

History 499 (Spring 2024)
Senior Research Seminar--Trials in Early American
History, 1607-1861

Dr. Zagarri

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 11:00-1:00, and by appointment (via zoom or in-person)

This course is the capstone course of the History major. Students are required to do a major research paper on a topic analyzing a trial or lawsuit that occurred in colonial North America or the United States at any time between 1607 (founding of Jamestown, VA) and 1861 (beginning of Civil War). The course requires students to demonstrate that they have mastered the skills of historical research, analysis, oral presentation, and written communication. Papers must be approximately 20-25 pages long. This course meets the requirements for Synthesis and Writing Intensive in the Major for the Mason Core.

IT IS EXPECTED THAT STUDENTS WILL SPEND A MINIMUM OF 10 HOURS/WEEK WORKING ON THIS COURSE.

BEGIN TO THINK OF A TOPIC FOR YOUR RESEARCH PAPER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. The attached list offers certain possibilities, but you are free to choose your own trial, as long as there are sufficient primary sources available. Consult the Info Guide at Fenwick Library for guides to sources. See: <https://infoguides.gmu.edu/early-american>.

YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO PURCHASE ANY BOOKS FOR THIS COURSE. If you like, you may purchase William Kelleher Storey's *Writing History: A Guide for Students* at the campus bookstore.

Date: **Topic/Assignment:**

Jan. 22 **Introduction: Trials, Law, and Society**

Listening: Listen to Ben Franklin's World Podcast #092, Sharon Block, "How to Research History Online" (approx. one hour) at www.benfranklinworld.com.

Written assignment: Write three short paragraphs that discuss three key take-away points from Block's podcast that will help you in doing online research

Jan. 29 **Identifying a Topic**

Reading: Kermit Hall, "Introduction," *Oxford Companion to American Law*, pp. vii-xi (online book available through Fenwick Library website)

Written Assignment: Do preliminary research on a number of potential topics. Identify at least **TWO** potential trials/topics for your research paper. **FOR EACH**

TOPIC, write a short paragraph in which you explain what the trial was about, when and where it occurred, and at least three questions you'd like to answer.

PRESENTATION BY DR. GEORGE OBERLE, History Librarian

Feb. 5 Researching Trials: Sources and Methods (BRING LAPTOPS)

Reading: "Gutting a Book" (Blackboard); Elaine Forman Crane, "He Would 'Shoot him upon the Spott,'" BE SURE TO READ THE FOOTNOTES! (BLACKBOARD)

Written Assignment: Find the online version of *The Companion to American Legal History* by Sally Hadden and Alfred Brophy in the Fenwick catalogue. Based on the potential topic you are researching, read ONE of these two articles: Chapter 2-"What's Done and Undone: Colonial American Legal History, 1700-1775," pp. 26-45, OR Ellen Holmes Pearson, "[American Legal History], 1775-1785," pp. 46-66.

Write approximately 300-400 words (1-2 pages) summarizing the article's major points. Explain how the article relates to your topic. See if the bibliography has any references that might be useful for your paper.

In-class writing: BRING YOUR LAPTOPS to class. You will do an in-class database exercise on sources related to your research topic.

Feb. 12 INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS/INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Written Assignment: **Make the final decision about your topic.**

Write a paragraph about the topic, describing the subject, posing your major research questions, and noting what primary sources you have found thus far. ALSO, FIND AND BRING THREE HARD-COPY SECONDARY SOURCE BOOKS RELATED TO YOUR TOPIC TO THE MEETING.

Feb. 19 Notetaking/Citations/Refining the Hypothesis (BRING LAPTOPS)

Reading: Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Means to Think Historically?" (Blackboard)

In-class writing: BRING ONE OF YOUR SECONDARY SOURCE BOOKS AND YOUR LAPTOPS (OR OTHER DEVICE) to class. During class, you will "gut" a book and write a short summary of its contents.

Feb. 25 History and Historiography (BRING LAPTOPS)

Reading: Amanda Izenstark, "What Is Historiography?" (Blackboard)

Written Assignment: **Submit a revised proposal for your paper (1 paragraph) and your preliminary annotated bibliography.** The **Bibliography** should have three sections: *Representative Primary Sources*; *Secondary Source Books* (6-8 books); *Scholarly Articles* (at least three). For each citation, briefly discuss (in two to three sentences) the work's major focus and/or themes and/or thesis. Citations should conform to the style used in the *Chicago Manual of Style* which can be found at http://chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. Be sure to give the title of your

paper at the beginning of the bibliography. Be prepared to answer questions about your topic and the sources you have cited.

