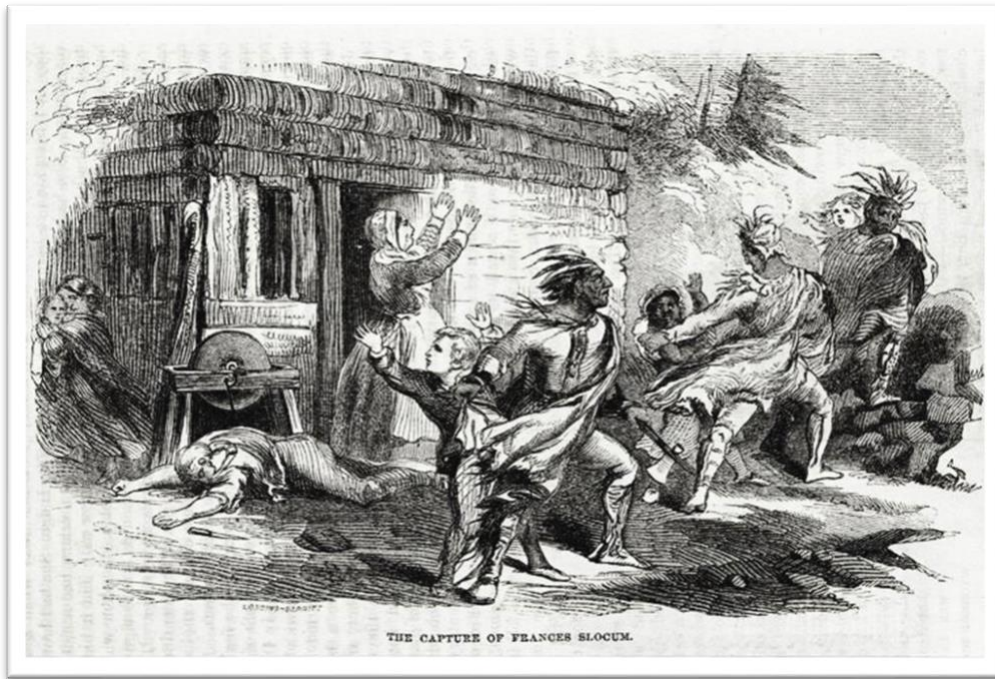


Spring, 2021

EN 4893/6893: American Literature to 1800
“Catastrophe” and Early America

Dr. Bonnie Carr O’Neill

MW 1:00-2:15 p.m. ONLINE



Whether actual, imminent, or imagined, catastrophic events recur throughout the literature of early America. Kathleen Donegan advises “looking at catastrophe as a discourse rather than as a material consequence” of the conditions of early American life. Among other consequences, such a view challenges us to rethink deterministic visions of American exceptionalism. In this class, we will set “catastrophe” alongside other keywords, such as “religion,” “colonialism,” “nation,” “democracy,” “property,” and “freedom.” Together we will interrogate these concepts’ use as organizing principles of American colonial life and of the literature we read.

Readings: our readings may include accounts of European settlement by John Smith, William Bradford, and others; Indian captivity narratives, such as those by Mary Rowlandson and John Williams; novels by Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, and Susanna Rowson; poetry of Phillis Wheatley and others. In addition, we will read brief essays on keywords in early American literature and culture, which we then apply to the literary readings.

Requirements: All students will be required to lead class discussion and submit two essays, including one research paper, and the class will include both a midterm and a final exam. Assignments will be modified for graduate students as appropriate.