

George Mason University  
Department of History and Art History

Spring 2021  
Thursday, 7:20-10:00 PM via Zoom  
(links in “Weekly Meetings” section of Blackboard site)  
Online Office Hours: 5-6 PM Thursdays & by appointment

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## **HISTORY 535/615/635**

### **OCEANS AND EMPIRES: NORTH AMERICA IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD**

This course examines the place of North America in the wider early modern world from approximately 1500 to 1800. As European empires expanded, they reshaped connections and power relations among different parts of the world, bringing North America into that world in a variety of new ways. We will draw on new and classic literature to explore the ways in which historians have framed and interpreted these processes. Throughout, the focus will be on the circulation of goods, people, and ideas through this world and on the structures and labor that facilitated this movement. Topics will include maritime trade, settler colonialism, slavery and the slave trade, consumption and material culture, systems and technologies of knowledge production, and imperial warfare.

#### **REQUIREMENTS**

##### **Class Participation:**

Active and informed participation in discussion is **the** central element of the course. Our meetings will consist entirely of discussion of the assigned readings, so it is essential that you do the reading (both the main text and any required supplemental reading) and come prepared to discuss it. You can use the questions on the “Helpful questions” document (in the “Assignments” section of the Blackboard site) as a way to get started on thinking through the reading.

Discussion serves as a way of exploring and thinking about historical works and questions that gives us a more complete and complex understanding than any single point of view can provide. Classes are more enjoyable and intellectually rewarding for everyone when as many people as possible contribute. Participating in scholarly discussions of this type is a skill in and of itself, and working on this skill is part of the purpose of the course. Thus, regular, positive contributions to discussion are a baseline expectation for the class.

##### **“Weekly” Reaction Papers:**

You must write eight (8) one- to two-page reaction papers on the weekly reading. The particular weeks are up to you and don’t need to be decided in advance, just make sure you do eight. Also note that an additional week will be taken up by your book review essay (see below)—you may not submit a reaction paper for that week.

The reaction papers should have **one paragraph summarizing the book’s argument** and

project as succinctly as possible without sacrificing accuracy and important nuances, and **another paragraph on your critical response** to this argument/project and its execution in the book (in this case “critical” does not necessarily mean negative, but rather engaged and analytical). Your response should focus on **substantive intellectual and interpretive issues** rather than matters that are primarily aesthetic or formal (e.g., there were too many big words, it was boring, you felt maps would have been useful, or you would have preferred footnotes to endnotes). These papers are due via Blackboard (in the “Assignments” section) before class on the day we discuss the reading.

### **Book Review Essay:**

On a week of your own choosing, you must write a six- to seven-page (6-7) analysis of the reading for that week. This should not be a chapter-by-chapter summary of the main book’s contents, but rather a higher-level analysis of the book’s argument and method, exploring the key evidence and themes that support and develop that argument. You should also consider the contrast or complement offered to the main book’s argument and themes by both of the supplementary readings for that week. This paper is due via Blackboard (in the “Assignments” section) before class on the day we discuss the reading.

### **Final Paper:**

There are four options for the longer final paper topic—the first option is the default option that is most widely useful for most students. The other options are more specialized and geared towards students in particular situations in which those assignments may be more useful to their academic and intellectual progress.

*Option One:* Set questions on course readings. I will two two or three questions about major themes in the course, and you can write an extended (12-15 page) essay in response to one of them, drawing on a wide sampling of the course readings. This is the default option, and the one that is usually the most useful for M.A. students seeking to synthesize what they have learned this semester and for Ph.D. students preparing for exams.

*Option Two:* Your own thematic analysis of course readings. You may select a particular theme from the course that interests you, and write a 12-15 page essay on that theme, drawing on *at least* four of the books we read and *at least* four of the supplementary readings. Consult with me if you wish to pursue this option.

*Option Three:* Historiography paper. If you have a specific interest in a particular topic in colonial American, imperial, or oceanic history, you may elect to write a paper exploring the existing literature on that topic, laying out the major works and interpretations, existing debates, underexplored or neglected areas, and possible future directions for research. This option requires substantial extra reading, so it is most appropriate for those who would particularly benefit from building this kind of deep background—those intending to do research on the topic, or those for whom specific historiographical and bibliographic knowledge is important. The ideal length of these papers will vary depending on the nature of the topic explored, but 15 pages should be considered a realistic minimum. Consult with me if you wish to pursue this option.

