

History 20 (Online)
Second week Agenda (10/24-11/1)

1. Since I haven't graded anything yet, I don't have anything to say about your responses here as a group, but I think in the future, I will say something as a way of review. Some of the things that I think will recur and our worth trying to remember as we move on to the next readings is (1) the idea that Columbus first circulates in his letter that the native peoples of the "New World" are timid, weak, child-like, uncivilized, irreligious (or savage), innocent push-overs is kind of the default of a lot of European (and later, American thinking. It conditions, in other words, a lot of the relationships between Europeans and Indians and that relationship is often asymmetrical (to the point of being incommensurable) and often ends in violent interactions. That is not to say that Columbus is responsible for the history that follows in his wake, but that Europeans were often quick to dismiss non-Europeans and tended to be chauvinistic about their culture and religion. The other thing that will recur has to do with the connection between liberty and slavery that I mentioned before in the form of Edmund Morgan's thesis. Like I said, I haven't read anyone's responses yet, but the last paragraph of Taylor's chapter on the Chesapeake (p. 157) sums things up nicely and it's worth thinking about that dynamic as the Revolution approaches—the dynamic being that rich planters offered racial equality in the place of a longed for economic equality. As for this week's reading:

2. In terms of the reading for this week, I want you to keep in mind what you know and think about the Puritans (some of whom are called Pilgrims who were Puritan separatists that came on the Mayflower in 1620). The reason I ask you to do this is that many Americans like to think that the Puritans were like the original Americans who came just seeking religious freedom and thus they themselves offered religious freedom, which isn't so. They did certainly value *their* freedom and came to the Americas specifically to get out from under the heel of the Anglican Church, but they had no problem executing their religious as well as cultural enemies. There is loads of writing on the internet about the Puritans and I suggest you satisfy your curiosity and get to know the context a little bit—I would avoid overtly religious websites that claim to teach history, but that's just me. When you are thinking about the reading though, keep in mind it is on the witch trials in particular and the relationship between the New English colonists in the late 17th century and the mother country, as well as with Indians. What is interesting about this reading (Godbeer, aside from his name) is that it offers a context that rationalizes the Witch Trials. He tells us that there was a lot going on that led the colonists to react the way that they did; and a lot of what was going on had to do with the feeling of being invaded—invaded by Indians, invaded by the French Catholics, and invaded by English Anglicans and the monarchy itself. This also should bring to mind some of the back

and forth to come between the colonies (in America) and metropole (England) that will lead to war. I have also added a primary source—the famous “City on a Hill” lay-sermon by John Winthrop, who gave it on the ship *Arabella* en route to New England. I think it speaks to the notion not only of American exceptionalism as it has been thought of for a while but also Christian community and the non-individualist desire to help those in need—it is called “A Model of Christian Charity.”

The Laurel Thacher Ulrich reading concerns, on the one hand, gender; and on the other, daily life, answering (at least partially) the question, what was life like during the colonial era—at least for women. What she is asking us to think about is how difficult (although maybe difficult might not be the right word) it was for women who lived in the American colonies, which was/were like a frontier—very rough and unrefined. So you have some women (rich women) who had these pretensions to gentility but never could quite live up to the standards set in Europe or even cities in the early US—keep in mind that distinction between city and country, coast and interior, urban and rural—it makes a political difference leading up to the revolution (as we saw with Bacon’s Rebellion) that redounds to the present day (I think we could easily make an argument that a major source of friction in our polarized times has to do with urban, suburban, and rural values). Another aspect of this history to keep in mind having to do with this dynamic is the class aspect of it, particularly the ways in which pretensions to gentility itself become suspect in the revolutionary era. Another primary source I have added has to do with the issue of gender. It is a letter exchange between John and Abigail Adams...the important aspect of it is the moment when she asks him while he is “declaring an independency” to “remember the ladies.” Alas they did not.

The final reading is from our old (new) friend Bender. He is beginning to think about the Revolution and particularly its international context. In this sense we really want to think about the European rivalries, particularly between England and France; and how eventually the Americans will exploit those rivalries. Again, because he is asking us to reframe our understanding of American history it begins with this notion that perhaps the American Revolution was not merely a moment of political genius on the part of “founding fathers,” but rather something more messy and contingent.

I know all of these readings seem a bit amorphous (especially for those of us used to the smooth chronologies of textbooks), but I think if you stick with the readings and do a little supplemental research or ask me questions about the things that you are unfamiliar about, you will finish this class with a far more deeper understanding of the American past than if we just read a textbook and took multiple choice tests online (which some of you would probably prefer).

A note on primary/secondary sources

Primary sources are the raw materials of history—diary entries, letters, newspaper articles, advertisements, pamphlets, novels, plays, poems, artifacts such as furniture and clothes, the list is ongoing—these are the things that historians pore over and synthesize into interpretations or analyses of the past that are usually rendered in literary (that is to say written) form that we call secondary sources. It is helpful to read these two types of text in light of one another: how do we square Winthrop's Puritans with Godbeer's? What can Ulrich tell us about Abigail Adams's life? Also, if there are questions attached to the primary sources (or on the powerpoints) just treat them as something to think about you don't have to address them in an official capacity.

Questions for reflective essay

Your essay should deal with in some substantive way these five questions. Remember, it should be at least 650 words and can either just answer the questions or you can blend your answers into a more organic whole. I am grading you on a few factors: length (is it at least 650 words—put word count at the top, clarity (is your writing and grammar of a quality that I can understand what you are trying to communicate to me), and reference to the readings (do I get the feeling that you actually did the reading). If you hit all these marks, you will get 5/5 on your essay. In a sense these will be works in progress. I will try to be as thorough as possible in my feedback if you are not hitting the mark. If you are, I will let you know with a simple, *interesting*, *very thoughtful*, *very good*, *well-done*, and if it's special, *excellent*. I am not looking for perfection, just that you are reading and engaging with the texts. Due: 10/31 (Happy Halloween) by 12 PM **BY EMAIL**

1. On p. 182 Godbeer writes, “only by placing the witch hunt in its immediate historical context can we understand why the people of Essex County reacted so strongly to the afflictions in Salem Village.”

What is the context that he is speaking of? Try to be as specific as possible. There is a hint on p. 186, where he writes, “New England, then, was under attack—physically, politically and spiritually—during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.” The recognition of what exactly he means by “physically, politically and spiritually” will answer the question.

2. What is Winthrop mean when he says: “For this end we must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others' necessities, we must uphold a familiar commerce together in all

meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality...” Does that make you feel any differently about the Puritans?

3. In Ulrich, what are the qualities of a “good housewife” and a “pretty gentlewoman?” Put differently what are the differences between “industry” and “gentility?”

4. On Bender: How does it complicate our understanding of America’s “founding” to think about it in such deeply contingent terms—that it was not a “singular” moment of political genius that came out of the blue but a “side-effect” of a much larger global or international process?

5. What can you ascertain (guess or infer) about Abigail Adams’s life from her letter/s? Was it easy? Hard? And what do you think of her plea to “Remember the ladies?” Does it seem farfetched? How does John Adams respond?