

University of North Texas
Department of History

History 5110: American Exceptionalism – Historiography and History

Graduate Readings

CHEM #352
09:00-11:50

Dr. Chet

Office hours: by appointment (guy.chet@unt.edu).

American exceptionalism – the long-held notions nurtured by Americans and American historians about their nation’s allegedly exceptional history – is generally understood as a historiographical approach suggesting that the New World was antithetical to the Old. The belief that America was different from Europe (inferior in many ways, but at least free from Europe’s ills and a model for the future progress of liberty and democracy) has been a resilient constant in American culture.

Jack P. Greene traced the term exceptionalism back to Tocqueville’s statement about Americans being “quite exceptional.” After surveying American thinking over the past three centuries, Greene concluded that the concept of exceptionalism was “present at the very creation of America.” By the time of the Revolution this belief in its exceptionalism and its special place in the world had become an integral part of America’s identity. Always underlying this belief, of course, was a sense of difference from Europe.

During the colonial era that sense of difference was usually one of inferiority. Most colonists realized only too keenly that they were simply British provincials living on the very edges of Christendom. They were awed by the contrast between their own seemingly crude and trivial world and that of the great British metropolis three thousand miles away. The Revolution changed much of this sense of inferiority. Americans in 1776 may have felt culturally inferior to Britain and to Europe; but they were a rising people, and they believed that sooner or later they would become the greatest nation in the world.

This belief of Americans that, in the words of President James K. Polk, their history lay ahead of them colored much of their national history writing in the nineteenth century and gave it much of its teleological (Whiggish) and exceptionalist character – its sense that the United States was the fulfillment of all that was great and progressive in the past. Gordon Wood, for example, pointed out that if a history of the colonial period did not point to the future greatness of the United States, few people were interested in purchasing and reading it.

Some claim that the rise of “Atlantic History” and the increasingly multicultural diversity of the United States have diluted the old-fashioned unified sense of American identity, causing American exceptionalism to lose much of its earlier resonance.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Familiarity with the general history of British America and the United States.
2. Exposure to competing analyses of the events and processes that shaped American culture and the transatlantic relationship with Britain and Europe.

3. Developing analytical and writing skills.
4. Developing an independent understanding of the methodological trends in the scholarship on American history.

COMMUNICATION: Learning content will be delivered in class, through course readings (textbooks and reading materials posted on Canvas), and through student reviews circulated via email. Students must use their UNT accounts to log into the course from the UNT Canvas Learn page. To correspond with me, please use email (guy.chet@unt.edu), rather than Canvas. It is too easy for me to miss Canvas messages; please use email.

GRADING: Students are expected to attend all meetings, offer book reviews and oral presentations, contribute to class discussion about the weekly readings, and submit two writing assignments (12-point, single spaced): a 1500-word analysis of the sources covered in the early weeks of the course, and a 4500-word final paper assessing the role of American exceptionalism in modern American scholarship (covering all the sources covered during the semester). Assignments are graded on a scale of 0 to 100, with the final course grade assigned according to the following scale: A (90-100), B (80-89), C (70-79), D (60-69), F (0-59). In grading the exams, I pay close attention to both substance and form (grammar, spelling, and clarity). In evaluating substance, I examine whether the author has demonstrated a critical, historical understanding of the material by presenting and substantiating a thesis (a historical argument). In order to compute the final course grade, I will add the relative values of each student's number grades for class participation (40%), the first paper (20%), and the final paper (40%).

LATE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK: Assignments must be completed by the due date for full credit. Late submissions will incur a 5-point late-penalty for the first hour, and 5 additional points for every hour thereafter.

TIME COMMITMENT: Students should anticipate at least 12 hours per week for studying materials and completing class assignments. Falling behind schedule in this course will be detrimental to a student's final grade, since the concepts covered are cumulative – not becoming proficient with information in a particular week will lead prevent a student from comprehending material delivered in subsequent weeks.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM: As a student-centered public research university, the University of North Texas promotes the integrity of the learning process by establishing and enforcing academic standards. Academic dishonesty breaches the mutual trust necessary in an academic environment and undermines all scholarship. Students are held accountable for understanding UNT's policy on academic integrity. Any violations of this policy may result in a 0 or F on the particular assignment or an F in the course.

