

Fall 2020 OLLI Course

General Theme:

The intersectionality of three cultures: European, Colonial, and American

I belong to the Colonial culture. My ancestors, if you go back far enough, were all European (or mostly all – I'm not aware of any exceptions, but they of course may exist). My mother's parents were Canadian, of Scottish descent. My father's parents were Yankees, of primarily English ancestry, with a few Welsh, Scottish, and (perhaps) French connections thrown into the mix.

For the sake of simplicity (and with other motivations), I refer to Indigenous American culture(s) as “American” – partly to give them their due, and partly to remind us that Colonial culture was essentially a European invention that was transplanted onto our continent.

In North America, the Colonists were able to create a new culture in a way that the Europeans could not, despite all the changes wrought there by the end of feudalism, the rise of the merchant class, the scientific revolution, and the strident view of the Enlightenment Philosophers. What the Europeans were unable to shake off was the entrenched interests of the hereditary aristocracy. On our side of the Atlantic, we never had a home-grown equivalent, although many individuals (and whole families) had become part of a de facto aristocracy by means of their commercial success.

The burning issues of our times:

- Climate Change
- Income and Wealth Inequality
- Equal Treatment/Opportunity and Justice for All

Underlying these problems are the European inventions:

- Private property (privatization of public goods, including intellectual property)
- Racism (the notion that superficial differences define a person's potential and limitations)
- Disaccommodation (the idea that those with different needs should accommodate to the predominant culture, instead of the other way around)

What are the solutions? What can we learn from Native Americans, who did not experience these problems? Why have we overlooked their success for so long?

In this course, we will examine these (and other) questions, and contrast original American culture with what has been overlaid on it by the Colonists, and the ways in which American culture has influenced the development of Colonial culture.