

# ENGL 2610: Earlier American Literature

Assoc. Prof. Kathryn Wichelns

wichelns@unm.edu

Spring 2021 (online)



1624 engraving after Georg Keller, depicting the abduction of Pocahontas

In this class we will look beyond the cultural mythologies that present the origins of the United States as cooperative, historically inevitable, and bounded by borders we recognize today. Beginning in the 1500s, we will focus on the divergent expectations and experiences of Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Jean de Léry's account of his time with Tupinamba in Brazil, Mary Rowlandson's narrative of her captivity by the Narragansett, and the contradictions between Mattaponi oral history and later revisionist accounts of the life of Pocahontas tell us of the ideological violence at the foundation of the U.S. Mary Prince, Olaudah Equiano, and a series of known and unknown writers of the Revolutionary War period describe the internationalism of early Black America, and the extraordinary cultural productivity of a people living in a time and place that espoused ideals of freedom that didn't include them. As the nineteenth century begins, Hannah Foster and Charles Brockden Brown examine the contradictions inherent to the humanism that informed Revolutionary fervor, and Washington Irving brutally satirizes American self-regard. An emphasis on primary documents and historical context reveals the stakes involved in the literary works we discuss, and helps us to understand how this tumultuous time inaugurates struggles that continue into our own era. Evaluation will be based on regular short response papers, participation in our discussions, and midterm and final essay exams.