

ENGL 646, American Literature to 1865. Topic: The American Enlightenment

Fall 2018 Mondays 4:00-6:50, Colson 223

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By the time Kant wrote “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” (1784), the international recognition of the United States with the 1783 Treaty of Paris had apparently provided one kind of answer—the prospect of political liberation through self-determination. But for whom? The proposed course will pursue the interrelation of two Enlightenment projects that came together in this moment: 1. The pursuit of political subjectivity for all “men” and its subsequent extension in anti-slavery and feminism. 2. The attempt to put politics on a rational foundation (a project that Max Weber famously characterized as the “disenchantment of the world”). The latter project, according to critiques leveled by the Frankfurt school and others, eventuated in the technological domination of external nature and the repression of internal nature. To what extent are these two projects intertwined and to what extent can the negative trajectories of the latter be decoupled from the positive trajectory of the former? The proposed course will return to the American eighteenth century to examine the problems and prospects of enlightenment by investigating keywords such as nature, reason, natural law, natural rights, liberty, individualism, and benevolence in a range of texts. The course will attempt to address head-on the apparent incompatibility of literary-historical approaches such as Ferguson’s with critical-theory approaches such as Adorno’s, tracing their divergence to the 18th century.

Secondary texts:

Robert Ferguson, several articles later collected in *The American Enlightenment 1750-1820* (Harvard UP, 1997)

Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Cornell UP, 1970), chapter 3, “Objects of Scientific Inquiry”

Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” (1784) and “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” (1786)

Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, “The Concept of Enlightenment” from *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947; Stanford UP, 2002)

Bruno Latour, “Why has critique run out of steam?” *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 225-48.

Primary texts:

William Bartram, *Travels* (Dover 978046200132)

Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (Broadview 9781554813384)

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (Oxford 9780192838988)

Olaudah Equiano, *Interesting Narrative* (Penguin 9780142437162)

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Penguin 9780140436679)

Hannah Foster, *The Coquette* (Oxford 9780195042399)

Susanna Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers* (Copley 9781583900147)

Humanity in Algiers (from the Just Teach One project <http://jto.common-place.org>)

Poetry Project poems TBA

Graded work (due dates noted in bold on the Schedule):

- Weekly reading responses (~ 2pp. double-spaced, 5% each). I might give you a specific prompt or I might leave it up to you. Either way, engage with the text in a way that connects your aesthetic response to a theme or topic we've been tracing *and to a scholarly article or book beyond the syllabus* that you found interesting on this text, theme, or topic. No reading response is due 10/15.
- Presentation on recent scholarship on a week's primary readings (10%). Introduce us to this scholarship in ways that stimulate class discussion.
- Poetry project (10%). Using the American Periodicals Series Online database, find a poem published between 1780 and 1800 that engages an Enlightenment theme or topic. Upload this poem (PDF) to Dropbox course folder for 11/12. Lead a short discussion of this poem, *addressing form as well as content*, 11/12.
- Conference-length final paper (~8pp. double-spaced plus works cited page, 30%). A thesis-driven scholarly essay on any American Enlightenment text, on or off the syllabus. Discuss potential topics with me by mid-semester.

Policies

Attention to faces over screens.

Let's work to support WVU's inclusivity policy. The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (304-293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>

Notwithstanding the risk to your intellectual development, you are allowed one absence. Each subsequent absence will lower your final grade by one full letter.

Late work will not be accepted. If you have to miss class for any reason, email the written work that is due that day (e.g., reading response) to me before class time.

Schedule

8/20	Introduction
8/27	<p>Robert Ferguson, "What is Enlightenment? Some American Answers," <i>American Literary History</i> 1.2 (1989): 245-72. (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Ferguson, "'We Hold These Truths': Strategies of Control in the Rhetoric of the Founders," <i>Reconstructing American Literary History</i>, ed. Bercovitch, 1-28. (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Ferguson, "Ideology and the Framing of the Constitution," <i>Early American Literature</i> 22.2 (1987): 157-65. (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Ferguson, "Limits of Enlightenment," <i>The American Enlightenment</i>, 150-91. (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Linda Kerber, <i>Federalists in Dissent</i>, chapter 3. (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Reading response due</p>
9/3	Labor Day recess
9/10	<p>Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> (1782)</p> <p>Reading response due</p>
9/17	<p>Thomas Jefferson, <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> (1785)</p> <p>Reading response due</p>
9/24	<p>William Bartram, <i>Travels</i> (1791); skype with Bartram scholar Tom Hallock</p> <p>Reading response due</p>
10/1	<p>Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Kant, "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, "The Concept of Enlightenment" from <i>The Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Bruno Latour, "Why has critique run out of steam?" <i>Critical Inquiry</i> 30.2 (2004): 225-48. (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Reading response due</p>
10/8	<p>Olaudah Equiano, <i>Interesting Narrative</i> (1789)</p> <p>Reading response due</p>
10/15	<p>Class meets in G18 Colson</p> <p>Enlightenment poems: a selection from recent anthologies (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Paul Lewis, "Waiting to Be Found: The Citizen Poets of Philadelphia and New York," <i>Early American Literature</i> 52.3 (2018): 679-90. (PDF in Dropbox)</p> <p>Colin Wells, Introduction, <i>Poetry Wars: Verse and Politics in the American Revolution and Early Republic</i> (PDF in Dropbox)</p>

10/22	Susanna Rowson, <i>Slaves in Algiers</i> (1794) <i>Humanity in Algiers</i> (1801) http://jto.common-place.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/08/Humanity-in-Algiers-1801-for-JTO.pdf Reading response due
10/29	Hannah Foster, <i>The Coquette</i> (1797) Reading response due
11/5	Charles Brockden Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> (1799) Poetry project poems due in Dropbox folder for 11/12 Reading response due
11/12	Poetry Project poems in Dropbox—lead a brief discussion of the poem you selected Reading response due
11/19	Thanksgiving recess
11/26	Drafts of final papers for peer review
12/3	Presentations; final paper due ; course evaluations