*Option Four:* Primary source research paper. Students with a research agenda in colonial American, imperial, or oceanic history may do a medium-length, focused primary source

research paper as the final paper for this course. Consult with me if you want to pursue this option.

The final paper is due via Blackboard (link will be in the “Assignments” section) on Friday, May 7.

### **Grading:**

Reaction Papers: 20%

Book Review: 20%

Final Paper: 30%

Class Participation: 30%

## **READINGS**

### **Structure of Weekly Readings:**

Each week (except the first week), one book will serve as the core reading that we all will read. There will also be a selection of supplementary readings of chapter or article length that relate to some aspect of the core reading. You will be required to read one (1) of these supplementary readings each week in addition to the core reading, and, along with others who have read the same supplementary material, to explain it to the rest of the class and bring it into the discussion when relevant.

### **Core Reading:**

The following books are required reading for everyone:

- Brown, Vincent. *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020.
- Delbourgo, James. *Collecting the World: Hans Slone and the Origins of the British Museum*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Frank, Caroline. *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011
- Greer, Allan. *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Hanna, Mark G. *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. (Available online via JSTOR)
- Mapp, Paul. *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. (Available online via ProQuest E-Book Central and JSTOR)
- McNeil, J. R. *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Merritt, Jane T. *The Trouble with Tea: The Politics of Consumption in the Eighteenth-Century Global Economy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.
- Romney, Susanah Shaw. *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Connections and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. (Available online via JSTOR)
- Schneider, Elena A. *The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. (Available online via JSTOR)
- Scott, Julius. *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2018.
- Smallwood, Stephanie E. *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

- Warsh, Molly A. *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492-1700*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. (Available online via JSTOR)

### **Accessing Required Supplementary Readings:**

The supplementary readings are usually journal articles or chapters in edited collections of essays. I will provide links to these readings in the “Supplementary Readings” section of the class Blackboard site.

You can also find the journal articles (and some chapters) by visiting the GMU Library’s homepage ([library.gmu.edu](http://library.gmu.edu)) and using the main search box. For journal articles, a combination of the author’s last name and a distinctive combination of words from the title usually works to locate the article.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

All work in this course is governed by the George Mason University honor code:

*To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: **Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.***

For details on how the honor system at GMU works, consult the university catalog (<https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>). More information can also be found at the GMU [Office of Academic Integrity](#).

### **OTHER POLICIES AND IMPORTANT INFORMATION:**

Administrative Dates (Consult advising and Registrar’s Office for more information)

Last day to add: Monday, February 1

Last day to drop with full tuition refund: Friday, February 12

Final Drop Deadline, with 50% tuition penalty: Tuesday, February 16

Unrestricted Withdrawal Period: Wednesday, February 17-Monday, March 1

#### Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services ([ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu)) at (703) 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

#### GMU Email Accounts

Students must use their MasonLive email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See [masonlive.gmu.edu](http://masonlive.gmu.edu) for more information.

#### Useful Resources

Writing Center ([writingcenter.gmu.edu](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu)): see website to schedule online sessions

Counseling and Psychological Services ([caps.gmu.edu](http://caps.gmu.edu)): SUB I, Room 3129, (703) 993-2380

University Catalog: [catalog.gmu.edu](http://catalog.gmu.edu)

Other university policies: [universitypolicy.gmu.edu](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu)

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

### January 28: The Atlantic and Beyond

Alison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities," *American Historical Review* 111:3 (June 2006): 741-757.

Peter Coclanis, "Atlantic World or Atlantic/World," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63:4 (October 2006): 725-742.

### February 4: Commodity and Empire in the Early Spanish Caribbean

Molly A. Warsh, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492-1700*.

#### Supplementary Readings

Ida Altman, "Key to the Indies: Port Towns in the Spanish Caribbean, 1493-1550," *The Americas* 74:1 (January 2017): 5-26.

Marcy Norton and Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, "The Multinational Commodification of Tobacco, 1492-1650," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 251-273.

### February 11: Disease and the Fate of Empire in the Caribbean

J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*.

#### Supplementary Readings

David S. Jones, "Virgin Soils Revisited," *William and Mary Quarterly* 60:4 (October 2003): 703-742.

Matthew Mulcahy and Stuart Schwartz, "Nature's Battalions: Insects as Agricultural Pests in the Early Modern Caribbean," *William and Mary Quarterly* 75:3 (July 2018): 433-464.

### February 18: Trade, Law, Crime, and Politics in Making the British Empire

Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740*.

