

**Studies in American Literature to 1870:
Religion and Science in Early American Colonial Encounters**

Fall 2009
Section 002, Wednesday 3-5:50 p.m.
Location: LANG 219
Phone: 940-369-8952

Professor Kelly Wisecup
Email: kelly.wisecup@unt.edu
Office: LANG 409A
Office hours: M, 3:30-5:30 p.m.,
and by appointment

A. Description

In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, both religious and scientific beliefs and practices operated as important tools by which to describe and interpret natural and supernatural phenomena. European travelers, British American colonists, Native Americans, and Africans shared many conceptions of and strategies for describing the natural and supernatural worlds: for instance, natural phenomena—such as comets, epidemics, and hurricanes—were believed to have supernatural causes, while practices such as prayer were believed to intervene in natural processes. However, the discovery, conquest, and colonization of the New World also brought Europeans, Natives, and Africans into contact with unfamiliar religious and scientific practices. The ability to provide firsthand accounts of such unfamiliar or marvelous phenomena in the New World frequently endowed colonists, Natives, and Africans with the authority of the eyewitness.

In this course, we will read poems, natural histories, autobiographies, captivity narratives, speeches, and true relations by European travelers, British American colonists, Native Americans, and African Americans. We will explore the ways in which people throughout the Americas presented their ability to provide firsthand information about the New World as a sign that their accounts were trustworthy and authoritative, and we will investigate how they employed various rhetorical traditions to relate such observations and to articulate their relationships to unfamiliar peoples and places.

We will ask the following questions:

- How did colonists, travelers, Natives, and Africans employ religious and scientific discourses to describe the unfamiliar peoples, places, and practices they observed in colonial encounters?
- How were religious and scientific practices employed to authorize accounts written in and about experiences in the colonies and to rationalize colonization? How did such practices contribute to the development of early American literatures?
- In what ways did colonial encounters affect discourses of religion and science throughout the early Americas?

A. Texts

Norton Anthology of American Literature, 7th ed., volumes A and B, ISBN 10: 0-393-92993-0
Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings: Revised Edition* (Penguin, 2003), ISBN: 9780142437162
Available at the University Bookstore

B. Assignments

1. Reading Questions (10 %)

By midnight each Monday, you should respond to the reading questions by posting a short, paragraph-long response to Blackboard (at <http://ecampus.unt.edu/webct/entryPage.dowebct>). Reading responses should make a specific argument in response to each question and must provide specific textual evidence to support your thesis. Once a week, you should respond to **one** of your classmates' posts on the class discussion space; these responses are due at midnight Tuesday. *Reading questions cannot be made up; late submissions will not receive credit.*

This course is an excellent opportunity to begin to craft and practice your critical thinking and writing skills. You will be expected to read and engage the texts for each week and to participate in discussion with thoughtful comments on the readings and your classmates' ideas. To facilitate your participation, please bring all readings, including those posted online, to class.

2. Class Presentation (10 %)

Each student will give a ten-minute presentation on one of our readings. Presentations should include a handout, be focused on no more than two passages, and raise at least three questions about the passages to stimulate class discussion.

3. Papers (50 %)

You will employ close reading, literary analysis, and argumentation skills in two papers (4-5 pages each). More detailed handouts will follow.

Each paper will consist of one preliminary draft and one final draft, due two weeks apart from one another. You will receive comments on preliminary drafts; grades will be assigned **ONLY** on final drafts. No comments will be given on final drafts. If a student does not submit a preliminary draft by the assigned deadline, s/he forfeits his/her right to a comment.

*** Papers will lose one-third of a letter grade per class day they are late and will receive "F's if not turned in a week after the due date. Emailed papers will not be accepted.*

4. Final Exam (30 %)

A final exam will be given during the regular exam period.

C. Course Policies

1. Participation/Attendance

Because group discussion will be an essential part of the class, you will be expected to participate in discussions in class and on Blackboard with relevant, interesting, and respectful questions and responses. Reading questions and discussion count as part of your participation grade. Your engagement and participation in the class is valued and expected, so roll will be taken at the beginning of every class.

The only absences that are excused are those that are university-approved: for religious holidays, documented illness, and representation of the University at approved events. **Excused absences must be documented in writing, no later than one week after the absence. Please let me**

know, in writing, ahead of time if know you will be absent for a university-approved reason.

More than three absences will result in your final grade dropping one letter grade for each class day missed thereafter.

2. Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by the University's Policy of Academic Dishonesty in the Student Handbook. Academic dishonesty (including plagiarism, cheating, or falsification of academic records) will not be tolerated; all cases will, at the least, result in a grade of F. The UNT Student Handbook defines plagiarism as:

- a) the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person with out full and clear acknowledgement, and/or
- (b) the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

Please see UNT's policy on academic integrity, available in the Student Handbook, <http://www.unt.edu/csrr/handbook.html>.

3. Disabilities

If you have a disability that you feel will affect your performance in this class, please register with the Office of Disability Accommodation, University Union, Suite 321, (940) 565-4323, and inform me in writing as soon as possible.

The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112—The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

4. Instructor Contact

Please feel free to contact me with any questions: through email, during my office hours, or by making an appointment. I will respond to your emails within 48 hours.

Schedule

Week 1: **September 2: Course Introduction**

Christopher Columbus, *Letters*
Iroquois Creation Story

Week 2: **September 9: First Encounters**

The Broken Spears (online)
Bartolome de Las Casas, "The Devastation of the Indies"
Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*
John White, Paintings
John Smith, *The General History, A Description of New England, New England's Trials*

SEPTEMBER 10: Last day to drop a course online

Week 3: **September 16: Colonial Encounters in "Texas"**

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Relación of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*
True Relation of the Vicissitudes that Attended The Governor Don Hernando de Soto
(online)

Week 4: September 23: Colonial Encounters and Dissent

Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan*

Roger Williams, *A Key to the Language of America* (in Norton and online)

Week 5 September 30: Captivity I

Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration*

OCTOBER 6: Last day to drop with a “W”

Week 6 October 7: Captivity II

John Williams, *The Unredeemed Captive Returning to Zion* (online)

“A Notable Exploit”: Hannah Dustan’s *Captivity and Revenge*

John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings* (online)

Week 7 October 14: Travel, Creoles, and Slavery

Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph*

Sarah Kemble Knight, *Journal of Madam Knight*

William Byrd, *The History of the Dividing Line* and *Secret History* (online)

PAPER 1: Draft One DUE

Week 8 October 21: Self-Constructions I: The Black Atlantic

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (Penguin)

Week 9: October 28: Self-Constructions I: The Black Atlantic Continued

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (Penguin)

PAPER 1: Final Draft DUE

Week 10 November 4: Self-Constructions II: Slavery, Poetry, Oratory

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Page 444, and 657-665)

Pontiac, *Speech at Detroit*; Red Jacket, *Speech to the US Senate*;

Thomas Jefferson, *Logan*; Tecumseh, *Speech to the Osages*

Phillis Wheatley, *Poems and Letters*

Samson Occom, *A Short Narrative of My Life*

William Apess, *An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man*

Week 11: November 11: “Planting” in the Americas

Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbados* (online)

James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane*, Book IV (online)

Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (in Norton and online)

Week 12: November 18: History, Sympathy, and Race

James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers*, *Last of the Mohicans*

Catherine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*

Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, selected poems

Week 13: November 25: Religion and Race in Slave Narratives I

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom*

Paper 2: Draft One DUE

Week 14: December 2: Religion and Race in Slave Narratives II

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

William Wells Brown, *Clotel*

Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*

Week 15: December 9: Race and Revolution

Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*

Paper 2: Final Draft DUE