

# *Past Early America*

(Intro U.S. History to 1865)

HIS 120

Instructor: Katrina Ponti

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Office Hours: By Appointment



## Course Descriptions and Objectives

The study of Early American history covers a huge time span, roughly 1492 to 1865. Even these dates are highly fluid with the inclusion of the rich Native American and Mesoamerican narratives, as well as the lasting social and political implications of the American Civil War. Within this period, four continents violently collide, placing millions of people into direct contact when previously none existed. Nations came into being where previously none existed. There are several schools of study at work rather than a single trajectory that miraculously led to the United States. The result is a dynamic story that is virtually impossible to contain within a single category of “Early America.” Within the study of maritime history broadly, and Atlantic history in particular, there is a developing discussion among historians of the role that America—and eventually the United States—played in the larger transatlantic picture of the early modern world. This course will provide students with an understanding of U.S. national heritage from multiple perspectives, as well as a “citizen’s tool kit” that empowers learners to imagine their own roles in the success of democracy.

## Grading

Grades for this course will be determined using the University of Rochester’s grading scale

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| 93-100 = A | 73-76= C  |
| 90-92= A-  | 70-72= C- |
| 87-89= B+  | 67-69= D+ |
| 83-86= B   | 63-66= D  |
| 80-82= B-  | 60-62= D- |
| 77-79= C+  | 0-59= F   |

**Attendance (10%):** Students are expected to attend every class session, and to be on time. Anyone arriving more than 10 minutes later than the designated start time will be marked absent. That being said, I understand that life circumstances can influence class attendance. Every student is allowed to miss two class sessions without penalty. However, any absences beyond the designated two, will

result in the loss of 2% points from the final grade. Once a student misses 5 class meetings (beyond the aforementioned two) the student will receive zero points for the attendance portion of their grade.

### **Participation (15%)**

Because this class is a mixture of lecture, discussion and in-class exercises, students must come ready to participate. Please come prepared to discuss assigned readings and share your insights, questions, and thoughts about them. Discussion is not optional in this course— it is required. You have important insights and opinions and the entire class benefits from hearing them. In addition to general class participation, we will also have an in-class debate at the end of the semester which will be included in this grade.

### **Commonplace Book (25%)**

In lieu of quizzes or reading responses, all students will be required to keep a digital commonplace book, which I will peruse weekly (students may have a private section of their books that I will not read, but a public section must also be kept for grading). Commonplace books, somewhat like a daily diary, were frequently used in early America as a semi-private collection of notes, thoughts, and quotations that inspired and interested. It also helps to organize thoughts and improves writing style. They were so popular that even Thomas Paine wrote a handbook on how to keep a commonplace. Each week I will provide students with a broad theme that will be discussed in class sessions. Students will write on this theme in their books, relating their thoughts, and connecting the theme to the class readings, topics, and discussions. They may also record quotations or pictures from class that struck the student as relevant or intriguing.

### **Midterm Exam (25%)**

### **Final Exam (25%)**

### **Technology Policy**

Since most of our readings are digital and accessible on Blackboard, I expect you to have your computer or tablet available for class discussion. However, the use of cell phones and smart phones is strictly forbidden during class. If the use or misuse of technology becomes an issue during in-class lectures and discussions (i.e., checking Facebook, watching Youtube videos, Tweeting, etc.), then I reserve the right to alter the technology policy as I see fit.

### **Late Work and Missed Assignments**

Late work will not be accepted. No exceptions. Any extenuating circumstances should be communicated directly to the instructor as soon as possible. Exam dates and assignment deadlines are made clear at the beginning of the course which means there are few reasonable excuses for missing them.

### **Academic Honesty Policy**

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>. For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including

subtle instances), see the American Historical Association's "Defining Plagiarism," <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/plagiarism-curricular-materials-for-history-instructors/defining-plagiarism>

### **Academic Assistance**

This classroom respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. I invite you to talk with me about any concerns or situations that may affect your ability to complete your assignments successfully. If you have any issues throughout the semester, I strongly encourage you to contact the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). CETL supports undergraduate students at the University of Rochester with services that promote academic success, including course-specific collaborative study groups, study skills counseling, a study skills course, and disability support. The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the [Office of Disability Resources](#) at: [disability@rochester.edu](mailto:disability@rochester.edu); (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall

### **Course Schedule**

Syllabus Introduction

*Theme: The Origin Myths*

Pre-Columbian America

Read: Coast Salish Transformation Stories

Columbian Exchange

Read: Excerpts from *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*

*Theme: (E)motion*

The Atlantic System

Read: Excerpts from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*

British Colonies

Read: Excerpts from *The Papers of William Penn*

### **Midterm Exam**

*Theme: Sticking it to the Man*

American Revolution

Read: *An American's Experience in the British Army*

Congressional and Constitutional America

Read: The Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution articles I to VII

*Theme: Define the Nation*

Adams to Monroe

Read: Excerpts from the Diary of Meriwether Lewis

Early Industrial America

Read: Historical Patents

*Theme: Who do you think you are?*

American Peoples- The west, First Nations, Creoles, immigration

Read: Letters of George Washington Bush

Slavery in America

Read: Frederick Douglass digital exhibit <https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/frdo/index.html>

*Theme: The United States 'are' or the United States 'is'?*

Civil War: Puzzle pieces of Union

Read: Thomas Barb Diary

In-Class Debate

Reconstruction

Watch: "All Bound Up Together" <https://youtu.be/VG0IIffc5Qo>

**Final Exam**