#### Supplementary Readings (optional this week due to length of main book)

Lauren Benton, "Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47:4 (October 2005): 700-724.

Jane Hooper, "Pirates and Kings: Power on the Shores of Early Modern Madagascar and the Indian Ocean," *Journal of World History* 22:2 (June 2011): 215-242.

**February 25: Law, Land, and Colonization**

Greer, Allan. *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America*.

Supplementary Readings (optional this week due to length of main book)

Jeffrey Ostler and Nancy Shoemaker, "Settler Colonialism in Early American History: Introduction," *William and Mary Quarterly* 76:3 (July 2019): 361-368.

Plus any of the other short articles in that forum that seem interesting to you:

<https://www-jstor-org.mutex.gmu.edu/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.76.issue-3>

**March 4: People and Empire from the Bottom Up**

Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth-Century America*.

Supplementary Readings

Alison Games, "Anglo-Dutch Connections and Overseas Enterprise: A Global Perspective on Lion Gardiner's World," *Early American Studies* 9:2 (Spring 2011): 435-461.

Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *Journal of American History* 88:3 (December 2001): 829-865.

**March 11: People as Commodities in the Atlantic Slave Trade**

Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*.

Supplementary Readings

Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *American Historical Review* 114:5 (December 2009): 1231-1249.

Randy J. Sparks, "Gold Coast Merchant Families, Pawning, and the Eighteenth-Century British Slave Trade," *William and Mary Quarterly* 70:2 (April 2013): 317-340.

**March 18: Science, Knowledge, and Empire**

James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Slone and the Origins of the British Museum*.

Supplementary Readings

Christopher M. Parsons, "The Natural History of Colonial Science: Joseph-François Lafitau's Discovery of Ginseng and Its Afterlives," *William and Mary Quarterly* 73:1 (January 2016): 37-72.

Benjamin Breen, "Empires on Drugs: Pharmaceutical Go-Betweens and the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance," in *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500-1800*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), pp. 63-82.

**March 25: Commodities, Consumption, and Global Connections**

Caroline Frank, *Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America*.

Supplementary Readings

Kariann Akemi Yokota, "Transatlantic and Transpacific Connections in Early American History," *Pacific Historical Review* 83:2 (May 2014): 204-219.

Raquel A. G. Reyes, "Flaunting It: How the Galleon Trade Made Manila, circa 1571-1800," *Early American Studies* 15:4 (Fall 2017): 683-713.

**April 1: Business, Empire, and the Politics of Consumption**

Jane T. Merritt, *The Trouble with Tea: The Politics of Consumption in the Eighteenth-Century Global Economy*.

Supplementary Readings

Philip J. Stern, "British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63:4 (October 2006): 693-712.

Jonathan P. Eacott, "Making an Imperial Compromise: The Calico Acts, the Atlantic Colonies, and the Structure of the British Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly* 69:4 (October 2012): 731-762.

**April 8: North America in an Age of Global Imperial War**

Paul Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763*.

Supplementary Readings (optional this week due to length of main book)

Kristie Patricia Flannery, "The Seven Years' War and the Globalization of Anglo-Iberian Imperial Entanglement: The View from Manila," in *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500-1800*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), pp. 236-254.

François Furstenberg, "The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History," *American Historical Review* 113:3 (June 2008): 647-677.

**April 15: Imperial War and Long-Term Change in the Spanish Caribbean**

Elena A. Schneider, *The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World*.

Supplementary Readings

Evelyn Powell Jennings, "War as the 'Forcing House of Change': State Slavery in Late-Eighteenth-Century Cuba," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62:3 (July 2005): 411-440.

Ernesto Bassi, "Enabling, Implementing, Experiencing Entanglement: Empires, Sailors, and Coastal Peoples in the British-Spanish Caribbean," in *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500-1800*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-

Esguerra (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), pp. 217-235.

**April 22: Imperial Conflict and Slavery's "Perpetual State of War"**

Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*.

Supplementary Readings

Brooke N. Newman, "Contesting 'Black' Liberty and Subjecthood in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1730s-1780s," *Slavery and Abolition* 32:2 (June 2011): 169-183.

John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," *American Historical Review* 96:4 (October 1991): 1101-1113.

**April 29: The Age of Revolution**

Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*.

Supplementary Readings

Laurent Dubois, "An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic," *Social History* 31:1 (February 2006): 1-14.

Ada Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic," *American Historical Review* 117:1 (February 2012): 40-66.

**Final Paper Due via Blackboard, Friday, May 7**