

SEAN

The Society of Early Americanists Newsletter

From the SEA President

Looking Ahead to the 2025 Conference

Planning has begun for the **2025 biennial conference**, to be held **June 5-8** on the **University of Notre Dame campus**. The **conference committee** has members spanning a range of fields and institutions, and it includes members of the SEA leadership (listed in parentheses):

[Kristy Cherry-Randle](#) (representing the Junior Scholars Caucus)

[Kathleen Donegan](#)

[Elijah Gould](#)

[Patrick Griffin](#)

[Sandra Gustafson](#) (President)

[April Langley](#) (DEI officer)

[Jay David Miller](#)

[Wendy Raphael Roberts](#)

[Jan Stievermann](#)

[Kelly Wisecup](#) (Vice-President)

The **Call for Proposals** will appear in late summer or early fall. We are making good progress toward **keynote presentations** and a **Common Read**—watch this space and the SEA website for additional information as it becomes available. Also in the works: an **online seminar series** related to the Common Read and the work of the new DEI committee, to be held over the fall and spring.

In 2025 we hope to rekindle the vitality of the fully **in-person conference** that was dampened by the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced the conference online in 2021. The Notre Dame campus is a good setting for face-to-face exchanges, with spacious facilities and outdoor areas for gathering. The main venue will be the [McKenna Hall Conference Center](#), which has rooms of varying sizes for panels and keynotes.

Across the street from McKenna Hall, a block of rooms has been set aside at the [Morris Inn](#), which has additional meeting rooms as well as the popular Rohr's restaurant, Café J for coffee and breakfast, and an outdoor seating area. For those who prefer dormitory accommodations, they will be available to book in early 2025.

With an eye on the upcoming conference, we have begun a **membership drive** to foster engagement in advance of the formal gathering



THE SOCIETY OF EARLY
AMERICANISTS

Inside this Issue . . .

From the SEA President	1-2
From the SEA Vice-President	2-3
From the SEA Executive Coordinator	3-4
Announcements	4-5
Featured Scholar	6
Book Prize Interview	7-8
Teaching Early America I	9-10
Teaching Early America II	11
Digital Early America	12
SEA @ ALA	12
Upcoming Conferences and CFP's	13-15
Opportunities for Giving	16
Membership Information	16
Image Index	16



Overmantel from the Baldwin House

We are being aided in the drive by the University of North Carolina Press—the SEA’s affiliated press, which publishes *Early American Literature*—and Duke University Press, which runs membership for the SEA by arrangement with UNCP. Among the **benefits of membership** are:

- receiving the journal [Early American Literature](#) three times a year (in print or print + digital)
- receiving the SEA Newsletter, in PDF form twice a year
- participating in SEA biennial and special topics conferences (after conference registration payment)
- voting in biennial elections and participating in business meetings at the biennial and topical conferences
- receiving periodic email messages from the SEA Executive Coordinator about the society’s activities
- participating in the Junior Scholars Caucus where appropriate

You may have received a renewal notice from Duke recently, and if that’s the case, I hope you’ll take a moment to affirm your commitment to the SEA. Please direct membership-related inquiries to: Duke University Press Journal Services via this email address: orders@dukeupress.edu.

In May the Executive Committee voted to add the SEA to the organizations supporting the [ACLS Statement on the 2024 Campus Protests](#). The American Council of Learned Societies is a leading academic organization devoted to humanistic knowledge and the interpretive social sciences. On the ACLS website, President Joy Connolly describes the organization’s mission: “Since our founding in the wake of World War I, ACLS has devoted itself to the free circulation of knowledge for a secure and peaceful world. At the heart of our mission for the 21st century is our commitment to work toward a more just and inclusive future by supporting a scholarly ethos of curiosity, discovery, understanding, debate, and critique.”

The ACLS statement on the campus protests expresses these values while emphasizing the range of opinions that signers hold: “Academic freedom and freedom of speech are central to this endeavor. As a representative of a large and diverse community of scholars, we have no shared position on the issues at the heart of the student protests.”

The topic of academic freedom has recently been raised with regard to the [1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#) of the American Association of University Professors, which the SEA has been asked to sign as well. The SEA leadership invites member comments on the desirability of signing the AAUP statement. Please write to us at seacoord@gmail.com.

Sandra Gustafson, University of Notre Dame
SEA President

From the SEA Vice-President

In 2022, the SEA membership voted to add a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion officer to the Advisory Committee, and the Executive Committee was delighted to appoint Dr. April Langley, African American Studies Department, University of South Carolina, to the position. Dr. Langley has assembled a committee which has begun work on several initiatives. The committee consists of the following scholars:

- April Langley, African American Studies Department, University of South Carolina
- Kelly Bezio
- Angela Calcaterra, American Indian Studies Program, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
- Chinaza Amaeze Okoli, English Department, Eastern Kentucky University
- Rebecca M. Rosen, English and Philosophy Department, Murray State University

The following interview, conducted by Kelly Wisecup, aims to introduce Dr. Langley to SEA members who might not have yet had the chance to meet her and to introduce the committee and its work more broadly to the membership.

Kelly Wisecup: Could you tell us a little about your scholarly work—what scholarly interests and expertise do you bring to your role as chair of the SEA DEI committee?

April Langley: As a scholar in the interdisciplinary fields of Black Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and Religious Studies, whose research brings her to the intersections of many issues, contexts, and concerns related to inclusion, equity, and diversity, I have spent more than two decades writing, teaching, and participating actively in what is commonly known as DEI work.

I’ve been a member of the Society of Early Americanists for nearly as long and have watched it grow, from the earlier days in the late 90s while still a graduate student to my current role as chair of African American Studies at the University of South Carolina, and I feel a certain responsibility and dedication to be part of that growth, not only in my formal scholarly contributions as an early Americanist in colonial Afro-British American literature and culture but also toward its continued growth for future generations as a society that honors the very best traditions of what it means to embrace, celebrate, and promote equity and inclusion for all its current and future scholars and in honor of those who have gone before us and on whose shoulders we stand.

For me, doing this work as chair of the inaugural SEA DEI committee, I honor my ancestors, Phillis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, Lucy Terry, Jarena Lee, Jupiter Hammon, John C. Shields, Wilfred C. Samuels, Nellie McKay, and so many others. I am most interested in being part of cooperative scholarly communities that are dedicated to the equitable framing, sharing, learning, and teaching about early American studies from as many diverse spaces, places, identities, and modes of existing as possible. In this role, I hope to facilitate my interests in research, teaching, and community through SEA.

