

## **HIST615: America and the Sea**

Dr. Abby Mullen

Wednesdays, 7:20pm - 10:00pm

Horizon Hall 4016

Welcome! This course is about the history of the relationship between the United States (and a few other parts of America) and the ocean. It is a readings course, but our goals are broader than just reading. Because the sea's relationship to the United States has so many threads that all happen at similar times, we're going to be doing the readings more thematically than chronologically.

Our course objectives are these: by the end of this course, you should

- Understand the broad and varied ways in which the United States has shaped and been shaped by the sea.
- Communicate the history of the United States in the sea using various methods that are appropriate to both academic and public history settings.

In order to accomplish these things, this course has several components:

- Readings: This is a readings course. There are readings, some of which are listenings or watchings. You will be responsible for reading and submitting discussion questions about the readings 2 days in advance of class.
- Discussion: Every member of the class will lead discussion for one week of class, in conjunction with one other classmate. Discussion includes the questions your classmates submit, but it also includes planning additional activities that enrich our understanding. (More details on this later.)
- Three writing projects:
  - A comparison paper between two books that focus on a similar time period (due in week 6)
  - A Wikipedia article or 7-minute podcast episode (due in week 12)
  - A book summary of 200 words (due in week 15)

## **Expectations and policies**

You're all graduate students. I want you to be involved in creating the policies we'll observe in this class. But there are a few that are hard and fast ground rules that I will impose. They are these:

- Be respectful. This is a discussion class, and you'll be interacting with your colleagues frequently, both synchronously and asynchronously. If you're prone to speak your mind, let others speak first. If you're certain you have the answer, listen before you speak.
- Be responsive. Things might go awry; you might not be able to get to all the things you want to get to. We can work through all of these problems, but only if you talk to me, and respond when I try to talk to you.
- Be flexible. Things are going to change in this class as we go. Our lives might all change drastically. Be willing to go with the flow. I'll do my absolute best not to make changes without sufficient notice.

## Life

We're all humans. This class is not your only responsibility. I know that. If there are things in your life that are making it hard for you to do your work, please let me know. If you're struggling with mental health, or your work schedule is overwhelming, or you need help with time management or workload management, please talk to me privately.

## Covid

Despite the precautions and protocols in place at GMU, there's a non-zero chance that covid may affect our class, whether the whole class or individuals within it. If you have covid symptoms, please **DO NOT COME TO CLASS**. If at any time I deem it necessary, we will move our class online to Zoom. I reserve the right to decide to move our class online at any time, whether or not the university's official position dictates it, if I feel that our safety or efficacy is compromised.

## University policies

See the George Mason University catalog for general policies, as well as the university statement on diversity. You are expected to know and follow George Mason's policies on academic integrity and the honor code. Please ask me if you have any questions about how these policies apply to this course. Please note the dates for dropping and adding this course from the academic calendar.

## Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please talk to me and contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. If you need to give me an accommodations form, you can send it to me via email.

That said, if you need help about anything, or you have special circumstances that I need to know about to help you succeed in this class, please come talk to me. Special circumstances could be a disability, or childcare issues, or an aging parent who needs help, or a full-time job, or any number of other things. I can't help you unless you tell me that you need help.

## Contact

There are many ways to get in contact with me and your classmates.

- Slack: This is the best way to get hold of me. I'll likely answer your questions much more quickly on Slack than through any other means. You'll receive more info about joining our Slack group on the first day of class.
- Email: You're always welcome to email me at [amullen2@gmu.edu](mailto:amullen2@gmu.edu), but fair warning: I tend to lose track of emails. So if you email me and I don't email you back within a day or two, please resend your email. I will not be offended.
- Office hours: You can book an office hours appointment with me [through my booking form](#). Unless we agree otherwise, all office hours appointments will be held on Zoom (the link will be in the confirmation email you get when you book).

## Assessment

I don't believe in grades. I believe in constructive and useful iterative feedback. However, the university does believe in grades. So here's how assessment works in this class: You tell me what grade you want and think you deserve, and I give it to you. At the beginning of the semester, I'll ask you what grade you want, and at the end I'll ask you whether you met the expectations for that grade. And then I'll give you the grade we mutually agree upon.

