

***John Demos' The Heathen School:  
Early American Quandaries with Race and Religion***

In 2014, historian John Demos published the book, *The Heathen School: A Story of Hope and Betrayal in the Age of the Early Republic*. The book tells the story behind an experiment in missionizing in the early 19th century: the creation of the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut. The school, which only lasted from 1817-26, was intended to educate and convert young men from around the world, with the ultimate goal of sending them back to their nations so they could help Christianize and “civilize” their societies. Drawing students from nations as diverse as Hawaii, China, New Zealand, Portugal, many Native American tribes, and more, the school was controversial from the get-go. However, it also garnered considerable support, not only in the United States but also amongst Christians in Europe and elsewhere. Locally, the school was frequently referred to as the “Heathen School.”

Demos draws from a vast array of primary sources, and he organizes his book into several sections, with each section containing a chapter of overall historical context, then a chapter dedicated to the specific characters associated with the Heathen School, and finally a chapter that details the relevant locations as they exist today. Given the length of the book and our limited time to read it, you will not be reading the chapters in which he specifically chronicles the Heathen School or his own travels to the locations today. Rather, you will be responsible for reading the attached review of the book by Abigail Jones (“John Demos Takes on America’s ‘Heathen School’ and a 19th Century Sex Scandal; Murder, betrayal and an explosive sex scandal in America’s early days”) so you can get the general picture of the story of the Heathen School.

Then, you will you read the attached chapters in which Demos chronicles the evolving white American identity and relationship to people of other societies, cultures, and races:

*Chapter 1: “American Outreach: The China Trade”*

*Chapter 3: “American Mission: The World Savers”*

*Chapter 5: “American Paradox: The Indelible Color Line”*

*Chapter 7: “American Tragedy: Renascence and Removal”*

*Epilogue*

Altogether, between the book review and the book excerpts, the reading is about 50 pages. You’ll want to budget your time and spread out the reading, so you can keep up with our other assignments. Ultimately, after the reading, your task is to write a 4-5 page paper reflecting on ONE of the following:

1. What does the specific story of the Heathen School, as well as the broader narrative that Demos provides, tell us about the evolving sense of American identity in the 18th and early 19th centuries? *Was it always exceptionalist, or were there times or people that broke with that trend?*
2. During this era, *to what extent* did white Americans allow their people and their ideas to commingle with those of other cultures and races? What events, ideas, or trends caused any variations over time?

3. Demos says early in the book that America around 1800, after two centuries as colonies, “would increasingly - sometimes aggressively - turn *out* towards other groups and places.” From what you read in the excerpts, what were the results of this outward attention, for the places where the U.S. focused? How much choice did the people of those places - China, Hawaii, Native American nations - have in how they responded to the Americans?

Your response will be worth up to 75 points, based upon the strength of your thesis, organization, specific evidence, and proper writing and citations. The paper will be due on **Friday, 11/6/15**.