KW: The DEI committee is a newly formed committee, approved at the business meeting at the SEA conference in June 2023. How are you and the committee thinking about your work together?

AL: In our first year we have a) established and received approval for our mission statement; b) developed a survey to assess members' needs in the area of DEI; and c) we are in the process of working on organizing online DEI seminars for the spring, with perhaps a possible presenter for the fall. Once we receive, and review responses from the survey, we look forward to working together on a number of projects that will be SEA member driven. We also hope to add a few members to an already stellar and productive committee.

KW: How might SEA members support the committee over the next year or two?

AL: The most important thing right now is that SEA members [complete and submit the survey](#). The committee needs to hear from our members about the needs that will best serve SEA's commitment to active work on behalf of inclusion, equity, and diversity.

Kelly Wisecup, Northwestern University
SEA Vice-President



From the SEA Executive Coordinator

As an early Americanist who is stationed, so to speak, on the West Coast, I think a lot about orientation. From what vantage point do we perceive our field, and how does that affect what we teach and how we teach it? All travels, physical and intellectual, begin somewhere, and that point of origin orients us in space and time--dictating whether something feels ahead of us or behind us, toward the rising or the setting sun, near or distant, familiar or foreign.

If the line from George Berkeley's famous 1728 poem, "Westward the course of empire takes its way," became one of the hoariest clichés of the modern era, it's because it contained a kernel of harsh historical truth: Europeans and their religious, financial, and cultural structures did spread in a dominant fashion through the Americas. Yet, as revisionist scholarship has insisted for at least three decades, the direction of our *thought* need not follow the brutal currents of colonialism. Even linguistically embedded ideas about the forward direction of time are not universal.

In the Aymara language spoken in the Andes, for example, the future is described spatially as being behind us, while the past is in front. From an embodied perspective, it makes perfect sense: our backsides don't have eyes! We can envision things that already exist and experiences that have already happened, whereas the future is unseeable.

Now-classic works like Daniel K. Richter's *Facing East from Indian Country* (2003) challenged the Anglo-European orientation that imaginatively located everything "new" and future-oriented through a westward directionality: when the historian's thinking subjects are instead Native American, change and novelty get associated with strangers arriving from the eastern sea.

Likewise, Claudio Saunt's *West of the Revolution: An Uncommon History of 1776* (2014) disrupted the chronotope of American revolutions by focusing on Euro-Indigenous encounters at that same moment in Alaska, California, and in Dakota-Lakota territory.

More recently, Michelle Burnham's terrific *Transoceanic America: Risk, Writing, and Revolution in the Global Pacific* (2019) spun the Berkeleyan west-as-future orthodoxy fully around, using examples of Indigenous Pacific encounters with strangers from their own east (and north and south) to argue for revisions to the early American literary canon, where an Atlantic focus remains quite palatable.

One of the Executive Coordinator's jobs is to manage the organization's membership lists. Out of curiosity, I calcu-

lated the percentage of SEA members living west of the Rockies (or, using a reverse orientation: east of the Pacific coast as far inland as that mountain range). It's about 14%, in contrast to the region's 24% share of the total US population.

That lack of correspondence is not at all surprising, of course, given the field's historical associations with New England, and the fact that the SEA itself was first founded and strongly supported by institutions in the South.

It stands to reason, though, that the thinner concentration of early American scholars in this region probably translates into fewer course offerings in its institutions of higher education—which in turn impacts what and how K-12 teachers pass along knowledge to young people. Since the demographic of these “Western” states trends younger and more ethnoracially diverse than the nation as a whole, this disparity poses some long-term questions that this organization will need to think about.

Which direction, or directions, do we face when we think and talk about “early America”? How do we meaningfully build from students' local experiences of space, time, and identity toward more capacious models that will open them up to the relevance of other kinds of experience? And where will we, as scholars, find community so that we can periodically refresh and reorient our own thinking? The answers lie behind us, in the unseen future.

Kirsten Silva Gruesz, University of California, Santa Cruz
SEA Executive Coordinator

Announcements

Associate Editor Sought

Early American Reprints, a not-for-profit publisher serving the profession, seeks an Associate Editor. Working with the Editor, the Associate Editor will share in responsibilities that include these: managing publications, editing new texts, writing scholarly notes, editing introductions, doing academic consultation, soliciting reviews, promoting publications, and other aspects of editorial production and marketing. While prior editorial experience is desirable, it is not necessary. The position offers opportunity for learning and advancement. Interested applicants should write to Richard S. Pressman describing their academic and editorial background. Respond to rpressman@satx.rr.com.

New Benjamin Franklin Distinguished Lectures

In March 2024, the McNeil Center announced the creation of a Benjamin Franklin Distinguished Lecture Series. The series is endowed by the Estate of Margy Elin Meyerson, and the first lecture will feature David Waldstreicher, Professor of History at the CUNY Grad Center in New York City. He will deliver a series of three lectures titled “Three Ages of Slavery and the Future of U.S. History.” The lectures will focus on Franklin as central figure to discuss further scholarly topics concerning early American studies. Additional information about the series can be found at the [McNeil Center website](#).



David Waldstreicher

Zachary M. Bennet Wins Murrin Prize

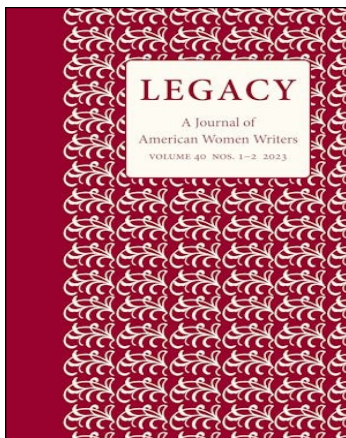
In May, Zachary M. Bennet of Norwich University was awarded the Murrin Prize for the best article published in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Bennet's article, titled "'Canoes of Great Swiftness': Rivercraft and War in the Northeast," was honored for its contribution to the historiography on the Red Atlantic, according to the prize sub-committee.



Zachary M. Bennet

Digital Media Editor Sought

Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers seeks a Digital Media Editor who will research, write, and post content on the journal’s social media sites at Facebook, Instagram, and Bluesky, and on its newly redesigned website. Other responsibilities will include: creating social media posts about news items, exhibits, collections, etc. that will appeal to our target audience; working with the *Legacy* editorial team to develop content to promote the journal and individual issues; editing and proof-reading digital content written by other members of the team; and attending biannual editorial meetings.



