What, where, and when is “early America?” The Omohundro Institute has long described its purview as “the history and cultures of North America from circa 1450 to 1820 [and] related developments in Africa, the British Isles, the Caribbean, Europe, and Latin America,” but even this may be too limiting. The intensely and complexly interrelated histories of the peoples of four continents over four centuries demand a broad perspective, even while we want to know ever more detail about developments on the ground. Multiple languages—native, European, African—and different kinds of sources ask for different kinds of investigation and skill. How can we see it all?

This seminar attempts to survey the breadth of this vast early American field. To appreciate this vastness, we will read widely in the chronological, geographical, disciplinary and methodological diversity of the field. There is no way to do this entirely satisfactorily—there may be too much older literature, too little breadth, or too little grounding and too much reach. The point is to try, and in the effort to appreciate the task.

The course is explicitly historiographical. A common core of readings will be supplemented by additional readings as listed on the syllabus for each week. The goal is to build a picture not only of the field’s general framework, but also of some of the animating methodological and interpretive issues. We will not move chronologically, but rather explore various places and times in context, both in terms of the historical past and developments in the history of early America. This means reading books that have inaugurated specific developments in the field, looking to understand their position in their own time as well as subsequently.

Course Reading

Each week includes “common” readings (one, sometimes two books, often an additional essay) and additional readings. The latter category offers three opportunities for engaging with and understanding the historiographical development of arguments and methods: weekly, every student should be familiar with at least one of these readings of their choice; the first paper (a review); and the second paper (an historiographical essay). Do not mistake the common readings for the most important or the most influential. Rather, I built this list with an eye to how the common and additional readings might represent key areas of critical inquiry. There are deep historiographical traditions and emerging debates suggested here by single works. They should, collectively, give you a frame of reference for an incredibly rich and dynamic field.
Book chapters will be included as either links or PDFs on the Blackboard site; journal articles can be found via JSTOR or Project MUSE. The following books, in their entirety, are included in the common readings:


Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Empire, 1560-1660* (2008)


**Course Requirements**

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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper # 1</td>
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<td>Paper # 2</td>
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The most important responsibility of each student in this course is to participate fully and productively in the work of the seminar. A seminar is an intellectual community—at least for the duration of the term, and hopefully beyond. Every seminar member must be committed to reading and engaging with the course materials. Having read the assigned material every person brings a useful perspective to the table, and must be willing to share it.

To further facilitate discussion in class, we will use Blackboard’s discussion forum. There, by 6PM of the Sunday preceding each class meeting, each student will post 2 questions/comments in that week’s forum. More detail on the format for discussion questions is in the description for the Jan. 30 forum.

For the first class meeting, Jan. 23, note information about the comparative archives project on Blackboard.

Both papers assignments require thinking and writing historiographically. Historians write for many reasons, primary among them is to contribute to the field of historical knowledge. We do this by reference to other scholars’ work, acknowledging the collaborative labor of knowledge production. Historiography, done best, reflects both the history of history and the relationships among historical works. (And it’s fascinating—honest.)

For the first paper, due at any time between February 23 and March 9, students will write a review of a book on the “also” list. The review will offer an assessment of the book (evidence and argument) and its position within the literature. How to assess this position? Review what the author is aiming to do, and how the author sees their work contributing to larger arguments. I do not expect your review to be definitive, but rather a first effort at grappling with a corner of the field. This essay should be 5-7 pages in length, and make use of notes as necessary. For models, see reviews in the *William and Mary Quarterly* and *Reviews in American History*.

The second paper, due May 1, should consider collectively the historiographical relationship(s) within and among one cluster of works—core and additional readings, as well as an additional one or two books or key essays that you identify. This essay should be 8-10 pages and include notes.

*All writing assignments should be submitted to me by email, as a PDF.*

**Course Schedule**

**Jan. 23** Introduction: The Archive of Vast Early America  
(Student posts on comparative archives’ histories)

Light reading: Student posts on comparative archives
Wulf:  https://blog.oieahc.wm.edu/for-2016-appreciating-vastearlyamerica/
Wulf:  https://blog.oieahc.wm.edu/discoverability-edwardian-style/
Piker:  https://blog.oieahc.wm.edu/getting-lost/

Also:

**Jan. 30**  
Geographies: Continental Early North America

Common:  
Barr, *Peace Came in the Shape of a Woman*  
Barr and Countryman, “Maps and Spaces, Paths to Connect, and Lines to Divide” (PDF on Blackboard)

Also:  
Paul Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763* (2013)

**Feb. 6**  
Comparative Imperial Projects

Common:  
Games, *Webs of Empire*  
Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*

Also:  
Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *American Historical Review* (2006), 741-757
John Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Spain and Britain in America, 1492-1830* (Yale UP, 2006)


**Feb. 13**  
Slavery and Slavery’s Diasporas  

**Common:**  
Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*  

**Also:**  
Matthew Restall, *The Black Middle: Africans, Mayas and Spaniards in Colonial Yucatan* (Stanford, 2009)  

**Feb. 20**  
Epistemologies: Religion and Natural Science  

**Common:**  
Rivett, *Science of the Soul*  

**Also:**  
Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (OI, 2006)  
Susan Juster, *Sacred Violence in Early America* (UPenn, 2016)  
Ann Little, *The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright* (YaleUP, 2016)  
Feb. 27  Law and Legal Practice

Common:  McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms*

Also:  Tomlins and Mann, *The Many Legalities of Early America* (OI, 2001)
Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattoes and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford, 2015)

Mar. 6  SPRING BREAK

Mar. 13  American Republics

Common:  Ulrich, *Midwife’s Tale* and Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*

Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (Liveright, 2017)

Mar. 20  Middle Ground, Native Ground

Common:  Kathleen Duval, *Native Ground*

Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (UPenn, 2006)
Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (YaleUP, 2009)
Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Illinois UP, 2009), Ballantyne and Burton, “Introduction, the Politics of Intimacy in an Age of Empire”; Michael McDonnell, “Il a Epousé une Sauvagesse”: Indian and Métis Persistence Across Imperial and National Borders”

**Mar. 27**

Political Economies and Politics of Trade

**Common:** Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*

**Also:**
- Seth Rockman *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery and Survival in Early Baltimore* (JHU Press, 2008)

**Apr. 3**

Cultures and Politics of (whose?) Things

**Common:** White, *Wild Frenchmen*

**Also:**
- David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (Yale UP, 2009)

**Apr. 10**

Atlantic Revolutions

**Common:** O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*

**Also:**
- Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (Yale UP, 2009)

Janet Polasky, *Revolutions Without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (Yale UP, 2016)

**Apr. 17**  
American Revolution?

**Common:**  
Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*  

**Also:**  

**Apr. 24**  
How do we get to which early America?

**Common:**  
O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*

**Also:**  

**May 1**  
Final Papers Due