March 4 **Spring Break**

March 11 **Text and Context--Analyzing Evidence (BRING LAPTOPS)**
Reading: Storey, "Interpreting Source Materials," 32-39
(BLACKBOARD)
In-class exercise: BRING A SHORT PRIMARY SOURCE FROM YOUR OWN RESEARCH AS WELL AS YOUR LAPTOPS (OR OTHER DEVICE) to class.

March 18 **INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS/INDEPENDENT RESEARCH**

March 25 **Writing Strategies/ The So-What Question**
In-class group exercises

April 1 **Peer Review/Abstracts/Plagiarism**
Reading: Handouts
Written Assignment: **Submit your Introduction (approx. 3 pages).** Make sure you have discussed the most relevant historiography (books and/or articles) and describe the historical background for your subject.

April 8 **INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS/INDEPENDENT RESEARCH**
Written Assignment: Bring your thesis statement and a brief outline of your paper to our meeting.

April 15 **Oral Presentations**
Oral Presentations: Prepare a **5-7 minute oral report** in which you BRIEFLY discuss your topic. Prepare a Powerpoint to be used along with your oral presentation using the template I have provided. Be sure to explain what your subject is, the chronological and geographic boundaries of your project, your thesis statement, the major kinds of primary sources (genres of evidence) you are using, and your conclusions. Dress professionally. **Practice your presentation. Time limits will be strictly enforced.**

April 22 **PAPERS DUE by 1:30 pm via email--No class**

This is **NOT** a draft. This is the first version of the entire paper in as polished a form as you can produce, complete with proper footnotes and bibliography. Citations should conform to the style used in the *Chicago Manual of Style* which can be online at http://chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. Send an email copy to me at rzagarri@gmu.edu and another copy to the person assigned to review your paper. Send a one-paragraph Abstract to everyone else in the class.

April 29

Research Skills and Lifelong Learning

Written assignment: Write a one-to-two page critique of the paper assigned to you. Provide one hard copy for me and one hard copy for the author.

Informal Oral Presentation: In class, be prepared to discuss your research process and trajectory. How did your paper's focus evolve over time? What proved to be the most useful primary sources for your paper? What secondary work was most helpful? What most surprised you about what you found? What aspect of the research process do you think you handled most effectively? What would you do differently next time? How can the research skills you have developed help you in jobs that are not directly related to the field of History?

April 30 -May 15

OPTIONAL INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS: Students are encouraged to make an appointment with the professor to discuss their papers and areas most in need of revision. Meetings are available via zoom or in-person.

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE VIA EMAIL BY noon on Friday, May 6.

Papers should be approximately 20-25 pages in length, plus Bibliography and Notes (either endnotes or footnotes), typed, double-spaced. In the **Bibliography**, sources should be listed under three headings: **Primary Sources; Secondary Source Books (7-10 books); Scholarly Articles (at least three)**. Books/Online sources/databases should be listed under the appropriate category listed above.

ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE COURSE SHOULD BE DONE IN 12-point type, double-spaced, written with WORD. Do not send PDFs. Citations should conform to the style used in the *Chicago Manual of Style* which can be found through Fenwick Library databases or online at http://chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html .

Grading:

Oral presentations and class participation:	15%
Preliminary writing assignments (including proposal, bibliography, primary source, bookand database assignments):	15%
Research paper (60% first version/40% second):	70%

Students MUST turn in ALL preliminary assignments for this course. Students who simply turn in a final paper will NOT receive a passing grade.

If you would like the title of your Undergraduate Senior Essay to appear on your transcript, go to the link at masonimpact.gmu.edu and follow the prompts to submit your paper.