Requirements:

- ABD or a recent PhD from an English Department or related field, with a dissertation project that includes a substantial focus on American women writers up to 1950
- In-depth experience (either personal or professional) with social media
- In-depth experience with WordPress
- No editing experience is required

Benefits:

- Training in editorial methods;
- A \$1,000 annual stipend
- Credit given in print and on the website
- Experience working with the editorial team at *Legacy*

To apply, please send an email explaining your qualifications for and interest in the position along with a recently updated curriculum vitae. Applications should be directed to Jennifer Putzi, Editor, at legacyeditor@wm.edu, by 1 September 2024. A final decision will be made by 1 October 2024.

New Leadership in the SEA Junior Scholar Caucus

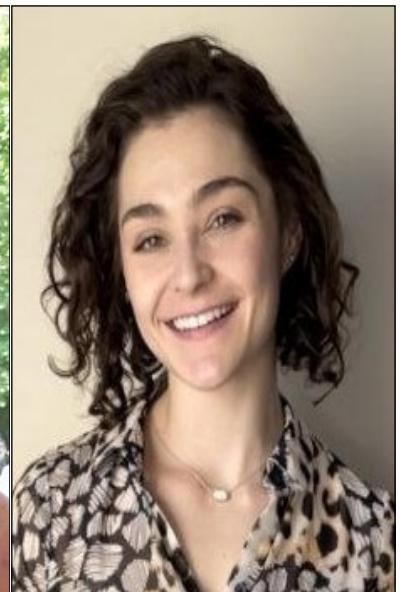
The SEA Junior Scholar Caucus is excited to announce new leadership beginning this summer.

Kristy Cherry-Randle will serve as Chair of the JSC. Kristy holds her PhD from Florida State University and currently serves as an Instructor in the English department at the University of Alabama. Kristy’s special interests include first encounter moments between the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and Europeans, Indigenous textual cultures, and the history of text technologies. Her digital humanities project, *The Cabeza Matrix*, seeks to recenter Indigenous voices during the first encounter period in a spatially and temporally interactive environment.

Lauren Santoru will serve as Vice-Chair. Lauren is a PhD candidate at the University of Alabama where she studies literature and culture of the early modern Atlantic world. Her dissertation, “Derivative Knowledge: Cultural Translation and Narrative Authority in Colonial English Travel Writing,” analyzes alternate narrative forms such as natural elements and human bodies to refigure the early Americas as an epistemological classroom in which people of color contribute vital intel to a developing transatlantic episteme. In addition to teaching undergraduate writing and literature courses, Lauren has also presented her research at international conferences in London, Maryland, and virtual settings.



Kristy Cherry-Randle



Lauren Santoru

Angela Calcaterra is Associate Professor in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.

How did you become interested in studying early American literature?

My interest in early America has always intersected with my interest in Indigenous literary histories. My undergraduate program was heavily focused on canonical British and American Literature, but I took a contemporary Native American literature class with Lucy Maddox that turned my eye to the ways Indigenous authors center tribal-national histories and literary practices that challenge Eurocentric narratives of American literary history. Then I took two graduate courses during my MA at the University of Virginia, one with Marion Rust and one with Deborah McDowell, that introduced me to a range of Indigenous and Black writers working in the early Americas. I was blown away by the forms of critique and refusal in their work.



Angie Calcaterra

Who is your favorite early American writer, or what is your favorite early American text, and why?

Partly because it challenges the term “early American,” my favorite early American text to think with and teach is the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) peacemaker epic and Great Binding Law. The epic tells the story of the foundation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy before European arrival in the Americas, and the Great Binding Law puts in legislative form the principles laid out in the epic (it’s great to teach alongside the US Constitution). The story and laws so powerfully counter the notion (laid out in the Doctrine of Discovery and countless early Euro-American texts) that Indigenous peoples are lawless, and they demonstrate the Haudenosaunee nations’ keen

insight into human frailty and the need for regulation through carefully maintained relationships. Another favorite is William Apess’s “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man,” a scathing indictment of white American settler colonialism and Christian hypocrisy that comes at the end of his book *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of New England* (1833).

What are you currently working on?

I’m working on a book tentatively titled *Bearing Arms: US Gun Violence and Indigenous Relationality*, which analyzes American gun violence in the context of centuries of Indigenous perspectives on weapons technologies, human relationships, and the equipment of settler colonial violence.

What is something you are reading right now (EAL related or otherwise) that inspires you, either personally or professionally?

I just finished Choctaw author Tim Tingle’s *When a Ghost Talks, Listen*, the sequel to his acclaimed young adult novel *How I Became a Ghost*. These are excellent young-adult novels focused on a Choctaw boy who dies during the US Army’s violent removal of Choctaw people from their homes in the early nineteenth century; he becomes a ghost who helps his people and learns from his ancestors. I ordered the books for an Indigenous YA class I plan to teach, and my 8-year-old daughter read both of the books before I could get my hands on them! It was so wonderful to read them and then talk about them with her. When you read *When a Ghost Talks, Listen* pay special attention to Stella, my daughter’s favorite character! I also recently read Percival Everett’s *James*—an amazing novel, a perfect companion to Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Is there a scholar in the field who inspires you, and why?

It’s impossible to pick just one! I’m most inspired by Indigenous Studies scholars who reframe early American literature geographically, formally, and temporally. Chad Allen’s recent book *Earthworks Rising: Mound Building in Native Literature and Arts* inspires me with its attention to both ancient Indigenous knowledge literally inscribed on American land and contemporary literary and artistic engagements with Indigenous earthworks. I’m recently inspired by Indigenous legal scholars such as Robert A. Williams Jr., Heidi Stark, and John Borrows, whose work draws attention to the sophisticated forms of regulatory guidance laid out in very old Indigenous stories. Other scholars who inspire me: Lisa Brooks, Jean M. O’Brien, Kelly Wisecup, Joe Rezek, Cassie Smith, and so many others!

**Interview with Kirsten Silva Gruesz,
Winner of the 2023 Early American Literature Book Prize**

Kirsten Silva Gruesz is Professor in the Literature department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She was awarded the 2023 EAL Book Prize for Cotton Mather's Spanish Lessons: A Story of Language, Race, and Belonging in the Early Americas.

What was the inspiration for your study?

