

**Oberlin College
Department of History**

HIST 472: Early Modern Atlantic World
Spring 2014
Wednesday – 2:30-4:20pm
King Building 335

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Office Hours: W – 1:00-2:30, F – 11:00-12:30, & by appt.

Description

In the early modern era, the Atlantic Ocean functioned as an extensive superhighway facilitating the circulation of an array of people, goods, ideas, and power. The sea, in other words, connected rather than separated the disparate cultures and societies around its basin, in turn generating a nexus of unique experiences and identities. This nexus emerged as its own “world,” a singular place of distinct processes and opportunities. Over the past two decades, this way of conceiving the Atlantic has supplanted older understandings of European, American, and African pasts that emphasized the insularity and exceptionalism of those historical experiences. In so doing, the Atlantic World has obtained an enormously influential stature in the historical and literary scholarship of the early modern period. In this seminar, we will hoist our sails on our own Atlantic exploration, investigating various currents and coves of this world as portrayed by a diverse array of scholars. By the time we call at port at the end of the semester, we will have developed a solid grasp of the Atlantic World as a theoretical construct, a historiography, and a historical entity.

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.

Class Requirements

That you accomplish the assigned readings, attend all class meetings, and actively participate in the conversation at those meetings really goes without saying. Attendance/discussion is worth 50% of the total course grade. The writing components of the class include a weekly quiz (précis) (15%), a weekly position paper (15%), and a final synthesis paper, 12-14 pages in length (20%).

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 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 position papers), 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 position paper – each week prior to our class meeting, you will be responsible for logging into Blackboard and posting a 300-350 word position paper on the Discussion Forum. You should use the paper to engage thoughtfully with a particular issue or problem that captivated your attention in the reading. Unlike the précis that requires you to only summarize the thesis, this is your opportunity to sound off on the reading, to offer your critical analysis of a particular component. Like the weekly précis, this exercise is designed to get you acquainted with the readings, and allow you to share fully- or partially-formed ideas, *before* you get to class. The open window for posting your paper is midnight on Sunday to midnight on Tuesday, 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? Where do they agree/disagree? 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.]

Required Texts

David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Cornell University Press, 2010)

Susan Scott Parish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006)

Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1989)

Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: a Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2009)

James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011)

John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (Random House, 2004)

Course Schedule

Week One – February 5 – Introduction to the Course

Week Two – February 12 – Charting a Course and Weighing Anchor – Conceptualizing Atlantic History

Bernard Bailyn, "The Idea of Atlantic History," *Itinerario* 20:1 (1996). Reprinted in Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 1-57 [available on Blackboard]

Nicholas Canny, "Atlantic History; or Reconfiguring the History of Colonial British America," *Journal of American History* 86:3 (December, 1999), pp. 1093-1114 [available on JSTOR]

- David Armitage, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," in Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Palgrave, 2002), pp. 11-27 [available on Blackboard]
- Peter Coclanis, "*Drang Nach Osten*: Bernard Bailyn, the World-Island, and the Idea of Atlantic History," *Journal of World History* 13:1 (2002), pp. 169-182 [available on JSTOR]

According to Bernard Bailyn, when and why did the concept of Atlantic World history emerge, and what factors contributed to its coalescence as a distinct field of historical inquiry? Judging from the tone and structure of his argument, what compelled Bailyn to write this essay and what is he attempting to accomplish with it?

Where do Canny and Armitage's respective understandings of Atlantic history converge and diverge? How can the Atlantic World as an interpretive framework illuminate our conceptions of early modern history in ways that move beyond previous approaches? What are its shortcomings?

Week Three – February 19 – Atlantic Commerce and Trade

David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785*

Week Four – February 26 – Violence and Theft in the Atlantic World

Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*

Week Five – March 5 – Commodifying People in the Atlantic World

Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: a Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*

Week Six – March 12 – Creating a Black Atlantic

John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*

Week Seven – March 19 – Freedom and Unfreedom in the Black Atlantic

Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53:2 (April 1996), 251-288

Randy Sparks, "The Two Princes of Calabar: An Atlantic Odyssey from Slavery to Freedom," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (July 2002), 555-584

Sue Peabody, "'A Dangerous Zeal': Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800," *French Historical Studies* 25:1 (Winter, 2002), 53-90 [available on Blackboard]

March 26 – No Class – Spring Recess

Week Eight – April 2 – The Power of Ideas in an Intellectual Atlantic

Rebecca Earle, “‘If You Eat their Food...’: Diets and Bodies in Early Colonial Spanish America,” *American Historical Review* 115:3 (June 2010), pp. 688-713 [available on JSTOR]

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Amerindian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650,” in *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 64-95 [available on Blackboard].

Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic,” *Social History* 31:1 (2006), pp. 1-14. [available on JSTOR]

Week Nine – April 9 – Hidden Meanings of Atlantic Commodities

Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World*

Week Ten – April 16 – Creating Authority and Knowledge in the Atlantic

Susan Scott Parish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World*

Week Eleven – April 23 – Natural Knowledge and Dangerous Power in the Atlantic

James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World*

Week Twelve – April 30 – The End of Atlantic World History?

Peter A. Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63:4 (October, 2006), pp. 725-742 [JSTOR]

Alison Games, “Beyond the Atlantic: English Globetrotters and Transoceanic Connections,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63:4 (October, 2006), pp. 675-692 [JSTOR]

Week Thirteen – May 7 – Captivity and the Fragility of Empire

Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850*

Final Examination Period - TBD