

CFP: “Emergent Secularities in Early America”
2023 SEA Biennial Conference (University of Maryland)

For over forty years, scholars of early American literature have critiqued Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch’s assumption that secularized Puritanism was the foundation of the United States’ political culture. Nevertheless, histories of Western religion (including Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* [2007] and Carlos Eire’s *Reformations* [2018]) continue to argue that the Puritans’ antipathy to ritual and (supposedly) strict division between the supernatural and mortal realms paved the way for modernity’s desacralization of the public sphere.

Moving beyond that teleological narrative, this panel seeks to open fresh perspectives on colonial America’s relationship to the secular and secularization. To what extent did early Americans recognize distinctively secular forms of writing, experience, association, and expertise? Did the special circumstances of colonial society (religious diversity, dispossession of indigenous peoples, enslavement, indenture, distance, and dispersion) create unique varieties of secularism, as well as of religious conviction? What new genealogies of secularization emerge if the Puritan origins thesis is decentered?

We welcome papers that address these questions, or any other topic relating to secularism, secularity, and/or secularization in early America.

Please send a 250-word abstract and a CV to Christopher Trigg (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) at cptrigg@ntu.edu.sg by **October 24th**.