I was in graduate school in the late 1980s, exploring contacts between the English, Spanish, and French Americas and trying to narrow down a dissertation topic. There was very little comparative scholarship at the time, but I found an older study by Stanley T. Williams, *The Spanish Origins of American Literature*, published in the fifties. There, I was flabbergasted to learn that not only had Cotton Mather and Samuel Sewall taught themselves Spanish—but Mather had written and published a short Spanish book, *La Fe del Christiano*, in Boston in 1699. This, Williams says, is where inter-American literature starts: with sixteen modest pages that Mather envisioned as the start of a grand campaign to convert all of what he called “the Spanish America” to Protestantism. At the time, I dismissed it as typical Anglo-American Black Legend stuff: the suspicion of, disdain for, and presumed



Kirsten Silva Gruesz

superiority toward Latin Catholic culture which continues to dog perceptions of Latinos in the U.S. I swerved away from the early modern period and decided to focus on the nineteenth century instead.

After years of doing research that deepened my understanding of the material qualities of printed objects, though, Mather’s project came to seem weirder and much more interesting than I’d given it credit for. As I gained appreciation for the deep intellectual infrastructure of Mexico during that period, including its multi-

lingual print culture, I realized that Mather was not dismissing but *imitating* the Latin Catholics, with their exponentially more successful temporal and spiritual empire.

Imitation is its own form of regard, and he was exceptionally curious about the whole American hemisphere. I realized that he was taking lessons from what he read and who he spoke with about New Spain and the West Indies: lessons about geography, about language diversity, about evangelizing Indigenous peoples. He personally invested a lot in learning Spanish and in convincing a printer to adapt their equipment to mass-produce writing in that language. But another century would pass before there would be another Spanish-language imprint in the English colonies. *La Fe del Christiano* was a kind of evolutionary dead end in print history, and I became obsessed with figuring out the “why” and “how” of its existence.

What were some of the challenges you encountered while working on the book?

I was adamant about not writing another biography of Cotton Mather: there are so many already! Instead I set out to center the life story of *La Fe del Christiano* itself, inspired by Joanna Brooks’s maxim, “Books, like people, have life chances.” But while I could reconstruct much of the work’s intellectual prehistory (including the methods that Mather used to learn Spanish), there’s really no trace of its afterlife among readers, so a straight book-history angle was unsatisfying.

The breakthrough came as I pondered Mather’s repeated references to “Spanish Indian” people who were variously enslaved, bound, and free. He lived through a period of profound shifts in the racialization of labor throughout the Americas. In a seaport where people came and went, these identifications mattered more and more. So I wrote a group biography of Mather’s household, de-centering the Great Man and focusing on those who made his prodigious work possible—the servants, wives, and daughters. It’s a kind of anti-biography.

Mather designed the two tracts in *La Fe del Christiano* in symbolic multiples of twelve, and I took up the challenge of imitating that structure. I originally projected a short book, with twelve sketches that would illuminate different aspects of the story: one on the language learning, one on the “Spanish Indian,” one on the actual

printing, and so on, including a new transcription and translation. But the book kept snowballing with new details, and ended up being rather baroque and long-winded—much like Mather’s own work! In the end, it tells two intertwined narratives: one about the life story of the material text and its ideas, and one about the collaboration of multiple actors who made it possible.

What would you like to be one or two key takeaways for readers?

One major theme is language and power. Attitudes toward a particular language are keyed to the relative power of its speakers and the rights that they are allowed. That’s why attention to the Algonquian-language works of the Cambridge Press have revolutionized studies of New England: not only did they help revitalize spoken Wampanoag, they displaced the assumption that English always was and still is the only language of print that matters. Monolingualism was not the only social arrangement that settler societies experimented with, and it was not inevitable. I want readers to appreciate that other Indigenous languages of North America, including dozens of Mesoamerican languages that are spoken among Mexican migrants in the U.S. today, also have long histories of print that were deliberately obscured. One of those is Timucua, a Floridian language in which missionary texts were printed several decades before the “Indian Library” in Cambridge existed.

The other lesson I want readers to take away is that the splitting of the Americas into two distinct cultures—English Protestants in the North vs. Latin Catholics in the South—is a false construct. It may seem that Mather’s project, with its bias toward his own ethno-religious tribe, participated in that conceptual division, but I show that he actually understood America as a singular space, with a common millennial destiny. The two-Americas idea came later; it belonged to the age of nationalism. It makes no sense now that close to one-fifth of the U.S. population, especially the younger population, is of Latin American descent. It’s very important to many young Latinx folks to figure out their relationship to the entangled histories of Indigenous and African displacement and survival, and I hope my book offers a way of approaching that deeper context.

What scholars have had the greatest influence on your work?

I’m very invested in collaboration, so rather than list names I would say that I’ve been inspired by the kind of scholarship that reminds us that the normative social order we have inherited is not the only way of being in the world. Historicism gives us the ground for speculating on how to fix what ails us. I’m thinking of all the amazing

research over the past couple of decades that has demonstrated the vibrancy and adaptability of Indigenous and Black life in the first centuries after contact, even through terrible violence. Book and print culture history and critical bibliography studies is also a very collaborative field: how could it not be?

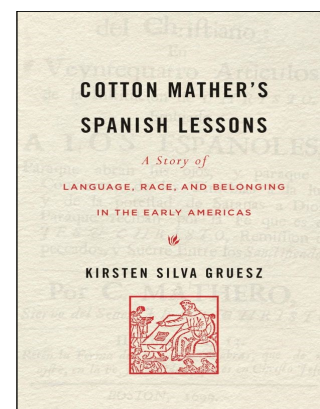
My teaching is shaped around questions of bi-linguaging, translation, and the sociology of language, especially in Spanish-English contexts, so I try to keep up with scholarship in those fields as well. This project is in a way a synthesis of years of reading in different fields.

What advice would you give other scholars who want to engage in similar projects?

Don’t assume that everything there is to know about a famous figure has already been seen or said. For most of my career, I’d focused on the text—the periodical or the book publisher or the publishing circuit—and when I did research specific authors, they tended to be lesser-known. Working on a family and region as well documented as Cotton Mather’s in early New England was daunting, and out of my comfort zone. I could rely on very high-quality bibliographic and editorial work done by others, including the ongoing new edition of *Biblia Americana*. You’d think all the important archival stuff had been transcribed and reprinted. But no: I found all kinds of interesting material in Mather’s commonplace-books, copy-books of uncollected letters, and other archival remains. As always, the golden rule is: ask the librarians!

What are you currently working on?

