



**2<sup>nd</sup> RéDEHJA international conference**  
**University of Orléans (France)**  
**June 16-18, 2027**

## **Fear in North American Colonies and the Early Republic (1607-1865)**



The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. "Trial of George Jacobs for Witchcraft, Salem, Mass" *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1898 - 1931.

The “affective turn” has recently led scholarship in the social and human sciences to (re)consider their research objects, areas of expertise, and methodologies, and to address forms of individual and collective agency as resulting from or being operated by emotions. It operates in the wake of the broader poststructuralist epistemologies applied to social and human sciences since the 1970s, in Gender

studies, Postcolonial studies, Black studies, Subaltern studies, Atlantic studies, Queer studies, migration studies, mobility studies, and material studies. Building on materialistic approaches to human actions and social developments, *affect studies* have addressed the psycho-emotional dimension of social history, and highlighted the ways in which *affects* are mobilized by the economic and cultural forces at work within human societies (Ahmed, 2004). They have shown that feelings need to be understood as dependent on structures of domination, social and geopolitical hierarchies, and processes of inclusion/exclusion (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012; Ahmed, 2004). Some scholars – notably those following the Foucauldian study of performative discourse and perception – have further contended that what one feels and/or is expected to feel depends on interactive power dynamics: one feels in relation to someone or something. The nature of such structures of power *affects* both the physical and psychological body of individuals, and initiates modes of action and of “being” to the world that vary according to “emotional communities” (Rosenwein) characterized by specific ways to perceive, channel or perform feelings.

Consequently, affects have shed a new light on the study of Early America. Following Ruth Leys’s 2011 call to reevaluate the role of reason and rationality as the main driving force behind social and political human action, historians have started to focus on the part played by emotions, as opposed to rational reasoning, in historical events and developments. Therefore, pain, hate, anxiety, anger, happiness, joy, etc. have been explored as novel means to understand the scope of human agency in the shaping of the social, political, racialized and gendered orders of colonial North American spaces. In short, emotions are now analyzed as full historical agents (Reddy), characterized by their ability to shape short- and long-term processes of apprehension and appropriation of these spaces. This approach contributes to the critical contextualization and the deconstruction of European sources at work in the most recent historiographical contributions related to “colonial” America and the Early American Republic, that challenge the linear and monolithic narrative of the Euro-American imperial venture into the North American continent. Scholars have reaffirmed the striking fragility of the contested colonial process, the profound insecurity of colonizers aiming to control the diverse populations on whom they depended, and the “restless” nature of the emerging (and limited) democratic order in the US nation-state. It seems therefore relevant to (re)examine the significance of fear in the making of North American colonies and the Early Republic.

Ever since the 2000s, historians of Early America have tended to reinterpret the role of fear, its causes, consequences, and contextual avatars. While refusing to perceive its occurrences as mere episodic or limited phenomena that could provide elements of explanation to a given event, they have analyzed fear as a structuring impulse that shaped governance, identity, and everyday life across the colonial world. They have presented fear as a culturally constructed and socially embedded force that shaped political action, racial and gender hierarchies, and religious beliefs. Laurie Henneton and L.H. Roper’s *Fear and the Shaping of Early American Societies* (2016) remains a key contribution to the field, notably in contending that fear was pervasive

and foundational, rather than an exception in the making of American colonial societies. This collection showed that, rather than appearing only in moments of crisis, such as wars, rebellions, civil unrest, environmental catastrophes, and moments of paranoia such as Salem in 1692, fear structured political decision-making and imperial strategies across Vast Early America. It argued that fear permeated early American life, functioning as both a social binder and a political instrument, while colonists, facing perceived or real threats from Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, religious dissenters, and other imperial powers, often circulated as rumors, translated insecurity into policy, preemptive actions, or community discipline. Far from being a sporadic or irrational element of history, fear has globally been linked to the chronic insecurity and emotional intensity of early American worlds and perceived as a central architect of structures of power and domination.

Ten years on, the 2027 REDEHJA symposium aims at reflecting on the central role of fear in the making of North American colonies and the Early Republic (1607-1865), and the sources, topics and methodologies that have emerged following the methodological path opened by recent works on emotions in Early American. Possible areas of discussions may include:

- Racial fears and the institution and practice of enslavement.
- Fear of the “other”, the “unknown”: “savagery”, “wilderness” and insecure “civilization”; insecure “whiteness” and the systemic subordination of racialized groups.
- Fear and insecurity: fear of revolts, rebellions, attacks, resistance and preemptive action, retaliation and colonial violence.
- Religious fears: radicalism, rigorism and social order, “supernatural” activities and destabilized Christianity.
- Fear and gender: insecure masculinities, insecure femininities and reconsideration of gender assignment.
- Existential fear of “subaltern” human groups: subjugation, oppression, annihilation, disappearance in the wake of settler colonialism.
- Fear of (re)enslavement, kidnapping, deportation, removal.
- The use of fear in political / diplomatic interactions (in treaty-making, land cessions, etc.).
- Social fears: rumors, conspiracies and local panics; collective and individual fears; social and intimate fears.
- Settler fragility in time and space: natural ordeals, negotiated locations of settlements, volatility of “contact zones” and limits to the colonial venture in borderlands.
- Social fears: rumors, conspiracies and local panics.
- Fear of war, disunion and secession: enemy empires/colonies/states and the questioning of expansion, of an “extended republic”, the growth of sectionalism.
- Circulation of fear and anxieties in Vast Early America and the Atlantic world.
- Fear of “progress”, technology and destruction of the environment.
- Political fears: fear of the mob, mobocracy, democratic deficit and tyranny.

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### **Conference Format**

RÉDEHJA 2027 will be held in-person.

Proposals and communications are accepted exclusively in English. This language requirement is due to the international scope of our congress, which gathers participants from multiple countries and requires a common language for meaningful exchange.

### **Submission instructions**

Proposals for panels and individual papers must be written in English and should be sent to [redehja2027@gmail.com](mailto:redehja2027@gmail.com) by October 15, 2026.

Individual proposals must include:

- a 300-word abstract
- a 150-word author biography

We also welcome panel proposals composed of scholars from multiple nationalities. Panels should be made of three to four presenters and a Chair. Proposals must include:

- a 300-word overview of the panel theme (including a title)
- 300-word abstracts for each paper
- 150-word author biographies

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

- Submission Deadline: October 15, 2026
- Notification of Acceptance/Rejection: December 15, 2026
- Registration Deadline for Participants: March 15, 2027
- Conference Dates: June 16-18, 2027

**Please note that you will need to be a RÉDEHJA member at the time of your online registration for the conference, that is by March 15, 2026.**

**Do not hesitate to join us now:**

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