Becoming “American”: Natives, Slaves, and Colonists in British Mainland North America

Description
This course investigates what America meant to three peoples of three cultures - the English settlers, the indigenous Americans, and the enslaved blacks - during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. We will use a variety of fictional and non-fictional sources to examine and to challenge a teleological narrative of what became the United States after 1783. We will compare foundational narratives constructed by historians, novelists, and films, and study mentalities, immigration patterns, demographic catastrophes, rebellions, and religious revivals to arrive at our own answer to the following question: How and when did European colonists in British mainland North America come to occupy a privileged position in relation to native peoples and African slaves and to have a special relationship with the British Empire? We will begin with the Roanoke settlement (1587) and end with the American Revolution.

Readings
The following required books have been ordered for purchase at the Oberlin College Bookstore:

Karen Ordahl Kupperman, Roanoke: The Abandoned Colony
Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia
Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812*
James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*
Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776*
James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*

Additional readings are available on Blackboard. PowerPoint presentations will also be posted on Blackboard after the class meeting in question.

**Films**
Pocahontas
A Midwife’s Tale
The Last of the Mohicans
1776

**Museum Trips**
Construction of natives (2/12)
Construction of blacks (3/4)
Construction of Britons (4/29)

**Museum Guidelines**
1. All personal belongings such as bags, backpacks, briefcases, coats, and umbrellas must be left on the hooks by the back door of the museum. When coming to the Print Study Room, only pencils and paper or notebooks may be brought in.
2. Please do not touch the works of art.
3. No food or drink allowed.
4. Pencils only are permitted in the galleries and Print Study Room; pens and writing instruments using inks may not be used.
5. Shoes and shirts are required at all times.

**Evaluation**
Class Participation (30%)
Attend all classes. Remain engaged in the texts and in the class.

Write six one-page discussion papers. You must submit three discussion papers before mid-semester break and three after the break. Use the papers to identify and briefly explain issues in the readings. These papers are for your benefit. Their sole purpose is to facilitate discussion. Consequently, late discussion papers will not be accepted, for any reason. Discussion papers may not be submitted electronically. Each discussion paper will receive a “grade” of $\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{}$, or $\sqrt{-}$. The cumulative performance on these papers may be used at the margin to shape a student’s final grade. Comments will not be written on the papers themselves but you are welcome to come talk to me about them if you have concerns or questions.
Lead pre-assigned class discussions. Post discussion questions at least 24 hours before class.

Presentations (5/6 and 5/8)

Write three 4-5 page essays (Essay 1 and Essay 2: 15% each; Essay 3: 20%)  
For each essay, you may write on the question below or speak to me about constructing your own topic. These are “think piece” essays rather than research papers and do not require bibliographies or footnotes.

Essay 1 (Required): Compare the explanations for the origins of slavery proposed by Morgan and Jordan. Which explanation do you find most convincing and why?  
(Due 3/20)

Choose 2A or 2B

Essay 2A: Do Kupperman and Merrell adopt the same model to explain the interaction between colonists and natives? Explain.  
(Due 4/15)

Essay 2B: Do Butler and Cooper offer compatible explanations for the emergence of a distinct American identity in the 18th century? Explain.  
(Due 4/29)

Essay 3 (Required): What theme best explains the development of American society between the 1580s and 1770s? Use the class texts as evidence.  
(Due 5/9, noon)

Note: Late papers will be penalized 5% each day until submission.

Take home final (20%)  
Open book exam that covers the contents of the entire course. It will include lecture notes, articles and texts, museum visits, and films.  
(Due 5/17, 9 a.m.)

Schedule of Classes

Week 1  
February 5  
Introduction: Contesting Interpretations of American Exceptionalism

February 7  
Migrations and Catastrophes

Discussion  
Richard Hakluyt “Discourse of Western Planning” (on Blackboard)

Week 2
February 12  
**Museum Trip:** Construction of Natives  
Read first half of Kupperman, *Roanoke Colony*  

February 14  
No class  

**Week 3**  
February 19  
Discussion  
Finish Kupperman, *Roanoke Colony*  
Film, *Black Indians: An American Story* – 7 p.m. at Oberlin Public Library (Optional)  

February 21  
Native Women as Mediators  
Discussion  
Kathleen Brown, “In Search of Pocahontas”  
Ian Steele, “English Jamestown and Powhattan”  

**Film:** Pocahontas  

Friday February 22 (Optional)  
Illustrated Presentation - *Black Women and Men Pioneers: The Real West*, 4 p.m. at Kendal at Oberlin’s Heiser Auditorium, 600 Kendall Drive  

Saturday, February 23 (Optional)  
Illustrated Presentation, 1:30 at Oberlin High School Auditorium, 281 N. Pleasant Street, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*  

**Week 4**  
February 26  
Discussion  
First half of Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom* (Books I and II)  

February 28  
Discussion  
First two chapters of Jordan’s *White over Black* (I and II)  

**Week 5**  
March 4  
**Museum Trip:** Construction of blacks  

March 6  
Discussion  
Second half of Morgan’s *American Slavery, American Freedom*
**Week 6**
March 11
Women in Colonial Society I
**Due:** Turn in a detailed outline of your paper (two pages). Include a thesis.

**Film:** A Midwife’s Tale

March 13
Workshop Papers

**Week 7**
March 18
Women in Colonial Society II

Discussion
Berkin, “The Sisters of Pocahontas”
Ulrich, “Martha Ballard and Her Girls: Women’s Work in Eighteenth Century Maine”

March 20
No class
**Due:** First Papers (send via email)

Mid-Break

**Week 8**
April 1
Hybrid Identities

Discussion
Merrell, *The Indians’ New World*, first half

April 3
Hybrid Identities

Discussion
Merrell, *The Indians’ New World*, second half

**Week 9**
April 8
Seven Years’ War

Discussion
Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, first half
April 10
Seven Years’ War

Discussion
Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, second half

**Week 10**
April 15
**Film**: The Last of the Mohicans
**Due**: Second papers (hardcopy)

April 17
Social Development

Discussion
Butler, *Becoming America*, “Introduction” and “Peoples”
Jordan, *White over Black*, III and IV

**Week 11**
April 22
American and British Patriotisms

Discussion
Butler, *Becoming America*, “Politics”
McConville, Introduction to “The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776”

April 24
Religious Awakenings

Discussion
Butler, *Becoming America*, “Things Spiritual”
Jordan, *White over Black*, “Souls of Men”

**Week 12**
April 29
**Museum Trip**: Construction of Britons
**Due**: Third Papers (hardcopy)

May 1
Eve of Revolution

**Film**: 1776

**Week 13**
May 6
Presentations
May 8
Presentations
Take home exam handed out

Final Due Dates
Take Home Exam Due: May 9 by noon
Final Papers Due: May 17 by 9 a.m.