I’ve just started researching a new book on Alta and Baja California in the eighteenth century. That started as an outtake from the book, where I speculated that Mather was the first English American to use the word “California” in print. I’m collecting early American uses and references, and I welcome leads!



Teaching Early America I “Revolutionary Timelines”

(This is a slightly edited version of my remarks at the Roundtable Session, “Teaching the American Revolution: 1619, 1776, and the Timelines of History,” at the 2023 meeting of the Society of Early Americanists.)

When does the American Revolution end? In History 1501 (The American Revolution), which I have taught with my colleague Professor Seth Rockman at Brown University, the question of the timelines of Revolutionary history help to frame the semester. Thinking about beginnings and endings: it not only awakes students to how we tell stories—inside and outside of the academy—but also relates directly to the question of the Revolution’s winners and losers. Was the Revolution as radical as the students generally assume?

The course is offered through Brown’s History Department, and it familiarizes students with the major (and contentious) interpretations of the Revolution. Its method is interdisciplinary insofar as students read primary documents for their historical and literary significance. Close reading matters; historical texts are not simply transparent windows into “the past.”

The course puts this grand national event of US independence into transatlantic contexts, emphasizing the histories of slavery and the slave trade in building European, capitalist empires based on agrarian economies. We introduce the course by emphasizing that, from the imperial perspective, the British American colonies were meant to serve the more lucrative sugar colonies of the West Indies. Most students simply assume the central importance of the North American colonies—the future United States—and are surprised at this. Slave-based export economies put Boston and Barbados in a new historical perspective.

Our pedagogical style relishes debate, and Rockman interrupts my lectures with impunity. Arguments take center stage. Students join the fray. This is productive, I believe, especially for this current generation of students who do not experience open—and civil—debate on our campus as much as they should.

We begin the semester with an overview of the prominent historical interpretations of the American Revolution and focus on 19th-century Whig interpretations as the context for the patriotic narratives that pervade popular culture today. George Bancroft and Whig interpretations of American history is a good place to start, since they allow us to think about which myths

of American independence still have currency (or, alternatively, are debunked).

The question of the causes of the Revolution segues to the issue of how one might imagine a “timeline” for Revolutionary history. When does it “begin”? How and why does one assign such a beginning? As we urge in our considerations of timelines, if Ralph Waldo Emerson looked to Lexington and Concord in April, 1775, as the moment of true beginnings—his commemorative poem’s iconic phrasing of the “short heard ‘round the world”—so too did the American militia and white supremacist movements that idolized the nation’s supposed beginning. Patriot’s Day points to Oklahoma City as readily as it does the outskirts of Boston.

The purpose of discussing beginnings also locates the English Glorious Revolution in 1688 as an important transatlantic political episode that was also deeply felt in the British colonies. Indeed, by connecting 1688 and 1776, we see how colonial subjects misinterpreted the meaning and scope of a metropolitan political event that championed the English liberties” and “the rights of Englishmen.”

Students begin to engage the processes by which historical subjects themselves fictionalize origins stories—and mobilize them later (in the Stamp Act riots, for example) to leverage their own political positions and desires. Such stories about the origins of English liberties, moreover, provide further context to the contemporary revisionist narrative that replaces 1688 with 1619, and re-routes a history of political ideas into one about chattel slavery and imperial-capitalist economies. In this regard, the 1619 Project dismantles a powerful interpretation of the causes of the Revolution that is grounded in English politics and, later in the 19th century, picked up and transformed nationalist historians offering an idealized version of an American Revolution rooted pristinely in higher principles.

The timelines of the end of the Revolution are perhaps a more pressing issue for us in light of US politics today. We spend ample time considering the political transition from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitutional settlement of 1787-88. Rockman’s lectures focus on the financial issues dominating state politics in the 1780s, which involve debtors, bills of credit, speculators in government bonds, and debates over repaying those bond values (with interest!). The story focuses on the plight of small farmers and debtors who have made sacrifices during the war and now find themselves victims of financial proposals that further paralyze the disempowered.

He demystifies the ways in which the new US Constitution, coupled with Alexander Hamilton's plans to finance the national debt, skewered debtors, who were now being asked to pay new taxes to establish the federal government's "credit" (in both financial and political meanings).

My lectures subsequently broaden the lens to consider the chaotic dysfunctionality of the central government under the Articles of Association, its inability to regulate commerce, pass legislation, or provide for national defense. This part of the course asks students to consider when—and how—a revolution "ends". Did the brief interregnum of what one historian has called the "Patriot Economy" of the 1780s represent fair dealings on a local level, only to be obliterated by new federal power? What do we even mean by the "real" revolution (that John Adams would later claim was in the hearts and minds of the people)? Were more radical and egalitarian possibilities abandoned—or rather taken away by propertied interests?

But the question of when the Revolution ends also raises profound questions about the nature of political activism—and violence—in a republic. The protests by debtors in the 1780s—closing courthouses, for example, so debtor cases could not be settled—echo the course's earlier examination of violence during the 1760s and 1770s by colonists angry over British imperial policies. And taxes. What, in other words, do the 1780s versions of popular politics look like next to our own today in the US? Which kinds of moral and political criteria do we use to judge "the rights of Englishmen" as opposed to, say, "stop the steal" on January 6, 2021?

Studying the question of when a revolution ends (or never ends?) inevitably poses hard questions about the legitimate range and form of political dissent. Then and now. This has pedagogical value for engaging the two crucial concepts upon which a republic rests: sovereignty and representation.



2020 Election Protests

And for unpacking the language of extra-legal violence. Who are the "people"? What are their "rights"? Perhaps Hannah Arendt's distinction between power and violence is useful for theorizing this. Our study of the Revolution aims to demystify not just why but how people take to the streets in protest. Revolutions are messy, and at the very least we need to acknowledge "big" events like the Stamp Act riots—or the quotidian forms of violence Loyalists suffered for years and years at the hands of the sons of Liberty—as moments of embodied violence where lives are lost or ruined. If historians have moved off of categories like "mobs" and articulate instead "crowd action" (or in the 18th-century notion of the "people out of doors"), we urge our students to ask what those riots must have looked like to Loyalists who could not imagine breaking from the Empire but were coerced to remain silent or simply leave.

The question of when the Revolution ends provides a new way of seeing political violence today. Those who tried to stop the Congressional certification of the 2020 Presidential Election were operating under the assumption that the revolution is never over—that in the name of the people's liberties, any form of violence is justified. The political populism generating this extra-legal dissent shares assumptions about the federal government that were expressed by the proposed US Constitution's opponents in 1787-88: the Antifederalists.

