

**Tentative Syllabus – Subject to Change**

**History 233-401: Corruption, Collusion, and Commerce in Early  
America and the Caribbean**

Mondays, 3:30 – 6:30 pm

Casey Schmitt, Office in McNeil Center, Room 214

Office hours: Wednesdays, 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm, or by appointment

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Corruption in politics and economics has become a significant issue in the modern world. This course introduces students to the study of corruption and collusion from the perspective of early America and the Caribbean from 1500 through 1820. By examining the historical evolution of corruption, the course addresses questions such as: What is corruption and, by contrast, what is good governance? Who creates law and when is it enforced? Can societies be corrupt or only institutions? And, does economic corruption help or hurt financial development? Our readings and discussion will examine the intersection of politics, culture, race, gender, and economics. We will reflect on how early Americans understood corruption and collusion and what that can tell us about similar modern issues. In the end, the course focuses on the concept of corruption as a complex social function through the lens of bribery, piracy, sex crimes, and other forms of social deviancy.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

1. Shannon Lee Dowdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (University of Chicago Press, 2008)
2. Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates* (Harvard University Press, 1986)
3. Patricia U. Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal: The Politics of Reputation in British America* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998)
4. Greg Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World* (Metropolitan Books, 2014)

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:**

Daily Reading and In-Class Writing Prompts: (10%) Because much of the material for this course will come from the weekly readings, students will be expected to complete the reading assignments for each week. Every class meeting some time will be set-aside for students to

complete a short writing-to-learn prompt. These responses should be thoughtful and exhibit original thought by connecting the weekly reading with their own interpretations of the material.

Class Discussion and Participation (30%): Each student will be expected to make substantive, thoughtful, and well-informed contributions to our class discussions. (See Blackboard for a rubric for class discussion). Daily and on-time attendance will be expected. It is unacceptable to use a cell phone for any reason during the class. Use of cell phones during class will result in zero participation for the student for that day. The use of laptops is a privilege that students must respect to retain. Please stay off of social media during class.

Critical Engagement Papers (15% each, total 60%): Students will be required answer writing prompts for all four books assigned in the course. These essays will be 5-6 pages and will respond to one of three question options. Separate instructions for these essays will be posted to blackboard. **Due dates for the four essays are: 2/18, 3/11, 4/8, and 4/29.**

A note on grades: To receive an A, students must turn in work that you and I agree is exceptionally insightful, thoughtful, original, and interesting. Students must be able to say to yourself and to me that your work is truly superior. I will assign an A- to students who complete all assignments, work hard, engage consistently in class discussions, but lack the depth of engagement or spark of originality and insight that would warrant an A. I will assign a B+ to students whose work is casually or minimally done, whose contributions to class discussions are less frequent and less insightful than I would expect at this level, or whose overall approach to the course shows a lack of serious intent to master the material. I will assign a C to students whose work is of insufficient quality, who lack engagement in class discussions, or who fail to respond to feedback.

## **POLICIES AND REMINDERS:**

### **Policy on Children in Class**

Currently, the university does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom. The policy described here is just a reflection of my own beliefs and commitments to student, staff, and faculty parents:

- 1) All exclusively breastfeeding babies are welcome in class as often as necessary.
- 2) For older children and babies, I understand that unforeseen disruptions in childcare often put parents in the position of having to miss class. While this is not meant at a long-term childcare solution, occasionally bringing a child to class in order to cover gaps in care is perfectly acceptable.
- 3) I ask that all students work with me to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity, including diversity in parenting status.

- 4) In all cases where babies and children come to class, I ask that you sit close to the door so that if your little one needs special attention and is disrupting learning for other students, you may step outside until their need has been met.

**Policy on Harrassment**

Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated. If you experience a problem, please report the situation to the professor immediately. If you are uncomfortable with this for any reason, please report the problem to the office of the Dean of Students. Students with any kind of disability are also encouraged to contact the Dean of Students, who will arrange any necessary accommodations.

**Policy on Late Work**

Late submissions of written assignments are unfair to the majority of the students who do their work on time. Late assignments will be penalized as follows: same day, after class, one-half a letter grade; second day and each day thereafter, one letter grade per day. However, it is always in your interest to submit the assignment, no matter how late. Failing in submitting the assignment will give a grade of zero.

