

**Oberlin College  
Department of History**

HIST 473: Violence and Terror in Early America  
Spring 2013  
Wednesday – 2:30-4:20pm  
Rice Hall 100B

Instructor: Matthew R. Bahar  
Office: Rice Hall 306  
Email: [mbahar@oberlin.edu](mailto:mbahar@oberlin.edu)  
Office Hours: M – 1:00-2:30, F – 11:00-12:30, & by appt.

Description

“In the beginning,” John Locke theorized in his *Second Treatise on Government* in 1689, “all the world was America.” Here man dwelled blissfully in a state of nature, a veritable Garden of Eden, free from the vices and anxieties of civilized society. But as we will discover throughout this semester, early America perhaps more closely resembled Thomas Hobbes’ estimation of life in a state of nature: “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Early America was indeed a violent and often terrifying place. From imperial warfare to frontier vigilantism, from infanticide to kidnapping, from witchcraft to pestilence, violence and the fear of violence shaped in profound ways the quotidian life of many in this period. This reality is often obscured by a more recent memory, the bloodletting of the twentieth century – “the bloodiest century in history,” we are often told. This class will explore the myriad functions and meanings of violence in America from the pre-Columbian period through the mid-nineteenth century. It will investigate the various contexts within which violence arose, and trace the continuities and transformations of these contexts over time. By the end of the semester, we will have developed an understanding of violence (and the threat of violence) as a dynamic and pervasive force that shaped so much of the human experience. We will come to understand violence as a major impetus in the formation and expression of early modern identities, attitudes, and worldviews.

Method of Instruction

This is a reading-intensive discussion-based seminar that demands your active participation and attendance. Think of this class as an extended conversation. In order for this conversation to succeed, each participant must pull his or her share of the load. Students should accordingly arrive at each meeting ready to demonstrate that they both completed and thought about the readings. To accomplish this most effectively, you should plan to engage critically, constructively, and courteously with your peers. Your overall performance in this class will depend on your thoughtful engagement with the readings and with one another.

Course Assignments

That you accomplish the assigned readings and attend all class meetings really goes without saying. But in a seminar such as this you must also actively participate in the conversation at those meetings. As such, attendance/discussion (including your film presentation) is worth 50% of the total course grade. The writing components of the class include a weekly quiz (précis) on Blackboard (15%), weekly participation in an online Blackboard discussion of the readings (10%), and a final synthesis paper, 15 pages in length (25%). In the seventh week of our course, I will provide each of you with a written assessment of your individual performance over the first half of the semester.

*Weekly précis* – each week prior to our class meeting, you are responsible for logging into Blackboard and responding to an assigned quiz question. This question will ask you to write a brief summary (usually one paragraph) of the main argument for that week’s monograph. Please do not summarize the entire book. On weeks when multiple articles are assigned instead of a monograph, the question will focus on one of the articles. You may have your readings open when you write the précis and use as much time as you wish. A précis requires none of your own

analysis, opinion, or commentary on the reading (save that for the discussions and paper), just your understanding of its thesis or main argument. The open window for completion of the weekly précis is 6:00pm on Saturday through 6:00pm on Monday, preceding the class meeting.

*Weekly online discussion* – each week prior to our class meeting, you will be responsible for logging into Blackboard throughout the open window and engaging with your peers in an informal online discussion of that week’s assigned readings. The topics for discussion are entirely up to you. Along with the weekly précis, this exercise is designed to get you acquainted with the readings, and allow you to formulate fully- or partially-formed ideas, *before* you get to class. The open window for participating in the weekly online discussion board is noon on Monday to noon on Wednesday, preceding the class meeting.

*Synthesis paper* – this assignment requires you to creatively synthesize our course readings in a final paper due at the end of the semester. Your goal here is to make the readings speak to one another in insightful and thought-provoking ways. From week to week, you should read the books and articles with and against each other in order to explore larger historiographic issues. In what ways, for example, can we think of certain readings as in dialogue with others? What do they agree/disagree about? Or how does one historian’s work complicate or enrich another’s? Be creative, but back up your ideas with the texts too. This paper is due during our scheduled final exam meeting time. [I am more than happy to read an early draft of your paper and provide feedback, provided it is turned in at least ten days before the due date.]

*Film presentation* – once throughout the semester, you will present to the class a short clip of violence from a film of historical fiction. You may choose any film (even animation) set in early America, but please get my approval beforehand. During your presentation, you must first briefly introduce the film and its basic plot, and explain what role the violent scene plays within the larger production. Offer your own insightful analysis of the segment. Does it suggest something about where/how violence originates? Are viewers supposed to understand this violence as purposeful or irrational, justifiable or inexcusable, legitimate or illegitimate, and what indicates this? What does this portrayal of violence suggest about our contemporary relationship with early American history? Or make up your own questions to answer. You have ten to fifteen minutes at the end of class to both offer your comments and show the film clip. You will sign up for a date in the second week of class.

