

UNIT 1 ESSAY

Alan Taylor's *Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction* is fundamentally a book about boundaries and borders. In the most literal sense, Taylor wants to expand the geographic boundaries of what is considered American colonial history. Taylor, however, is not content to stop there. He also wants to expand the boundaries of historiographical practice.

Your task for this first major assessment of the year is to construct an **intelligently argued** and **well-documented** essay in which you precisely **describe** the character of Taylor's project and **explain** the significance of this historiographical intervention. In doing so, you should make certain to **locate** *Colonial America* in the context of the developments, trends, struggles, changes, and controversies that have characterized American historiographical practice during the past half century.

After reviewing *Colonial America* and the readings for the unit, you should begin by developing a **working thesis**. It is important that you move beyond mere description in your thesis. Remember that a thesis is a **debatable conclusion**. Merely stating that "*Alan Taylor's Colonial America expands the borders of colonial history to include regions and peoples not traditionally associated with the establishment of the United States*" is not sufficient. There's really nothing debatable in that statement. You should also be careful to avoid writing an "op-ed" piece. Thus, do not offer a thesis of this sort: "*Alan Taylor's Colonial America is good,*" or, for that matter, "*bad.*" This does not mean you can't evaluate the worth of his project – just do not make it your focus. What you should be focusing on is answering the question: "Why does Taylor's project matter?" If you're having difficulty developing a thesis, come see me. And, of course, come see me to check whether or not you're on the right track.

Obviously, this essay prompt requires that you address more than the summer reading. Consequently, you must also engage at least **two** other readings from Unit 1. You may decide to engage more readings (including some from the beginning of Unit 2), but don't go overboard since the length of your essay (excluding footnotes/endnotes) is limited to **three** pages. This also means that you must write **judiciously** and with **brevity** even as you make certain that you provide a sufficient number of **concrete** and **precise** examples from both *Colonial America* and the other readings to **substantiate** your assertions.

Margins should be **1 inch** on all sides and type should be in a **standard 12-point font**. In such a short essay, remember that **clarity**, **organization**, and **fluidity** are essential in constructing a successful response. I am interested in receiving concise, clear, and focused essays. Make certain that you are able to check each box on the checklist that appears on the flip side.

I also want your essay to include a cover page. On that page should be:

- Title of essay (Not "Unit 1 Essay" or "Taylor Essay")
- Your name
- Section
- Date

Please leave me sufficient space on the cover page to write extensive comments.

The essay is due Wednesday, October 2nd in my office by the end of Ad Hoc

Essay Checklist:

- 1) Does the paper have an **introduction** that **engages** the reader, a **thesis statement**, and a brief “**road map**” to the rest of your discussion?
- 2) Have you consistently asked yourself: “What’s the essay’s thesis? Is it precise? Does it make sense?”
- 3) Does each paragraph **support** your thesis or discuss counterevidence that might potentially undermine your thesis?
- 4) Have you concretely and judiciously integrated the **appropriate number** of **readings** from the unit into your essay?
- 5) Have you avoided citing websites that are not scholarly in nature and, thus, not verifiable as to the information they put forward—this includes **Wikipedia**.
- 6) Have you used quotations appropriately?
 - a. Generally **do not** quote from the secondary literature but instead put the quotation in your own words.
 - b. Refrain from using large block quotations unless you are going to specifically analyze the passage.
 - c. If you do choose to quote, then identify who it was who wrote or said the words you have chosen to quote
- 7) Does the paper have a conclusion that does more than merely restate the thesis? If not, think about what would make for an appropriate conclusion.
- 8) Have you appropriately **cited** the sources you used and placed the citations as either **endnotes** or **footnotes** according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*?
- 9) Have you used a **standard font 12-point font**?
- 10) Do you have **one-inch margins** all around?
- 11) Is your essay **double-spaced**?
- 12) Have you included page **numbers**?
- 13) Have you avoided using the **passive** voice?
- 14) Have you avoided the **first person plural**—that is “we,” “our,” and “us.”
- 15) Have you found appropriate **replacement words** for “**said**” and “**felt**.”
- 16) Have you written the essay in the **correct tense** and been consistent in your use of tense?
- 17) Have you refrained from using **colloquial** language and too many **contractions**?
- 18) Have you read your essay **aloud** and corrected any sentences that were difficult to speak?
- 19) Have you **proofread** the final draft of your essay at least **4 times**?
- 20) Have included a **cover page**?
- 21) Have you **stapled** your essay?