

THE BRITISH ATLANTIC WORLD, 1550-1800
History and Literature 90f
Fall 2008

Seminar: Tuesday 1-3 pm
Classroom: Barker Center Room 128
Website: <http://isites.harvard.edu/k19400>

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Office Hours:
Monday 4-5 and Tuesday 3-4

Can an ocean have a history? The history of the early modern Atlantic is the story of the peoples who moved across it and the ideas, texts, goods and microbes they took with them. It is a story of dramatic change and dislocation that occurred when previously separate human societies came into contact with each other. The ocean was the key to these transformations, serving as a circulatory system connecting peoples together. In this seminar, we will focus on the literature and the history of the English-speaking societies of the North Atlantic basin. We will approach these societies through the texts they have left behind, texts that speak of the anxieties early modern men and women felt at the transformations they were witnessing. The ocean figures largely in these narratives of change, for it was the ocean that enabled these changes to occur.

We will study these transformations in an interdisciplinary and transnational fashion. Our methods will be interdisciplinary, for we will draw on the resources of both literary criticism and historical analysis to interpret our primary texts. Our approach will be transnational, for the texts we read will be drawn from both sides of the Atlantic, and the authors of those texts were addressing a literate community that spanned the Atlantic. This course will satisfy History and Literature requirements for Early British History, Early American History, Early British Literature, Early American Literature, and Postcolonial Studies. The course has no prerequisites and assumes no prior knowledge of British or American literature or history.

The seminar is structured around three main themes: exploration, identity and captivity. In examining these themes, we will draw on the resources of a wide variety of disciplines, including economics, gender studies, history, biology, literary criticism, and cartography. Most of the primary texts we will read are narratives of one form or another, whether fictional or autobiographical. We will read narratives of encounter and seek to understand the ways in which men and women made sense of the foreign and the unfamiliar, and how they negotiated contacts with other peoples whose perceptions differed radically from their own. We will read narratives of identity formation and seek to understand the ways in which an American printer, a freed slave, and an English castaway came to understand their evolving place in a changing world. We will read narratives of captivity and seek to understand the ways in which personal identity was maintained or transformed by individuals forced to undergo transportation into another cultural context.

The course assignments are designed to develop skills in close reading. We will pay attention to the cultural and historical contexts in which our primary texts were produced. There will be one short, six-to-seven page essay, due in week eight, in which students will apply their skills in close reading to an early American newspaper. There will be a longer, eight-to-ten page essay, due in week fourteen, in which students will analyze a captivity narrative. Brief writing exercises due in week two and week five will ask students to re-imagine a famous first encounter and a well-known relationship.

Course requirements:

1. Attendance and informed participation at all seminars. 25%
2. First writing assignment (due September 23rd). 5%
3. Second writing assignment (due October 14th). 5%
3. Third writing assignment (due November 4th). 25%
4. Research proposal and annotated bibliography (due December 2nd). 5%
5. Research essay (due December 16th). 35%

Course policies:

Absences from seminar must be excused with a note from University Health Services or from a Resident Dean; unexcused absences will reduce the participation grade. Work submitted late will drop one grade step per day. Students are expected to document their sources using quotation marks and footnotes where appropriate, as outlined in the Expository Writing Program manual by Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1998).

Readings available for purchase at the bookstore:

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (Bedford Cultural Editions, 1999), ISBN 0312108133

James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763* (Yale University Press, 2004), ISBN 0300093012

Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (Anchor, 2004), ISBN 0385721463

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Norton Critical Edition, 2004), ISBN 0393964523

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (Penguin, 2003), ISBN 0142437166

Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Penguin, 2003), ISBN 0142437603

Thomas Harriot, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (Dover, 1972), ISBN 0486210928

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Norton Critical Edition, 2001), ISBN 0393957241

Readings marked with an asterisk below are available on reserve at Lamont Library and in the box marked "Sowerby" in the History and Literature office in the Barker Center.

Week 1 (Sept. 16): What Is Atlantic History?

Reading: Have a look at the course website at <http://isites.harvard.edu/k19400> and follow the links to the on-line resources provided, including catalogues of maps, letters, and newspapers.

I. Exploration and Encounters

Week 2 (Sept. 23): First Encounters and Initial Perceptions

Reading:

Thomas Harriot, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1590)

First writing assignment due at the beginning of class on Tuesday September 23rd. Write a two-page report in the style of Thomas Harriot where you describe him from the point of view of one of his observed subjects (stating clearly which subject you have chosen).