Criteria for evaluating Research Papers:

- *Historiography: relates topic to existing secondary literature in the field and broader historical questions

- *Range and depth of research: uses primary and secondary sources effectively; establishes historical context

- *Analysis: states a clear thesis, uses strong evidence to support assertions, synthesizes diverse sources

- *Writing: clear and grammatical prose, logical organization

- *Mechanics: uses accurate citation style for footnotes and bibliography

Criteria for evaluating Oral Presentations:

- * Demonstrates ability to present one's work in a clear, organized, and visually interesting manner via Powerpoint

- * Completes the essential elements within the allotted time

- *Engages and maintains the audience's attention

- *Demonstrates ability to handle questions from the audience

Drop Deadlines: The last day to drop a class with a 100% tuition refund is Jan. 30.

Unrestricted Withdrawal period (no tuition refund) is Feb. 7-Feb. 20. Selective

Withdrawal period is from Feb. 21-March 25..

Statement on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: All GMU students are bound to abide by the Honor Code (<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>). Plagiarism is a broadly defined term that includes a wide spectrum of violation, **including Chat GPT and other forms of artificial intelligence**, that involves appropriating words or ideas as if they were your own. It includes, but is not limited to, the use of another person's words without attribution or proper citation; submission of work that is not one's own, whether the work is stolen, purchased, or used with the author's permission; the too-close paraphrasing of another person's words or ideas. If you don't know whether something constitutes plagiarism, ask the instructor. Students suspected of Honor Code violations will be turned over to the GMU Honor Board for disciplinary action.

Academic Accommodations: If you are a student who needs academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703.993.2474 or <https://ds.gmu.edu/>.

All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office

Writing Center: If you believe you could benefit from assistance with your writing, please contact the Writing Center at <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu>.

Finding A Topic

Possible topics—American trials between 1607-1861--are listed below. You may, however, choose another trial based on your own interests, provided there are sufficient primary sources available for research. You can look at a civil trial of someone obscure suing over property, debt, or trespass, or the criminal trial of someone famous for any number of crimes or offenses. You can look at a series of lawsuits by enslaved people trying to gain their freedom or in which enslaved people are tried for attempted rebellion. You can look at a rape trial of an ordinary woman during the American Revolution or a witchcraft trial or military court martial or a high-profile political trial. Use your imagination and think about what topics have interested you in the past. Then start searching for primary and secondary sources. FINDING AN ADEQUATE PRIMARY SOURCE BASE IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD WRITING A GOOD RESEARCH PAPER

Possible topics:

Trial of Anne Hutchinson in Puritan Massachusetts
Salem witchcraft trials—Salem Witch Trials Documentary Record (online)
John Peter Zenger freedom of the press trial (1735)
New York slave conspiracy trials of 1741
James Otis and the Writs of Assistance case (1760)
Rape of Abial Hollowell by Bryan Sheehan (1772)
Trials of British soldiers in the Boston massacre (1770)
Trial of British General Major Andre during American Revolution
Lawsuit of Mass. enslaved woman Mum Bett (Elizabeth Freeman) for freedom (1781)
Impeachment trial of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase
Military court martial of General Arthur St. Clair for failure in Indian battle (1791)
Prosecution of Congressman Matthew Lyon for violating Sedition Act (1798)
Trials associated with Gabriel's Rebellion in Virginia (1800)—See online materials at the Library of Virginia
Treason trial of Vice President Aaron Burr
NY murder trial of Henrietta Robinson for murder of Timothy Lanagan (1854)
Supreme Court case of Myra Clark Gaines to inherit her father's property (1848, 1856)
Freedom suits by enslaved people—for Washington, DC, see "O Say Can You See" database online; for St. Louis, MO, see St. Louis Circuit Court records (online)
US v. Amistad (enslaved ship mutiny) (1841)
D.C. trial of Congressman Preston Brooks for assault (caning) of Congressman Charles Sumner (1856)
The Dred Scott Trial

Other useful resources:

America's Historical Imprints (online database/Fenwick Library)—Browse by:

SUBJECTS; then go to LAW AND CRIME subheading

Records in PROQUEST: Slavery and the Law (online database/Fenwick Library)

Records in HeinOnline: World Trial Collections (online database/Fenwick Library)

Archival records of trials/lawsuits at the Fairfax County Library, Alexandria County
Courthouse, or Library of Congress

Prof. Douglas O. Linder, *Famous Trials* at <http://famous-trials.com>

Sally Hadden and Alfred Brophy, ed., *A Companion to American Legal History* (2013)

Kermit Hall, et al, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Law* (2002)