### Required Texts

- Elaine Forman Crane, *Witches, Wife Beaters, and Whores: Common Law and Common Folk in Early America* (Cornell University Press, 2012)
- Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (Penguin, 2005)
- Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Harvard University Press, 1974)
- Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (Yale University Press, 2009)
- Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006)
- Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (Penguin, 2008)
- Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (W.W. Norton, 2009)

## Course Schedule

### **Week One – February 6 – Introduction to the Course**

### **Week Two – February 13 – Violence and Terror in Native America**

- Richard J. Chacon and Rubén G. Mendoza, eds., *North American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2007), pp. 129-148, 160-232 [Blackboard]
- Kathleen DuVal, “Cross-Cultural Crime and Osage Justice in the Western Mississippi Valley, 1700-1826,” *Ethnohistory* 54:4 (Fall, 2007), 697-722 [JSTOR]
- Evan Haefeli, “Kieft’s War and the Cultures of Violence in Colonial America,” in Michael A. Bellesiles, ed., *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History* (New York University Press, 1999), 17-42 [Blackboard]
- Matthew H. Jennings, “Violence in a Shattered World,” in Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall, eds., *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 272-294 [Blackboard]

### **Week Three – February 20 – The Many Uses of Violence in the Colonial Mid-Atlantic**

- Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (W.W. Norton, 2009)

### **Week Four – February 27 – Trophies of Violence: Death and the Power of Human Remains**

- Douglas R. Egerton, “A Peculiar Mark of Infamy: Dismemberment, Burial, and Rebelliousness in Slave Societies,” in Nancy Isenberg, et. al., eds, *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 149-162 [Blackboard]
- Matthew Dennis, “Patriotic Remains: Bones of Contention in the Early Republic,” in Nancy Isenberg, et. al., eds, *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 136-148 [Blackboard]
- , “Death and Memory in Early America,” *History Compass* 4 (March, 2006), 384-401 [Blackboard]
- Andrew Lipman, “‘A meanes to knitt them togeather’: The Exchange of Body Parts in the Pequot War,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 65 (January, 2008), 3-28 [JSTOR]
- James Axtell and William C. Sturtevant, “The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 37 (July, 1980), 451-472 [JSTOR]

### **Week Five – March 6 – Hidden Meanings of Terror and Witchcraft in Colonial New England**

- Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Harvard University Press, 1974)

### **Week Six – March 13 – Defining and Policing Violence in Law and Society**

- Elaine Forman Crane, *Witches, Wife Beaters, and Whores: Common Law and Common Folk in Early America* (Cornell University Press, 2012)

### **Week Seven – March 20 – The Role of Violence in Bonds of Kinship**

- Ann M. Little, “‘Shee Would Bump His Mouldy Britch’: Authority, Masculinity, and the Harried Husbands of New Haven Colony, 1638-1670,” in Michael A. Bellesiles, ed., *Lethal Imaginations: Violence and Brutality in American History* (New York University Press, 1999), 43-68 [Blackboard]

- Randolph A. Roth, "Spousal Murder in Northern New England, 1776-1865," in Christine Daniels, et. al., eds., *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (Routledge, 1999), 65-93 [Blackboard]
- James D. Rice, "Laying Claim to Elizabeth Shoemaker: Family Violence on Baltimore's Waterfront, 1808-1812," in Christine Daniels, et. al., eds., *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (Routledge, 1999), 185-201 [Blackboard]
- James Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 32 (January, 1975), 55-88 [JSTOR]

March 27 – No Class – Spring Recess

**Week Eight – April 3 – Contested Meanings of Sexual Violence**

Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006)

**Week Nine – April 10 – Horrors of the Middle Passage**

Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (Penguin, 2008)

**Week Ten – April 17 – The Violence of Bondage**

- James F. Brooks, "'This Evil Extends Especially...to the Feminine Sex,' Negotiating Captivity in the New Mexico Borderlands," *Feminist Studies* 22 (Summer, 1996), 279-309 [JSTOR]
- Brett Rushforth, "'A Little Flesh We Offer You': The Origins of Indian Slavery in New France," *William and Mary Quarterly* 60 (October, 2003), 777-808 [JSTOR]
- Wendy Anne Warren, "'The Cause of Her Grief': The Rape of a Slave in Early New England," *Journal of American History* 93 (2007), 1031-1049 [JSTOR]
- Christopher Morris, "Within the Slave Cabin: Violence in Mississippi Slave Families," in Christine Daniels, et. al., eds., *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (Routledge, 1999), 268-286 [Blackboard]

**Week Eleven – April 24 – Theft and Violence in the Mexican Borderlands**

Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (Yale University Press, 2009)

**Week Twelve – May 1 – Culture of Violence in a Slave Society**

Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (Oxford University Press, 1986)

**Week Thirteen – May 8 – Enduring Effects of Violence: Imperialism, Warfare, and the Formation of American Identity**

Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (Penguin, 2005)

**Final Examination Period - TBD**