If “colonial America” is not, or not merely, the prehistory of the United States, then what is it? In recent decades there has been a turn away from approaching North American and Caribbean colonies as a series of emergent and distinct communities or societies, and toward seeing them first as “contacts,” “contests,” or “conquests,” then as an Atlantic and/or Continental world-in-formation. Most recently, these approaches seem to meld and, interestingly, return in part to an older approach to early American history: a notion of the period as shaped fundamentally by the creation, entanglements, and clashes of Spanish, British, Dutch, French, and Amerindian empires. Our readings will focus on attempts to use “empire” to understand both the big picture and the local lived realities of American history before the Seven Years’ War. Among the key questions that will occupy us: does “empire” offer something analytically valuable that “Atlantic,” “continental” or “global” approaches do not? Do neo-imperial histories have a bias toward certain subjects, interpretations? Do they bring Africans and Native Americans into something like the importance they actually had? Have correctives that emphasize transatlantic or imperial economies, politics, and wars come at the cost of the advances social historians made in delineating the making (and unmaking) of communities and the local experiences of natives, of settlers, of slaves? Where does “empire” leave seemingly separate but arguably central subjects like religion and gender? Has a culturalist sensibility enabled, informed, or set appropriate limits to a revised imperial approach?

In addition to the common weekly readings, each member of the seminar will be responsible for bringing relevant essays from one of the six editions of Stanley Katz, John Murrin et al eds., Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development (1971, 1977?, 1983, 1993, 2001, 2011) into our discussion in seminar and in one of three memo/reaction papers circulated in advance of seminar.

A seminar paper of 15-20 pages will be due during reading week. The choice and nature of the topic is open; it can be a research paper, a research proposal, or a historiographical essay.

8/29 Introduction: Colonial, Imperial, Atlantic, Continental, Hemispheric, Global, Early Modern American History?

* Recommended for historiographical background:

9/5 – No class: calendar adjustment!

9/12 Which Way was the Wind Blowing? Global and Environmental Approaches to New World Beginnings
Nicolas Wey Gomez, The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies (2008), Intro, pp. 1-59
Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, “Empires in their Global Contexts, 1500-1800” in Jorge Canizares-Esguerra and
John L. Brooke, Climate Change and the Course of Global History: A Rough Journey (2014), ch. 10, pp. 413-66
Sam White, A Cold Welcome: The Little Ice Age and Europe’s Encounter with North America (2017)

9/19 Comparing (Entangled) Empires
Anthony Pagden, Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, 1500-1800
(1995), to ch. 6, pp. 1-177.
Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish
Periphery," AHR 112 (June 2007), 764-86, and responses by Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, "Entangled

9/26 Comparisons II: Staying Grounded in North America
Allan Greer, Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America (2018)

10/3 Comparisons and Entanglements, III: African History and Slavery as Early American History
Joseph C. Miller, “Problematising Slavery in the Americas as History,” The Problem of Slavery
as History (2012), 119-62
Michael Guasco, “Agents of Empire: Africans and the Origins of English Colonialism in the Americas” in
Toby Green, “Beyond an Imperial Atlantic: Trajectories of Africans From Upper Guinea and West-Central
Stephanie Smallwood, Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora (2007)
Stephanie E. Smallwood, “The Politics of the Archive and History’s Accountability to the Enslaved,” History
of the Present 6 (Fall 2016), 117-32.

10/10 “American” Origins Revisited: Virginia
Paul Musselwhite, Peter C. Mancall and James Horn eds., Virginia 1619: Slavery and Freedom in the
Making of English America (2019)

10/17 Pirates and other Subjects

10/24 Atlantic Frontiers, Indian Pirates?
Andrew Lipman, The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast (2015)
Matthew Bahar, “People of the Dawn, People of the Door: Indian Pirates and the Violent Theft of
an Atlantic World,” Journal of American History 101 (Sept, 2014), 401-426

10/31 Dutch Moments
Susanah Shaw Romney, New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in
Seventeenth- Century America (2014)
Christian J. Koot, “Anglo-Dutch Trade in the Chesapeake and the British Caribbean, 1621-1733” in

11/7  Alliances
Claudio Saunt, “‘Our Indians’: European Empires and the History of the Native American South” in Canizares-Esguerra and Seeman eds., The Atlantic in Global History, 61-76.

11/14  The Imperial and the Everyday in the Caribbean and Atlantic Crucible: From Below and the Middle

11/21 New Fashioning Old Fashioned Imperial History: Trade, War, Reformers, Soldiers, Governors
Steve Pincus, “Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” William and Mary Quarterly 69 (Jan. 2012), 3-34 and responses, 35-70.
Douglas Bradburn, “The Visible Fist: The Chesapeake Tobacco Trade in War and the Purpose of Empire,” William and Mary Quarterly 68 (July 2011), 361-86

12/5 Enlightenment and Empire in New York and Beyond
Read at least 2 of the following:

12/12 Two other Places in an Imperial World: Still looking for America?
Noeleen McIvenna, The Short Life of Free Georgia: Class and Slavery in the Colonial South (2015)
**Book List**
Sam White, *A Cold Welcom*
J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*
Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World*
Allan Greer, *Property and Dispossession*
Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*
Mark Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire*
Paul Musselwhite and Peter Mancall eds., *Virginia 1619*
Susanah Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections*
Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier*
Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*
Kirsten Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean*
Stephen Saunders Webb, *Marlborough’s America?*
John Dixon, *The Enlightenment of Cadwallader Colden*
Serena Zabin, *Dangerous Economies*
Steven Bullock, *Tea Sets and Tyranny*
Mark Peterson, *The City-State of Boston*
Noeleen McIlenna, *The Short Life of Free Georgia*