Of course, there are some caveats. In order to get the grade that you deserve, you need to do a few things:

- You must complete all work to our mutual satisfaction. It is very likely that I will return work to you with feedback and ask you to revise it and resubmit. There is no cap to the number of times I may ask for revision.
- You must come to class. This is a discussion class, and you get no value from the discussion if you are not present.
- You must lead the discussion to our mutual satisfaction. I will provide you feedback on your discussion in the week after you lead. If you don't lead the discussion to our mutual satisfaction, I may ask you to lead another discussion (or you may ask to lead another discussion).
- You must treat your classmates and me with respect. Harassment, whether overt or passive, is not tolerated in any form, and your grade will be affected if you treat your classmates or me with disrespect. A few (non-exhaustive) examples of inappropriate behavior would be displaying symbols that are commonly associated with hate groups or agents of oppression, swearing at your classmates, or disrupting class. Repeated harassment or inappropriate behavior will result in your removal from the class.

## Schedule

**Weeks in bold are student-led discussion weeks.** Most of the readings are available online; for those that aren't, you should consider looking at [BookFinder.com](https://www.bookfinder.com) instead of buying them full-price.

Week 1: Wednesday, August 25, 2021: Introduction and overview

- Mahan, Alfred Thayer. *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/15749>

Week 2: Wednesday, September 1, 2021: Indigenous uses of the sea

- Bahar, Matthew R. *Storm of the Sea: Indians and Empires in the Atlantic's Age of Sail*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. (Online at GMU library)

**Week 3: Wednesday, September 8, 2021: Whaling**

- Philbrick, Nathaniel. *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*. New York: Penguin, 2001.

**Week 4: Wednesday, September 15, 2021: Commerce and commercial diplomacy**

- Consolation Prize, "[Making a Good First Impression](#)"
- Brown, Kate Elizabeth. "Creating the 'Commercial Republic': Neutrality and Law in the American Courts." In *Alexander Hamilton and the Development of American Law*, 85–112. University Press of Kansas, 2017. JSTOR.

**Week 5: Wednesday, September 22, 2021: The navy in the Age of Sail**

- Leeman, William P. "Defending the New Republic." In *The Long Road to Annapolis: The Founding of the Naval Academy and the Emerging American Republic*, 19–48. University of North Carolina Press, 2010. JSTOR.
- Dull, Jonathan R. "A New Navy Fights France and the Barbary States, 1783–1805." In *American Naval History, 1607–1865: Overcoming the Colonial Legacy*, 33–48. University of Nebraska Press, 2012. JSTOR.

**Week 6: Wednesday, September 29, 2021: African-American experiences of the sea**

- Bolster, W. Jeffrey. *Black Jacks : African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. (Online at GMU library)

- Preble Hall, [“The Slave’s Gamble”](#)

Week 7: Wednesday, October 6, 2021: Exploration and science

- Smith, Jason W. *To Master the Boundless Sea: The U.S. Navy, the Marine Environment, and the Cartography of Empire*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2018. (Online at GMU library)

**Week 8: Wednesday, October 13, 2021: Slavery and the slave trade**

- Smallwood, Stephanie E. *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Consolation Prize, [“Havana Hard Time as Consul”](#)

**Week 9: Wednesday, October 20, 2021: Steam**

- Fowler, William M., Jr. *Steam Titans: Cunard, Collins, and the Epic Battle for Commerce on the North Atlantic*. New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2017.

Week 10: Wednesday, October 27, 2021: Imperialism

- TBD

**Week 11: Wednesday, November 3, 2021: The coast**

- Wells, Jamin. *Shipwrecked: Coastal Disasters and the Making of the American Beach*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020. (Online at GMU library)

Week 12: Wednesday, November 10, 2021: Fishing

- Crawford, Sharika D. *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making*. Flows, Migrations, and Exchanges. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. (Online at GMU library)

Week 13: Wednesday, November 17, 2021: The battleship navy

- Leeman, William, and John B. Hattendorf. *Forging the Trident: Theodore Roosevelt and the United States Navy*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2020.

Week 14: Wednesday, November 24, 2021: no class

Week 15: Wednesday, December 1, 2021: Conclusions