In this class we will read examples of personal narrative or "life-writing" from anglophone America from the mid 1600s until the early 1800s. The term "autobiography" was not coined until 1808, and so does not appear in the titles of any of the texts we will read, but the genre of individuals' written testimonies of their own lives had important social functions and literary conventions in America during this period.

The individuals whose life narratives we will read all tell of profound social and spiritual transformations. Some write of religious awakenings or conversions, while others (notably the writers of captivity narratives) recount how they were forced to adapt suddenly to new families, new languages, and new identities.

Autobiography may appear to be a simple and popular literary genre, and memoirs (as they are more often called today) frequently appear on the lists of non-fiction best-sellers in the U.S. However, several recent controversies have questioned the accuracy or authenticity of these memoirs, and once again blurred the distinctions between novel and autobiography.

We will begin by studying the rhetorical conventions of the conversion narratives that were sometimes delivered as a condition of membership in church congregations in seventeenth-century New England. These texts appear to follow a formula. How does this affect readers' assessments of the authenticity of the narrators' spiritual transformations?

In the second half of the course we will read a number of captivity narratives and consider how these writers tried to convey the American Indian cultures into which they had been adopted. We will also look at narratives by American Indians who used the techniques of the spiritual autobiography and the captivity narrative to appeal for full membership in American communities of individuals.

Books on order at the University Bookstore:
James Seaver, A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison
John Tanner, The Falcon
William Apess, A Son of the Forest
Gordon Sayre, ed., American Captivity Narratives

e-texts from EADA: Early Americas Digital Archive linked from blackboard
Elizabeth Ashbridge
Anne Bradstreet
Jonathan Edwards
John Woolman

data-texts downloadable from the blackboard site
François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny
John Dane (I also used a link to an on-line version from HistoryMatters.org)
J. A. U. Gronniosaw
Venture Smith
Attendance

- Class meetings will be devoted to discussions, lectures, student presentations, small group assignments, and other activities. Attendance is therefore mandatory and fundamental to your success in the class.
- You are permitted to miss three classes for whatever reason, but your grade will be reduced for each absence beyond three. I will distribute an attendance list at the beginning of each class period. Please sign to confirm your attendance, although keep in mind that leaving class early will also constitute an absence. If you need to leave early, please discuss it with me ahead of time.
- If you have to miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain notes and materials. Small group discussion questions and handouts will be posted on blackboard, but lecture notes may not be. Your best source is often a classmate’s notes.
- If your absence is due to excusable circumstances, you may meet with me during office hours to review missed materials. Excusable circumstances include: death in the family, serious illness, ill children, observance of a religious holiday, and other university-recognized conflicts, such as athletic competitions. Be prepared to provide documentation.

Writing assignments:

- Critical paper on the conversion narrative, 4-5 pages, due on April 18th
- Critical paper on captivity and transculturation, 4-5 pages, due on May 25th
- Research or Creative Project (choose one of 3 options below) due May 4th
- In addition, the final exam will include a substantial critical essay, questions for which will be distributed by June 1st

Grading:

tests and written assignments will be graded by points, with a total of 100.
20 points each of the two critical papers
15 points research/creative project
15 points midterm
20 points final exam
10 points attendance and participation

Final grades will likely be determined on a scale where 90-100 constitutes an A, 80-89 a B, and 70-79 a C. However, characteristics of each class group and the strength of students’ performances can differ, and the curve may bend accordingly.

Academic Honesty:
All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please consult Rules for Writers for a definition of plagiarism and information on documentation, and refer to the Student Conduct Code on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website.

Research or Creative Project (due May 4th):

- 1st option: write or revise a wikipedia article on a little-known American autobiographer. You can write an entry for an individual who does not have one, or make substantial revisions to an entry that is brief or inadequate. The individual
may be one whose work is on the syllabus, or one of many others who are not. I can distribute a list of additional autobiographers. For example, there is no article on Devereux Jarratt, the one on Elizabeth Ashbridge is a short stub, and the one on Gronniosaw could use some work. For this option you will need to create your own wikipedia account and consult guides for how to write good articles.

- 2nd option: write your own brief spiritual autobiography, following, at least in part, the pattern that you find in the course readings.
- 3rd option: collect or study a narrative by an relative or ancestor. You will notice that Anne Bradstreet and others addressed their narratives to their children and grandchildren. Often with no expectation of publishing their text, they simply wished to leave a testimony of their lives for their descendants to read.

**Schedule of readings**

March 28th    Introduction to course; poems by Ann Bradstreet, Phyllis Wheatley, and/or James Revel (paper handouts)

March 30th    John Dane [pdf or link from blackboard]  
Ann Bradstreet “To My Dear and Loving Children” [on-line EADA]

April 1st     Jonathan Edwards, “Personal Narrative”  [on-line EADA]  

April 4th     Guest lecture by Ali Young: confessions recorded by Thomas Shepard

April 6th     John Woolman chapters 1-5  [on-line EADA]  
Also: connections between spiritual autobiography and addiction

April 8th     Elizabeth Ashbridge [on-line EADA]

April 11th    Olaudah Equiano in *American Captivity Narratives* pp 225-257

April 13th    John Marrant in *American Captivity Narratives* pp 203-224

April 15th    J. A. U. Gronniosaw’s narrative and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ”James Gronniosaw and the trope of the talking book" [pdfs]

April 18th    Venture Smith [pdf]

April 20th    William Apess, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe*

April 22nd    William Apess, *A Son of the Forest*, chapters 1-9 (50 pages)

April 25th    Mary Rowlandson in *American Captivity Narratives* pp 127-176

April 27th    Hans Staden in *American Captivity Narratives* pp 18-58
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 29th</td>
<td>Isaac Jogues in <em>American Captivity Narratives</em> pp 91-121</td>
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<td>May 2nd</td>
<td>Mid-term Exam</td>
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<td>May 4th</td>
<td>Intro to French Louisiana and to picaresque autobiography; excerpts from</td>
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<td>William Moraley (paper handout)</td>
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<td>May 6th</td>
<td>Dumont de Montigny, <em>The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont</em>, chap. 2</td>
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<td>May 9th</td>
<td>Dumont de Montigny, <em>The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont</em> chap. 3</td>
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<td>May 11th</td>
<td>Dumont de Montigny, <em>The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont</em> chap 4 &amp; 5</td>
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<td>May 13th</td>
<td>James Smith, “An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and</td>
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<td>Travels of Col. James Smith” in <em>American Captivity Narratives</em> pp 258-347</td>
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<td>(read to around p. 300 for today)</td>
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<td>May 16th</td>
<td>James Smith, remainder</td>
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<td>May 18th</td>
<td>James Seaver, <em>A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison</em></td>
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<td>Author’s Preface and Introduction, chapters 1-6</td>
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<td>May 20th</td>
<td>James Seaver, <em>A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison</em>, chapters 7-16</td>
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<td>May 23rd</td>
<td>John Tanner chapters 1-5 (1-68)</td>
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<td>May 25th</td>
<td>John Tanner chapters 6-8 (pp 69-131)</td>
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<td>May 27th</td>
<td>John Tanner, chapters 9-11 (pp. 132-198)</td>
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<td>May 30th</td>
<td>no class, Memorial Day Holiday</td>
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<td>June 1st</td>
<td>John Tanner, <em>The Falcon</em> chapters 12-15 (pp199-280)</td>
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<td>June 3rd</td>
<td>Geronimo, in <em>American Captivity Narratives</em> pp410-443</td>
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<td>Final Exam 10:15 Wednesday, June 8th</td>
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