

## “The Vast and Howling Wilderness”: Sounds of Early America

### **Panel Organizers**

Phillip James Grider (Universität Göttingen)

Abigail Fagan (Universität Hannover)

According to authors like Mary Rowlandson, William Bradford, John Smith, and Cotton Mather, the soundscape of early America was replete with the howling of wind, the crashing of rain, and the snarling of wolves and the other inhabitants of the forests and swamps of a hostile colonial environment. While Rowlandson writes of a “howling wilderness,” for instance, Bradford reports of “hideous and great cries” in the night, Smith remembers the “hideous cry and howling of wolves,” and Mather repeatedly evokes the sound and image of snarling wolves and crying lambs in his tracts on witchcraft. In light of these myriad cries, this panel asks: What changes in our engagement with early American culture, history, and literature when we foreground sound?

This question is one that is as methodological as it is descriptive. Historians like Saidiya Hartman, Lisa Brooks, and Marisa Fuentes remind us that the historical archive is fundamentally flawed for the ways in which it privileges texts written by the economic elite. They and others seek to write of the subjects the archive represents largely through records of noise, rather than written text, as in the sounds of the pain of enslavement in 17th century Bridgetown, Barbados (Fuentes) and the orality of transnational and interspecies encounters on 17th century Wabanaki land (Brooks). Foregrounding sound—the colonial perception and ideological representation of sound; African and Indigenous voices, song, and sound that resisted colonial archival erasure; as well as the silences of those omitted from the colonial archive—allows for possible re-readings of early America. Oral history and story-telling, in particular, represent one such element of the Early American soundscape. The papers in this panel contend with the significance of soundscapes, the rhetorical denials in speech and of silence, and the ethical imperative to engage the unwritten in our work on the early and colonial history of the United States.

### **Presentations**

#### **Phillis Wheatley Peters’ Black Soundscapes and the Politics of New Materialism**

Shelby Lynn Johnson (Oklahoma State University)

#### **The Sound of Deception: Imposture, Stupefaction, and Transformation in Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s Chronicle of the Narváez Expedition**

Anna-Lena Oldehus (Leibniz Universität Hannover)

#### **'The Science of Deception': Silence, Noise, and Avoiding Detection in The Narrative of Henry Tufts (1807)**

Johannes C. P. Schmid (Europa-Universität Flensburg)

#### **Ethics and Oral History**

Abigail Fagan (Leibniz Universität Hannover)