STUDENT SUCCESS AT UNT: Students who have trouble keeping up with assignments should inform the professor as early as possible. "Succeed at UNT" provides students support services and resources for success. Moreover, the History Department's Help Center (WH #220, 940-565-4772) and the History Department Library (WH #267, 940-369-7681) are staffed by graduate students who can assist students with tutoring and essay writing advice.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Students with special circumstances covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act should register with the Office of Disability Accommodation, and also inform the instructor of the class. Reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the special needs of students with disabilities where such adjustments are necessary to provide equality of educational access.

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS:

COVID-19 impact on attendance

While attendance is expected as outlined above, it is important for all of us to be mindful of the health and safety of everyone in our community, especially given concerns about COVID-19. Please contact me if you are unable to attend class because you are ill, or unable to attend class due to COVID-19 including symptoms, potential exposure, pending or positive test results, or if you have been given specific instructions to isolate or quarantine from a health care provider or a local authority. It is important that you communicate with me prior to being absent so I may make a decision about accommodating your request to be excused from class. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure. While attendance is an important part of succeeding in this class, your own health, and those of others in the community, is more important.

COVID-19 impact on remote instruction:

Remote instruction may be necessary if community health conditions change or you need to self-isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19. Students will need internet service, a webcam, and microphone to participate in fully remote portions of the class. [Learn more about how to be successful in a remote learning environment](#)

COVID-19 facemask policy:

Face coverings are required in all UNT facilities. Students are expected to wear face coverings during this class. If you are unable to wear a face covering due to a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Access to request an accommodation. UNT face covering requirements are subject to change due to community health guidelines. Any changes will be communicated via the instructor.

SCHEDULE:

Week 1: Introduction

Before class begins, familiarize yourselves with American history, by reading an American History college textbook of your choice, covering 1600-1900.

Also before class, read the two handouts (on Canvas) on Frederick Jackson Turner & his frontier thesis—"Frederick Jackson Turner," and Limerick's "Turnerians All".

Week 2: American Religion

W.R. Ward, *Protestant Evangelical Revival* (Cambridge, 1992. 0521892325)

Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family*

Bozeman, Theodore Dwight, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*

Peter N. Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier*

John Canup, *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of an American Identity in Colonial New England*

William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America*

Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution*

Harry S. Stout, "Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (Oct. 1977), 519-41; Rhys Isaac,

"Dramatizing the Ideology of the Revolution: Popular Mobilization in Virginia, 1774 to 1776," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (July 1976), 357-85; Rhys Isaac, "Preachers and Patriots: Popular Culture and the Revolution in Virginia," in *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young, 125-56; William G. McLoughlin, "Enthusiasm for Liberty': The Great Awakening as the Key to the Revolution," in Jack P. Greene and William G. McLoughlin, *Preachers and Politicians: Two Essays on the Origins of the American Revolution*, 47-73.

Frank Lambert, *"Pedlar in Divinity": George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770*

Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism*

FOR A CONTRARIAN VIEW OF THE GREAT AWAKENING, SEE: Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction," *The Journal of American History* 69:2 (Sep., 1982), pp. 305-325.

Week 3 (Mon. Sept. 27): Labor Day. No class.

Week 4: Environment and Culture, Old World and New

Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900* (1973; originally published 1955), chapters 1-5 ("Buffon and the Inferiority of the Animal Species of America" through "The Second Phase of the Dispute").

D. Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (1996).

A. Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (1982).

Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (2012)

A. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (1972).

Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement: Biological Catastrophe in the Native Southeast, 1491-1715* (2007). [Alongside, read a review of S.J. Kunitz, *Disease and Social Diversity: The European Impact on the Health of Non-Europeans* (1996).]

A. Crosby, 'Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 33, 2 (1976), 289-99. + D. S. Jones, 'Virgin Soils Revisited', *Wm Mary Qrtly* 60:4 (2003), 703-42. + James C. Riley, 'Smallpox and American Indians Revisited', *J Hist Med Allied Sci* (2010) 65 (4), 445-477. + Andrew Wear, 'The early modern debate about foreign drugs: localism versus universalism in medicine', *The Lancet*, 354 (July 1999), pp. 149-51.

M. Harrison, "'The Tender Frame of Man': Disease, Climate, and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies, 1760-1860' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70 (1996), 68-93. + D. Kennedy, 'The Perils of the Midday Sun: Climatic Anxieties in the Colonial Tropics' in J. M. MacKenzie (ed), *Imperialism and the Natural World* (1990). + K.O. Kupperman, 'Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience', *William and Mary Quarterly* 41:2 (1984): 213-40.

Virginia Anderson *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (2002).