\*Completing all assignments is mandatory. Anyone failing to submit an essay or to take the final exam will fail the class, regardless of what his/her average would be without the missing assignment.\*

**DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READING SCHEDULE:****PART ONE: COURSE INTRODUCTION****Week One – January 16<sup>th</sup>: Definitions of Crime and Corruption in the Early Americas**

**Reading:** Renate Bridenthal, “The Hidden History of Crime, Corruption, and States,” *Journal of Social History* pp.575-581 (On Blackboard).  
Karras, “Chapter Two: ‘It’s Not Pirates!’” *Contraband and Corruption in World History*, pp. 19-43 (On Blackboard).

**Week One – January 21<sup>st</sup>: Scope, Scale, and the Work of a Historian****NO CLASS – WRITING PROMPT ON BLACKBOARD**

**Reading:** Karin Wulf, “No Boundaries? New Terrain in Colonial American History,” *OAH Magazine of History*, (On Blackboard).  
Alison Games, “Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, Opportunities,” *American Historical Review* (On Blackboard); David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in Armitage and Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* pp. 11-27 (On Blackboard).

**PART TWO: COLONIAL NEW ORLEANS AS A CASE STUDY****Week Three – January 28<sup>th</sup>: Peripheral Economies, Economic Peripheries**

**Reading:** Dowdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, pp. 1-98.

**Week Four – February 4<sup>th</sup>: Schemes of Metropolitan Oversight**

**Reading:** Dowdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, pp. 99-189; Sophie White, "'A Baser Commerce': Retailing, Class, and Gender in French Colonial New Orleans," *William and Mary Quarterly*, pp. 517-550 (On Blackboard).

**Week Five – February 11<sup>th</sup>: Violence and the Construction of Regional Identity**

**Reading:** Dowdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, pp. 190-246.

**PART TWO: ECONOMIC CORRUPTION****Week Six – February 18<sup>th</sup>: Piracy and Global Economics**

**Reading:** Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*, pp. 1-55.

**First Review Essay Due in Class.**

**Week Seven – February 25<sup>th</sup>: Life among Pirates at the Edge of Empire**

**Reading:** Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*, pp. 56-126; Douglas R. Burgess, "A Crisis of Charter and Right: Piracy and Colonial Resistance in Seventeenth-Century Rhode Island," *Journal of Social History*, pp. 605-622 (On Blackboard).

**Week Eight – March 4<sup>th</sup>: Was Captain Kidd a Pirate?****NO CLASS – WRITING PROMPT ON BLACKBOARD**

**Reading:** Ritchie, *Captain Kidd*, pp. 127-238; Philip Stern, "Corporate Virtue: The Languages of Empire in Early Modern British Asia," *Renaissance Studies*, pp. 510-531 (On Blackboard).

**PART THREE: CORRUPTION AND REPUTATION****Week Nine – March 11<sup>th</sup>: History and Speculation**

**Readings:** Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal*, pp. 1-57.

**Second Review Essay Due in Class.**

**Week Ten – March 18<sup>th</sup>: Sexual Politics and Expectations**

**Readings:** Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal*, pp. 58-127; K. Tawny Paul, "Credit and Ethnicity in the Urban Atlantic World: Scottish Associational Culture in Colonial Philadelphia," *Early American Studies*, pp. 661-691 (On Blackboard).

**Week Eleven – March 25<sup>th</sup>: Gossip and Governance**

**Readings:** Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal*, pp. 128-165.

**Week Twelve – April 1<sup>st</sup>: Reputation, Corruption, and Imperial Politics**

**Readings:** Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal*, pp. 166-189.

**PART FOUR: SLAVERY AND LIBERTY**

**Week Thirteen – April 8<sup>th</sup>: The Nineteenth-Century Maritime World**

**Readings:** Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity*, pp. 1-96.

**Third Review Essay Due in Class.**

**Week Fourteen – April 15<sup>th</sup>: Seals, Slaves, and the Global Economy of Exploitation**

**Readings:** Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity*, pp. 97-202.

**Week Fifteen – April 22<sup>nd</sup>: Machinery of Modernity**

**Readings:** Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity*, pp. 203-273.

**Week Sixteen – April 29<sup>th</sup>: Final Discussion**

**Fourth Review Essay Due in Class.**