descent cope with being sold into slavery? Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity amongst the Wampanoag finds proof of God's supervising plan in the midst of bitter hardship. Reading Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, students will consider how a man from the same New-England Puritan culture could come to consider himself the master of his own destiny.

Covering a wide variety of literary forms and genres, this course will serve as a solid foundation for further study of the colonial and revolutionary periods. It will also give students a fresh perspective on issues of personal and national sovereignty that continue to be controversial today.

Required Texts

Warner and Jehlen (eds), *The English Literatures of America: 1500-1800* (Routledge [9780415908733](#))

Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* (Dover - [0486796191](#))

All other texts (those marked with a *) to be posted online.

Assessment

Participation and Preparation 10%

Bibliographic Exercise 15%

Term Paper 25%

Final Exam 50%

Participation and Preparation

Each Monday, two discussion questions will be posted in a thread on the course website. Students must write brief answers to both of these questions and post their answers on the thread. Answers must be posted online by 12 noon on Wednesdays, the day before class. Answering these questions is compulsory.

Bibliographic Exercise

Working in small groups, students will identify an interesting (and brief) early American text from an online database. They will then produce an edition of the text,

including a short introduction, a bibliographic record, and any footnotes necessary for the comprehension of a general reader. Students should be able to finish most of this assignment in class on the 8th of September.

Late Penalties

Late work submitted without an approved extension will be penalized one half-mark per day late – an A paper submitted one day late would drop to an A-, etc.

Plagiarism

Please see the Division of English's statement on plagiarism [here](#).

Seminar Schedule

1. 11th August

The idea of America

Amerigo Vespucci, from the letter to Pier Soderini (1504), J&W 19-23.

2. 18th August

Colonial Virginia: Explorers, Settlers, Rebels

Aphra Behn, *The Widow Ranter* (1689), J&W 233-291.

3. 25th August

Colonial Massachusetts: Puritan Ideology

John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630), J&W 151-159.

Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan* (1634), J&W 168-174.

William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1630-1650), J&W 175-191.

4. 1st September

The Captivity Narrative and The Indian Question

Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), J&W 494-497.

Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), J&W 349-382.

5. 8th September

The Book in the Atlantic World

Bibliographic Exercise.

6. 15th September

The Salem Witch Trials

Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative* (1692), J&W 475-481.

*Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692).

 ("Enchantments Encountered," viii – xxxi; "An Hortatory Address," 36-58;

 "The Tryal of G.B.," 70-77; "The Tryal of Susanna Martin," 85-94)

Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700), 482-487.

7. 22nd September

The Black Atlantic: Olaudah Equiano

*Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789).

Recess -----

8. 6th October

Slaves and Slave Holders

Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph* (1700), J&W 817-820.

John Saffin, *A Brief and Candid Answer* (1701), J&W 821-825.

*Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized* (1706).

9. 13th October

Pirates and Fortune Hunters

*Selected texts posted online.

In-Class Peer Review Session——bring draft of term paper.

10. 20th October

New Puritans: Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin

*Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741).

Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography I & II* (1793), J&W 725-770.

11. 27th October

Writing the Revolution: Jefferson and Freneau

Thomas Jefferson, *Draft of the Declaration of Independence* (1776), J&W 858-862.

Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, #1 (1776), J&W 868-873.

Philip Freneau, “On the Emigration to America and Peopling the Western Country” (1784), J&W 1104-1106; “The Indian Burying Ground” (1788), 1107-1108; “To the Americans of the United States” (1797), J&W 1110-1111.

12. 3rd November

Early American Novels: *The Coquette*

Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette* (1797).

13. 10th November

Revision and Exam Preparation——term paper due in class.