

EN 8553: Seminar: American Literature to the Civil War Terror in Early American Literature

Thursdays, 6:00-8:50 p.m.
Dr. Bonnie O'Neill



Contemporary American culture may be characterized, in part, by terrorist attacks and the “War on Terror.” A body of contemporary literature and criticism has arisen in response. But what about early American literature? If the tools and discourses of terrorism are uniquely modern, *terror* has long cast a shadow over America. In this seminar, we will read from a variety of genres in early American literature, focusing on works that depict terror and violence. Our reading and discussions will be guided by a series of questions: what are the sources of terror in these works? in what ways are depictions of terror and violence responsive to ideologies of race and gender? is terror ever a viable tool for social progress? how does terror contribute to cultural identity as it develops in the period?

Readings will include:

Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682) and selected captivity narratives

Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntley* (1799)

Nat Turner, *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831)

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and “The Heroic Slave” (1852)

Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (1851)

John Brown, selected speeches

Henry David Thoreau, “Plea for John Brown” (1859)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Emily Dickinson, selected poems