Consider the similarities. During the ratification debates, Antifederalist writing and speeches expressed a foundational fear of a distant and consolidated federal government; it argued against the dangers of "elite" aristocratic powers that would hijack the national government; it saw the national government as already hopelessly out of touch, distant, and nefarious; it looked to the states as the true arbiters of the people's rights; and, most importantly, the Antifederalists believed that political representation ideally should be as transparent and unmediated as possible.

Whereas the Federalist theorized political representation as a filter, Antifederalist pamphleteers countered that Congress should represent the people -- in miniature. The people's elected representatives should look, act, think and feel like the people themselves. If this points to theoretical differences between democracies and republics, it also creates a striking parallel to today's populist discourse of distrust. Drain the swamp indeed.

Philip Gould
Brown University

Teaching Early America II “Teaching Early American History in Canada”

I began my teaching career in graduate school at what became, at least for a time, the epicenter of the battle over early American history – Charlottesville, Virginia. My time teaching at the University of Virginia was fraught, even before the White nationalist attacks of August 2017. I spent a great deal of time trying to get my students to “unlearn” exceptionalist and White supremacist narratives. Unsurprisingly, getting students to think critically about America’s founding or concepts like the “Founding Fathers” at “Thomas Jefferson’s University” yielded mixed results.

But after I graduated, I moved back to my home country of Canada and taught at the University of Toronto, and now at Saint Mary’s University. My experiences could not be further removed from those I had in Virginia. I teach primarily Canadian and international students (most not from North America) and they arrive in my classroom as virtual blank slates when it comes to American history. Most don’t know the difference between the American Revolution and the Civil War. They may have heard the names of people like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, but they couldn’t tell you much about them. Their familiarity with American slavery is usually confined to the Underground Railroad and enslaved fugitives escaping to Canada.

So, rather than confronting national narratives and having students “unlearn” certain ingrained myths, much of my teaching in Canada focuses on getting my students to understand *why* Americans fight so intensely over their history. This is somewhat of a foreign concept in Canada – most Canadians don’t know much of their history and, to be honest, even fewer care. But while my Canadian students lack the foundation and familiarity that my American students had, they bring an outsider perspective and curiosity that can be supremely helpful. Their perspectives have shown me the value in stepping back and asking questions about why this history causes such a strong reaction from certain types of Americans. What is it about the American identity and concepts of citizenship, belonging, and exceptionalism that infuse certain founding narratives with such critical importance?

This framework forms the basis not just for my general teaching on the American founding, but for some entire courses. I teach a course on *Hamilton* entitled “Hamilton: History and Musical” that uses the show to have students think about historical memory and the cultural purchase of certain conservative narratives about the founding, even among “progressives.” In the course, we think deeply about the Revolution in popular culture and the purposes that simplified, triumphalist narratives serve.

I also teach a course called “American History, American Controversy” that looks at current divisions over issues like Indigenous People’s Day, *The 1619 Project*, and Confederate Monuments. In this course, we confront these contentious topics head-on and think deeply about why they have caused such discord and violence. We read widely, exploring opinion pieces, documentaries, podcasts, speeches, and Twitter posts, trying to understand the competing perspectives and the fallouts they have caused.

Through teaching these courses, I have found that the more I can blend the teaching of history with teaching *about* history – of having students think about how we currently encounter history, how contemporary concerns shape popular historical narratives, and how and why people fight over the framing of history – the richer and more engaging my classes tend to be. And, in addition, the more we can focus on developing critical thinking skills, spotting misinformation tactics and far-Right tropes, and discussing exclusionary ideologies.

However, I recognize that I am in a very privileged position. There are things that I can do in Canada at my small, fairly unknown university from the relative safety of the tenure-track that others cannot. And that deserves equal, if not more, concern than anything any of us are individually doing in our classrooms. When I taught in Virginia, I was concerned about how to discuss fraught topics in a safe way. For instance, how to create and maintain an inclusive classroom with zero tolerance for White supremacy when some of my students had Confederate flag stickers on their laptops. I still have those concerns, but they are dwarfed by the much bigger problem of the systemic attacks we currently face regarding curriculum, Critical Race Theory hysteria, shrinking programs, and evaporating tenure lines.

I believe any discussion of teaching Early America should focus on how we can and should be organizing as a field and a profession to counter these attacks and to act in solidarity with our embattled colleagues. To put it simply, the nuances of how I’m choosing to teach about Indigenous dispossession or American slavery don’t matter when there are people in certain states who can’t teach those topics at all.

For so many reasons, we are living and teaching in difficult times – we need to come together and act collectively to meet the challenges of our moment.

Shira Lurie
Saint Mary’s University

Digital Early America

The summer break can be the perfect time to explore digital resources or to consider developing a digital project of your own. We hope the below materials are helpful!

Readings:

Block, Sharon. “#DigEarlyAm: Reflections on Digital Humanities and Early American Studies.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 76, no.4, 2019: 611-648.

Hardy, Molly O’Hargan. “Archives Based Digital Projects in Early America.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 76, no.3, 2019, pp. 451-476.

Travis, Jennifer and DeSpain, Jessica. *Teaching with Digital Humanities: Tools and Methods for Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Illinois UP: 2018.

Digital Resources:

“Early American Sources” (contains links to various digital resources, such as United States digitized collections, online databases, and mapping projects)

<https://www.earlyamericansources.org/>

“ThingStor” (a material culture database that documents historical, “real” objects as they appear in American and English literature and visual art during the long 19th century.)

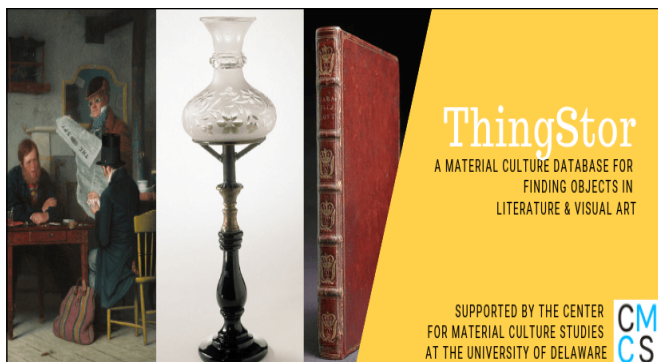
<https://thingstor.org/>

“American Antiquarian Society Digital Resources” (124 databases, with most available from anywhere and a few available only on site)

<https://www.americanantiquarian.org/collections/digital-resources>

“Digital History” (digital resources for teaching and research)

<https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>



SEA @ ALA May 23-26, 2024

This year’s American Literature Association Conference took place in Chicago and the SEA sponsored three panels.