Andrea Smalley, *Wild by Nature: North American Animals Confront Colonization* (2017)

Week 5: Race & Indian Relations

Guidelines for writing assignments.

White, Richard, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*

Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676*

Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*

Optional:

Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*

James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*

Karen Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640*

Another book of your choice (university press) on race & Indian relations.

Week 6: The American Way of War

All:

Chet review of Grenier, *The First Way of War* [handout].

Alexander V. Campbell, *The Royal American Regiment: An Atlantic Microcosm, 1755-1772* (2010)

Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness* (2003)

Eames, Steven, *Rustic Warriors: Warfare and the Provincial Soldier on the New England Frontier, 1689-1748*

Keener, Craig S., "An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Iroquois Assault Tactics Used against Fortified Settlements of the Northeast in the Seventeenth Century," *Ethnohistory* 46:4 (fall 1999): 777-807.

Grenier, John, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the frontier* (2005)

Malone, Patrick M., *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics Among the New England Indians*

Matthew Spring, *With Zeal and with Bayonets Only*

- Your papers are due (via email) next Monday at 09:00. If you'd like my feedback on your introduction, please send it to me before Thursday.
As you work on your paper, you might find this book (accessible as an e-book via the UNT library catalog) – Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity From 1492 to 1800* (1997).

Week 7: Southern Exceptionalism

Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*
Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*
Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth-Century American South*

optional:

* Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1800-1917*
Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together*
Thomas Little, *The Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Religious Revivalism in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1670-1760* (2013)
Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*
David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*

Writing assignment due.

Week 8: American Womanhood

Gayle Fischer, *Pantaloon and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States*
William R. Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society*
Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States*
Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism*
Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right*

optional:

Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America*
Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*
Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933*

Week 9: Ettiquette, Manners and American English

All:

John Seabrook, "Talking the Tawk" [handout]
Julie Powell, "Organic Food Fight Smacks of Economic Elitism" [handout]

John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*
Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*

David Crystal, *The Stories of English*
Kate Burridge, *Blooming English: Observations on the Roots, Cultivation and Hybrids of the English Language*
Robert Macneil and William Cran, *Do You Speak American?*

R. A. Burchell, *End of Anglo-America: Historical Essays in the Study of Cultural Divergence*
Raoul Granqvist, *Imitation as Resistance: Appropriations of English Literature in
Nineteenth-Century America*

optional:

A book of your choice about American English

Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*

C.D. Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*

Week 10: Education & Anti-Intellectualism

Jonathan Zimmerman, *Distilling Democracy: Alcohol Education in America's Public
Schools, 1880-1925*

Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*

Paul Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth-Century America*

Andrew J. Lewis, *A Democracy of Facts: Natural History in the Early Republic*

optional:

A book of your choice on education and anti-intellectualism in American schools and
American culture.

Week 11: The Common Man, Meritocracy & Aristocracy

Michal J. Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation
America*

Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and
America*

Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*

Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America*

optional:

Jim Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma
Countryside, 1904-1920*

Week 12: R&R: research & rumination

Think about & draft your papers.

Recommended reading:

Michael Kammen, "The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration,"
American Quarterly 45: 1 (March 1993): 1-43.

Week 13: Public Health: Alcohol, Drugs, Violence, Crime & Punishment

Elliott J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch": The Social Significance
of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry. [handout]

Karen Haltunen, "Early American Murder Narratives: The Birth of Horror"
[handout] + Carol S. Steiker, "Capital Punishment and American
Exceptionalism" [handouts]

Jessica Warner, *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason* + Michael Willrich, "Least
Vaccinated of Any Civilized Country: Personal Liberty and Public Health in the
progressive Era" [handout]

Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940*

optional:

Mark Lender & James Kirby Martin, *Drinking in America: A History*.

Judith Rowbotham, *Behaving Badly: Social Panic and Moral Outrage - Victorian and Modern Parallels*

W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*

Jill Jonnes, *Hep-Cats, Narcs, and Pipe Dreams: A History of America's Romance with Illegal Drugs*

Week 14: Sports

Finish your final papers (due a week from today).

Richard O. Davies, *America's Obsession: Sports and Society since 1945*

Kathryn Grover (Editor), *Fitness in American Culture: Images of Health, Sport, and the Body, 1830-1940*

Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*

Nancy Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure and Labor in Early Anglo-America*

optional:

Steven Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926*

John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*

John Wilson, *Playing by the Rules: Sport, Society, and the State*

H. G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*

Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era*

Alan Bairner, *Sports, Nationalism, and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives*

Week 15: Final papers due.