HIST 241
Early America

Dr. James Paxton
Comenius 306
Office Hours: Tuesday 8:40–11:00; Thursday 8:40–11:00; or by appointment
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Course Description

Welcome to 241: Early America. For many Americans, colonial history is synonymous with the thirteen English-speaking colonies that became the United States. But colonial America was a large, crowded, and diverse place that stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific and from Hudson’s Bay in the north to the tip of South America. Within this arena, Native, English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Russian, Swedish, and African peoples met, intermingled, and jostled for power. The impossibility of conveying New World societies in all their complexity and variety forces us to focus on a limited number of actors and a narrow range of themes, such as American exceptionalism, the nature of cultural contact, and the rise of racism and race slavery. This broadly comparative course will explore common themes in English, French, and Spanish speaking North America. It will focus on the evolving relationships between America’s founding people, Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans, and the societies they created together.

Course Objectives
By the end of the course, you will have enhanced your abilities to:

- Locate, evaluate, and use secondary sources.
- Identify major schools of thought and historiographical debates that have shaped historians’ understanding of the colonial period.
- Use writing conventions appropriate to the discipline of history.
- Become familiar with the main events and themes in colonial American history.
- Understand the role of Native peoples and Africans in the development of New World societies.
- Develop clear and effective oral and written communications skills.

Required Texts

Required texts are available in the Moravian College bookstore. Additional readings are available on JSTOR or will be placed on reserve in Reeves Library and the History Department Common Room.

Attendance
While there is no formal penalty for missing classes, students are strongly encouraged to attend all classes. Success in the course depends upon comprehension of the lecture material and participation in class discussions. Lateness will not be tolerated.

Please turn off or mute all electronic devices in the classroom.
**Grade Distribution**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scavenger Hunt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Essay 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Logs (10x2%)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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The participation grade will reflect the quality and quantity of your contributions to class. It is not an attendance grade.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

In this course, you will undertake two different types of writing, each with a particular set of conventions and each for a different audience.

**Major Assignments**

1) Review a movie or documentary or compare two movies pertaining to the colonial or revolutionary period. The paper should be three to four pages long and written in formal academic prose. A list of approved movies and subjects will be handed out in class.

2) Write a ten-page historiographical essay. A historiographical essay provides comment and analysis on a number of works pertaining to one subject. Do not summarize the contents of the books. Instead, write a coherent essay with a thesis that assesses how historians have interpreted the topic over time. You will choose an appropriate subject in consultation with the instructor. You must utilize at least five books or an equivalent number of articles.

I have placed two collections of historiographical essays on reserve in Reeve’s Library. Once you have a chosen a topic, you should consult the appropriate essay.


**Reading Logs.** Throughout the semester you will be keeping weekly reading logs in which you identify and evaluate the thesis, arguments, and evidence of articles and books you read. I will hand out forms which you can use to model your logs. I will read every log entry to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading and take them seriously. In terms of format and style, logs may be less formal than the essays. They will be graded for content, regularity, and willingness to engage with ideas, rather than for stylistic concerns such as spelling and grammar. Nonetheless, I do expect you to proofread your
reading logs before handing them in. Reading logs are due at the **beginning** of class. Late logs will not be accepted. Logs will receive a grade of 3-, 3, 3+.

**Late Policy**
Papers turned in after the beginning of the class on which they are due will be assessed a penalty of 5% for the first day they are late and 2% for each day thereafter. I do not accept late reading logs. They must be turned in at the beginning of the class in which they are due. Computer and printing problems are not acceptable reasons for lateness. I do **not** accept essays or logs via email.

**Academic Dishonesty**

According to the Moravian College Student Handbook, the following constitutes plagiarism: “as the use, deliberate or not, of any outside source without proper acknowledgment.” Plagiarism will result in the offender receiving zero in the course. Please consult the Student Handbook for fuller details.

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with physical, learning, or medical disabilities should speak to me and contact Laurie Roth, Director of the Learning Center, to arrange the appropriate accommodations. Please make these arrangements in the first weeks of the semester.
SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction: The Historiography of Early America  
Aug. 29

Week 2: Old Worlds and New  
Sept. 5
COMMON READING
Otterness, Becoming German, 1-77.
• Reading Log Due
• Library Visit

Week 3: Natives and Newcomers  
Sept. 12
COMMON READING
BLACKBOARD
• Reading Log Due
• Scavenger Hunt Due

Week 4: New World Societies  
Sept. 19
COMMON READING
Otterness, Becoming German, 78-170.
AND READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING
• Reading Log Due
• Topics for Historiographical Essay Due

Week 5: Slavery and Freedom, Part 1  
Sept. 26
COMMON READING


**Week 6: Slavery and Freedom, Part 2**

**Oct. 3**


- Reading Log Due
- Bibliography of 10 books due

**Week 7: Witchcraft**

**Oct. 10**

COMMON READING


Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: Vintage, 1989), ch. 4. BLACKBOARD.


- Reading Log Due
- Bibliography Due

**Week 8: Britain’s Other Colonies**

**Oct. 17**


- Reading Log Due
- Essay One (Movie Review) Due

**Week 9: Women**

**Oct. 24**

COMMON READING

AND TWO OF THE FOLLOWING
- Reading Log Due

**Week 10: The Imperial Crisis**

**Oct. 31**

**COMMON READINGS**


AND READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING


AND READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING


- Reading Log Due

**Week 11: Origins of the American Revolution Part 1**

**Nov. 7**

- Reading Log Due

**Week 12: Origins of the American Revolution Part 2**

**Nov. 14**

- Reading Log Due

**Week 13**

**Nov. 21**
- Final Paper Due

**Week 14: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING RECESS**

**Nov. 28**
Week 15: The Meaning of the Revolution  
Dec. 5
COMMON READING
AND TWO OF THE FOLLOWING
• Reading Log Due
LIBRARY SCAVENGER HUNT

1. Find a dissertation written by a faculty member in the department of history.

2. Locate a book written by Philip Morgan.
Essay One: Movie Review

Complete one of the following assignments.

Assignment 1

The way movies, television, and the internet depict past people and events powerfully shape popular perceptions of history. While some director’s tout their movie’s authenticity, they are usually referring to costuming, set designs, and lighting rather than any attempt on their part to render characters as complex, three-dimensional beings. This assignment asks you to critically assess movies as sources of history. Watch and compare *Black Robe* with either *The Mission* or *Last of the Mohicans*. How do these movies depict Native Americans? What possibilities do these movies hold out for cooperation between Europeans and Natives? In what ways do these movies replicate old stereotypes either about European settlers and/or Native peoples? What have the directors done or failed to do to make this movie an “accurate” portrayal of the past?

Assignment 2

Documentaries seem to have little in common with the books and articles historians employ in their own work. Documentary filmmakers rely on images and narration to convey their understanding of the past. Unlike academic books and articles, they seek to entertain as well as inform. Nevertheless, documentaries, like books, have a thesis or main argument. Through the selected use of images and quotations, directors seek to make their view of the past persuasive. As viewers, we must critically assess Watch either the PBS documentary *The War that Made America* or the HBO miniseries *John Adams*. What is the thesis or argument that drives these two filmic accounts of colonial and revolutionary America? Why, for example, do the directors believe that their subject was so important?

Word of Warning

This essay is a critical assessment of the movies and documentaries as sources of history. It is not a movie review. Do not tell me how many thumbs up (or down) the movie received, assess the acting, special effects, the realism of the action or dullness of the plot.