Teaching Colonial and Early US Latinx Literature

Chair: Melissa Adams-Campbell, Northern Illinois University

“From Columbus to Corridos: 30-Plus Years of Bringing Hispanic and Latinx Writing to the Early American Literature Classroom,” E. Thomson Shields, Jr., East Carolina University

“Pedagogical Juxtaposition and Productive Untranslatability in Early Latinx Studies; or, On Malintzín and Misinterpretation,” E. Mar García, Northeastern Illinois University

“Confronting the Unexpected in the Early US Latinx Literature Classroom,” Sara Flores, Washington University in St. Louis

Early American Environments, Part 1

Chair: Melissa Adams-Campbell, Northern Illinois University

“Nat Turner’s Emancipatory Environments,” Rio Bergh, Northwestern University

“Lucy Terry and Early New England Environments,” Mary Eyring, Brigham Young University

“The Colonial-Medical Gaze and Extractivist Regimes of Knowledge Production,” Miranda Castro, Cornell University

Early American Environments, Part 2

Chair: Rio Bergh, Northwestern University

“The Miami People and the Wabash and Erie Canal: Indiana Land Cessions and Forced Removal, 1795-1846,” Kathryn Bean, Northern Illinois University

“Black Hawk’s Wild Rock River Valley,” Allison Siehnell, University at Buffalo, SUNY

“Pilgrims and Wanderers: Joseph Johnson and the ‘Wandering Indian’ Trope,” Bradley Dubos, The Ohio State University

Upcoming Conferences

For 2026: Virginia's Revolutionary History and Beyond
October 24-26, 2024
William and Mary, Omohundro Institute, and Colonial Williamsburg

As part of the buildup to the 2026 250th Anniversary of American Independence, several small conferences will take place each year. This year's, "For 2026: Virginia's Revolutionary History and Beyond" will consider Virginia's distinctive role and influence in local and global contexts. The conference leans into innovative approaches to that past through an increased commitment to education strategies and programs, immersive experiences on site at W&M and CWF, along with the traditional focus on leading scholarly work.

For more information, visit <https://www.wm.edu/offices/culturalpartnerships/for2026/folder-with-content-page/>



Calls for Papers

American Society of Eighteenth Century Studies
55th Annual Meeting
Online: March 28-29, April 4-5, 2025
Due: July 26th, 2024

Open call for session proposals by chairs (panels, roundtables, project sessions, special sessions). See "Submissions Explained" on the linked website for more information, and check the "Affiliate/Regional Society Submissions Guaranteed Sessions List" above to avoid duplication of session submissions.



"Where is Early America?"

McNeil Center

May 1-3, 2025

Due: August 30, 2024

The McNeil Center for Early American Studies is pleased to announce a state of the field conference, to be held in May of 2025. Our goal is to provide a general convention for scholars working in all sub-fields of early American studies. We especially invite scholars focused on the earliest periods of America's past to participate. If your work is chronologically centered before 1750, please join us in Philadelphia to discuss the significance of this era with your peers.

Submission topics include but are not limited to: history, art history, material culture studies, African American studies, NAIS, architectural history, literature, and music. We are keen to host sessions that propose new frameworks for comprehending the earliest period of European colonization in America and novel arguments for scholarly attention to this era.

All proposals should include a title, brief abstract (250 words), CVs of all participants, and the type of session proposed (paper, panel, or roundtable). They must be submitted no later than **August 30th, 2024**, to mceas@sas.upenn.edu.

Reconceptualizing Religion in Early African American Literature

Early American Studies: Special Issue

Due: July 31, 2024

For a special issue on early African American literature and religion, *Early American Studies* (UPenn) seek article-length contributions on how 18th and 19th century Black writers reconceptualized religion beyond the telos of the nation-state. The roles of religion and religious thought in early Black culture have often been understood within the dualistic frame of resistance whereby Christianity, the dominant religion of colonial and antebellum American society, is both employed by masters to subjugate the enslaved and employed by the enslaved to resist their masters' subjugation of them. Scholars have thus considered the ways early Black writers strategically utilized Christian discourse to expose the hypocrisy of a supposedly Christian slaveholding society and appeal to a white audience for their civic inclusion within American democracy. Overall, the assumptive logic of such studies has been to understand religion and religious thought as a rhetorical and critical medium or tool for articulating issues of race, rights, and inclusion.

While such critical approaches are no doubt important, this special issue examines how early Black writers turned to religious concepts to not only critique but think outside of the boundaries of civic belonging. The editors invite essays that broaden our understanding of early Black religious culture (i.e., Christian, Islam, West African, transnational, etc.) at the intersection of literary studies, rhetorical studies, religious studies, and print culture prior to the Civil War. We are interested in both formal article-length contributions (6,000-8,000 words) and shorter essays on “Consider the Source” that highlight innovative or creative ways of reading/using primary-source documents (3,000-5,000 words).

To submit, please email a CV and a 1,000 word summary of the contribution to Kevin Pyon (kbp5545@psu.edu) and Don Holmes (doh61@pitt.edu). Please use the subject line “Early African American Religion Special Issue Submission.” We will notify you of your preliminary acceptance by August 31, 2024 and final essays are due on December 31, 2024. Articles to be published are subject to peer review in 2025.

Women of Color (R)evolutionizing American Literature
Northeast Modern Language Association
Due: October 16, 2024

Expanding on the NeMLA’s theme of (R)evolution, this panel seeks proposals that examine the role that women of color authors and artists have played (throughout the centuries) in helping to change and revolutionize literature by and about, literary representations of, and literary studies focused on women of color in the United States. It seeks work that examines how women of color have addressed and used their intersectional identities to change the American literary landscape, challenge the American literary canon, and changed how they and their communities have been viewed in the United States. Proposals can also include how women of color have challenged issues within their own communities and used a multiethnic approach to help literature and literary studies evolve and grow. Panel is not limited to literature/English departments and proposals with interdisciplinary approaches are encouraged to apply. Panel is open to proposals addressing approaches to the study of women of color revolutionizing literature in the United States throughout the centuries.

Contact Brandy Reeves at breeves2@unm.edu for more information.