Week 3 (Sept. 30): Crusoe and Colonization

Readings:

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)

Karl Marx, "Crusoe and Capitalism"; Virginia Woolf, "Robinson Crusoe"; James Joyce, "Daniel Defoe" (Norton Critical Edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, pp. 274-7, 283-7, 320-3)

Week 4 (Oct. 7): Cartography and Commerce

Readings:

A selection of early modern maps from the following websites:

<http://www.mappingboston.org/default.htm>

<http://www.usm.maine.edu/~maps/exhibit2/sec4.htm>

* Patrick K. O'Brien, "Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State, and the Expansion of Empire 1688-1815", in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 53-77.

Come to class on October 7th prepared to demonstrate on a map the movements around the world of a particular trade good in the eighteenth century. Choose your trade good in consultation with the instructor.

II. Imperial Identities

Week 5 (Oct. 14): The Formation of a "British" Identity

Readings:

James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763* (New Haven, 2004), pp. 39-187, 259-333.

* Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), pp. 117-132.

Second writing assignment due at the beginning of class on Tuesday October 14th. Write a diary entry or series of diary entries in which you tell the story of Louisa's relationship with Boswell from her point of view. Your diary should be two to three pages in length and should use diction that would be appropriate to Louisa's character.

Week 6 (Oct. 21): The Formation of an "American" Identity

Reading:

Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791)

* Phillis Wheatley, "To the University of Cambridge, in New England"; "To the King's Most Excellent Majesty"; "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1768-1773), in Julian Mason, ed., *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989), pp. 52-3.

Week 7 (Oct. 28): The Formation of an "African" Identity

Reading:

Oludah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789); pages 5-181, 231-6 in the Penguin edition.

Week 8 (Nov. 4): The Circulation of Texts

Readings:

Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850*, pp. 168-202.

* Charles E. Clark, "Early American Journalism: News and Opinion in the Popular Press," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 347-66.

* Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Oct. 1992), pp. 309-329.

Third writing assignment due at the beginning of seminar on Tuesday November 4th. Write a six-to-seven page essay analyzing a single issue of an American newspaper published between 1754 and 1763, chosen from the newspapers in the database *America's Historical Newspapers*. In your analysis, address the following questions. How is an American or a British identity articulated in that newspaper? What are the characteristics of that identity? If the identity is defined in relation to local and regional identities or the imputed characteristics of other nations, how is it so defined? Append a complete copy of the newspaper issue at the end of your essay. Be sure to trace the cultural assumptions embedded in the text as well as overt assertions of principle.

Week 9 (Nov. 11): Veterans' Day Holiday

III. Captivities

Week 10 (Nov. 18): Narrating Captivity

Readings:

Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850*, pp. 1-167.

* Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity & Restoration of Mrs. Mary*

Rowlandson, A Minister's Wife in New-England (1682)

Week 11 (Nov. 25): Travel and Hybridity

Readings:

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726); pages 2-125, 185-250 in the Norton Critical Edition.

Sir Walter Scott, "On Gulliver's Travels" (in Norton Critical Edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, pp. 311-19)

Week 12 (Dec. 2): Captivity and Redemption

Readings:

* Seymour Drescher, "Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade," *Past and Present*, no. 143 (May 1994), pp. 136-166.

* Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston, 2005), pp. 213-225.

* William Wilberforce, "Speech on Abolition of the Slave Trade" (1789)

Research proposal due at the beginning of seminar on Tuesday December 2nd. Choose a captivity narrative that interests you and prepare a one-page report in which you formulate a series of questions to guide your research. A sample report will be provided as a model. Append to your report an annotated bibliography that includes your chosen narrative and three secondary sources that will help you to interpret your narrative. Each annotation should be about three to five sentences in length and should describe the secondary source and explain why that particular source is useful for your project. Be prepared to discuss your research project in seminar.

Week 13 (Dec. 9): Confronting Captivity

Readings:

Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave* (1688)

Steele/Addison, "On Inkle and Yarico" and "On a Slave Love-Triangle" (in Bedford edition of *Oroonoko*, pp. 190-8)

Research essay due at 4 p.m. on Tuesday December 16th. Write an ten-to-twelve page analysis of one of the narratives listed in the "captivity archive" at the end of Linda Colley's *Captives* (pages 381 to 385). How did the experience of captivity alter or transform the author of your chosen text? Be sure to trace the changes in the author's social position, geographical location and cultural surroundings and the ways in which those shifts influenced the construction of the narrative.