Professor Benjamin L. Carp, Brooklyn College, BCarp@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Course Description:
This course will critically examine a number of major themes and scholarly disputes in early American history, from the pre-contact period to the mid-nineteenth century. Drawing from a number of scholarly disciplines, the class will investigate the historical impact and changing contexts of fear and violence, which set the tone for many of the ideas and actions that motivated people in the colonial, Revolutionary, and early national periods of American history. Specific themes will include crowd violence; wartime violence, atrocity, and “total war”; legal regimes, violent crime, and criminal punishment; rumors, propaganda, and the transmission of fear; domestic violence and sexual violence; slave revolts and the violence of the slave system; and the intersection of violence with themes of empire, intercultural encounters, colonization, and nation-making. Students will use these interrelated topics as their window into a relatively broad chronological period, and they will have opportunities to relate their own research interests to the overall theme of the course.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance, Participation, and Overall Conduct (25% of Grade):
   Each student must complete all readings by the day for which they are assigned, and come to class ready and willing to participate actively in class discussions. Participation requires consistent engagement with assigned readings and course themes during discussion. You should be prepared to respond to assigned readings and share your insights with your fellow classmates.

2. Discussion paper (25% of Grade):
   Sometime after the first few weeks of class (depending on the number of enrolled students), each week one or two students will write and present a five-page paper, to be circulated by 8:00 p.m. the evening before class, on how the readings for the week relate to the course’s themes and previous readings, with the goal of facilitating discussion.

3. Final Paper (50% of Grade):
Proposal due October 19, in class; final due December 12, 4 p.m.). Students will write a 15–18 page paper in one of two ways (see below), designed to link the themes of the course with their own research interests. On a case-by-case basis, it may be permissible for students to pursue a paper that extends outward from “early America,” either chronologically or geographically.
   A) an analytical research paper based on a limited set of primary sources (i.e. a discrete set of official documents, newspapers, correspondence, or diary entries, a selection of material or visual evidence, etc.)
   B) a historiographical paper on a particular subject within the overall theme of the course; the possibilities here are quite broad.
Schedule of Classes and Readings

A note on texts: Many of the shorter readings and essay volumes are available online, via the CUNY or NYPL library systems: be sure to check both. In a few cases where the readings are more difficult to obtain, I will do my utmost to facilitate student access to these texts. Please e-mail the instructor if you have questions or concerns about accessing particular texts. Also note: After conceiving of this course, I came across the syllabus of Matthew R. Bahar of Oberlin College on “Violence and Terror in Early America.” Some of his ideas already aligned with my own, but I also derived inspiration from his syllabus and I wish to credit him here.

WEEK 1 (August 31): Introduction

WEEK 2 (September 7): History of Emotions and Fear

WEEK 3 (September 14): Social Science Approaches to Fear & Violence

WEEK 4 (September 21): Colonial Encounters
Kathleen Donegan, Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014)
Sarah Barber, “Fortune’s Frowns and the Finger of God: Deciphering Fear in the Caribbean (c.1600–c.1720),” in Fear and the Shaping of Early American Societies, ed. Lauric Henneton and L.H. Roper (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 60–75

WEEK 5 (September 28): Violence and Terror in Early America
Matthew Bahar, Violence and Terror in Early America (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018)

WEEK 6 (October 5): Violence and Terror in Early America
Matthew Bahar, Violence and Terror in Early America (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018)

WEEK 7 (October 12): Violence and Terror in Early America
Matthew Bahar, Violence and Terror in Early America (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018)
WEEK 5 (September 28): The Anglo-American Culture of War

WEEK 6 (October 5): Fear and Violence in an Expanding Empire
Matthew Jennings, New Worlds of Violence: Cultures and Conquests in the Early American Southeast (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), xv–xxxiv

WEEK 7 (October 19): Rumor, Conspiracy, and Paranoia
DUE: Final Paper Proposal

WEEK 8 (October 26): Eighteenth-Century Cultures of Violence on the Frontier
Peter Silver, Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America (New York: Norton, 2008)

WEEK 9 (November 2): Fear and Slave Revolts
Anne-Claire Faucquez, “‘A Bloody Conspiracy’: Race, Power and Religion in New York’s 1712 Slave Insurrection,” in Fear and the Shaping of Early American Societies, ed. Lauric Henneton and L.H. Roper (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 204–225
WEEK 10 (November 9): Intimate Violence

WEEK 11 (November 16): Sexual Violence
Sharon Block, Rape and Sexual Power in Early America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006)

WEEK 12 (November 23): Approaches to Crowd Violence in America

WEEK 13 (November 30): Fear and Violence in the New Nation
Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), introduction

WEEK 14 (December 7): The Revolution and Control of Violence
Patrick Griffin, Robert G. Ingram, Peter S. Onuf, and Brian Schoen, Between Sovereignty and Anarchy: The Politics of Violence in the American Revolutionary Era (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015)

Monday, December 12, 4 p.m.: Final Paper due.