Early American Literature: Special Edition
New Directions in Quaker Literary Studies
Deadline Extended: September 15th, 2024

While Quaker literary history is far from absent in early American studies, scholarship has yet to move significantly beyond early work that typecasted Quakers into a variety of (not completely inaccurate) roles: counterpoints to New England puritanism, radical women writers, prophetic antislavery activists, practical mystics, and friends to Indigenous peoples. More nuanced work, such as Brycchan Carey’s *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1675-1761* (2012), illustrates the contest of opinion and slow pace of change among the Friends, complicating simplistic notions of Quakers as uniformly ardent moral forerunners.

From Peace to Freedom also stretches temporal and geographic parameters for Quaker literary history by following the development of antislavery rhetoric across the Atlantic world from the mid seventeenth century to the latter half of the eighteenth century. Other scholars have begun to more rigorously assess Quaker relations with Indigenous peoples and their role in settler colonialism in America, and some have used Native American and Indigenous studies methods to read Quaker writings as sources for better understanding the perspectives of Indigenous peoples.

This special issue of *Early American Literature* seeks to move this research agenda forward by gathering new work in Quaker literary history that uses a wide range of methodological approaches. The goal is to resituate Quaker writing both at the level of individual texts and broader literary histories of early America, from Quakerism’s Atlantic expansion alongside English imperialism in the mid seventeenth century through the early US national period and the splintering of American Quakerism in the 1820s. Submissions might address questions, such as the following:

- How have narratives of Quaker exceptionalism potentially hindered our understanding of Quaker literary history? Moving beyond stereotypes of Quaker benevolence, how do we assess the role of Quakers in enslavement, settler colonialism and Indigenous relations, and the politics of colonial America more broadly? To what extent, if any, is Quaker literary history distinctive during this period?

- How does our understanding of Quaker literary history change by foregrounding texts produced outside Philadelphia and the mid-Atlantic colonies? Are there neglected archives or texts that alter our understanding of Quaker print and manuscript literary production in early America? What influences on or by Quaker literature have gone unstudied?
- What are the key genres of Quaker writing and how do they interact within the Society of Friends as well as broader networks? Are there unique stylistic features that mark Quaker writing? Does Quaker theology lend itself to a particular type of writing style? How does Quaker church history, including its historic schisms, influence the content and production of Quaker writing?

Inquiries and submissions from 8,000 to 10,000 word essays should be sent to Jay David Miller (jaym@georgefox.edu) and Kaitlin Tonti (ktonti2@gmail.com).



Write for the Newsletter

Ever wanted to contribute to the newsletter but didn't know what to write? Consider submitting to one of our featured columns! Think about adding us to your CV!

Early American Historical Sites: little-known or understudied/undervalued historical sites of interest to teachers and scholars of early America.

Digital Early America: descriptions/overviews of new and insightful digital projects that advance the study of early American in the digital age.

Teaching Early America: new and engaging approaches to teaching early American material.

Scholar's Musings: a new *SEAN* feature that focuses on little-known figures/connections/intersections in early America.

Contact Mary Balkun at Mary.Balkun@shu.edu and Kaitlin Tonti at ktonti2@gmail.com for more information.

JSC Mentoring Program

The Junior Scholars' Caucus invites scholars of all levels to contribute to our mentoring program. Mentoring relationships enhance junior scholars' access to professional opportunities, integrate junior scholars into the SEA community of researchers, and facilitate excellent intellectual work.

We pair mentors and mentees based on a discrete task, like providing advice on a specific career stage, reading the work in progress of a mentee, writing recommendation letters upon familiarity with a mentee's work, or providing feedback on teaching and syllabi. We will also provide opportunities for mentors and mentees to network at conferences.

For more information please visit: <https://www.societyofearlyamericanists.org/membership/sea-junior-scholars-caucus>

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Society of

Early Americanists

To Our Members

The SEA thanks its new and renewing members for their invaluable support of our Society. Your contributions make early American studies thrive. Please remember to keep your membership current and direct any membership inquiries to the Executive Coordinator, Kirsten Silva Gruesz (seacoord@gmail.com).

You can also help build our membership by referring colleagues in the field to the Society's homepage: <https://www.societyofearlyamericanists.org/>



Society Information/Membership

The Society of Early Americanists provides a forum for scholarly and pedagogical exchange and professional support among scholars of various disciplines who study the literature and culture of America to approximately 1830. Our membership of over 350 individuals enjoys a bi-yearly newsletter detailing activities in our field, a website that links to many documents of interest to early American scholars and teachers, and a listserv. We also offer opportunities for networking and dissemination of professional work.

If you are interested in joining the Society, please see the membership information here: <https://www.societyofearlyamericanists.org/membership.html>



Opportunities for Giving

In addition to keeping your SEA membership active, you can contribute to the Fund to Honor Excellence in Teaching: https://www.societyofearlyamericanists.org/honored_teachers.html

Image Index

1. *Overmantel from the Baldwin House*. Courtesy of https://eap.worcesterart.org/Artists/unidentified_overmantles/overmantle_baldwin/discussion.html.
2. *American Borealis, 1699*. Courtesy of The New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6323496d-ffba-1227-e040-e00a180637df>.
3. "David Waldstreicher." Courtesy of CUNY Graduate Center. <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/people/david-waldstreicher>.
4. "Zachary M. Bennet." Courtesy of The McNeil Center. <https://www.mceas.org/news/2024/05/06/murrin-prize-awarded-zachary-m-bennett>.
5. "Legacy" Cover. Courtesy of Legacy. <https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/115>.
6. "Kristy Cherry-Randle." Courtesy of Kristy Cherry-Randle.
7. Lauren Santoru. Courtesy of Lauren Santoru.
8. Angie Calcaterra. Courtesy of Society of Early Americanists. . <https://www.societyofearlyamericanists.org/whats-new-announcements/sea-featured-scholar-june-2024-angela-calcaterra>.
9. Kirsten Silva Gruesz. Courtesy of UC Santa Cruz. <https://humanities.ucsc.edu/academics/faculty/regular-faculty.php?uid=ksgruesz>.
10. *Cotton Mather's Spanish Lessons*. Courtesy of Harvard University Press. <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674971752>.
11. "2020 Election Protests." Courtesy of CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/>.
12. "ThingStor." Courtesy of ThingStor. <https://thingstor.org/>.
13. "Landscape with Buildings, American 18th century." <https://boudewijnhuijgens.getarchive.net/amp/media/landscape-with-buildings-361cc7>.