

The American Revolution



History 5XXX
Dr. Justin Roberts
Tuesdays: 4:30 to 6:30

In 1776, thirteen of the two dozen British colonies in the Americas revolted against the British Empire and formed a new and independent nation: The United States of America. The causes and consequences of the event and its very nature have been the subject of intense debate ever since. An enormous range of questions have circulated around the event. For example, was it a civil war? To what extent did Americans reject monarchy? What collection of ideologies and economic and political interests caused the Americans to revolt? How inevitable was the event? How revolutionary was it? How many people supported the revolt and why? To what extent was it a class struggle? How did the Americans manage to unify thirteen disparate colonies? When and how did a common American identity form? How significantly did the revolution change the lives of the people living in the thirteen colonies? How did a small army of colonial rebels manage to defeat the most powerful military in the Atlantic World? This course will explore these questions and more while we examine both the fascinating history and the vast historiography of the American Revolution.

Office Hours:

Wednesdays from 10:30am to 12:30pm or by appointment in 1169 McCain Arts & Sciences
roberts.justin@gmail.com

Course Requirements:**Attendance and Participation: 20%**

We will meet once per week throughout the semester. These meetings will consist of short introductory lectures from me, intensive primary source workshops, and a thorough discussion and analysis of the readings and the major questions scholars have raised about the American Revolution. Students who attend but do not participate in meaningful and thoughtful ways will receive a failing grade for this portion of the grade. Any more than three missed seminars will result in an F this portion of the grade.

Chronology Exam: 5%

Study timelines of the major events of the American Revolution. During this in-class exam, I will give you series of events that I will ask you to place in chronological order. You do not need to memorize all the exact dates but you will need to be familiar with the *sequence* of events. For example, did the Battle of Lexington and Concord occur before or after the Declaration of Independence?

Summary and Description of the American Revolution: 10%

Write a short **1500 word summary** of the American Revolution in your own words. Your summary should briefly address all of the following questions. What was it? How did it happen and what were some of the causes and consequences of the event? Don't be more than 5% over or under for the length of this summary. It is very important to develop the skills of synthesis. You decide what is important to include. You do not need citations for this assignment but you do need to be accurate, concise and clear and you will need to do some background research. This assignment will allow me to assess your writing skills and whether you have a basic comprehension of the event.

Book Review: 5%

You will write a **1000 word book reviews** of **one** of the books on your individual reading list. Don't be more than 5% over or under this review length. Summarize the argument and the sources used and critique the book. What does it do well? What are its flaws or drawbacks? What is it missing? How could it be improved? What is its contribution to the historiography? List your word count at the top of the page. Choose your words carefully and make sure every word counts and makes a meaningful contribution. Omit needless words.

Class Presentation/ Mini-Lecture: 15%

You will choose a topic from a list I will provide in class and you will give a presentation of approximately **twenty-five to thirty minutes** in length on that person, place or thing to the class. You will become a specialist in that topic and teach the group. Try to relate your topic to the larger issues and themes in the course. There will be a question and answer period after your presentation and you may offer the other students a series of discussion questions after the event. Do not read verbatim a written

presentation. You may use notes but you should know the subject well enough to not have to read directly from your notes. This will be a chance to practice lecturing.

Term Paper: 25%

You will research and write a major term paper. It must draw on both primary and secondary sources. It will be a work of original research and not synthesis. This paper will be an absolute minimum of **twenty-five pages** long. Anything less will be docked grades. Feel free to write more than twenty-five pages but don't be verbose. Keep your writing clear and concise. I will read any drafts you prepare before the final due date as long as you give it to me two weeks beforehand so that you can make revisions. You will be working on this all semester and you are in graduate school now so my expectations and the marking standards for this assignment will be very high.

Oral Exam: 20%

There will be a **30 minute individual oral exam** with me at the end of the semester. I will meet with each of you to discuss the American Revolution and the major historical and historiographical themes in our readings. I will ask you to describe the event, critically analyze the event and place it in context. You will be expected to refer to specific readings, primary sources, class discussions, student presentations and lectures. You should be able to summarize and analyze the arguments in both your combined class readings and in your individual readings. I will focus in particular on your individual readings. We will book time for these exams during the last two weeks of the semester and we hold them after the course is finished.

Late Policies: The instructor reserves the right to dock a letter grade per day for late assignments.

Note on Readings: You will all read the required material listed below in advance of class. **You will also choose three books to read from a list I will provide for you.** You will write books review for two of these additional books. I expect you to be reading from the three books throughout the semester. Be prepared to cite and draw on them during our discussions. You should know them thoroughly.

All articles and selections from shorter books will be made available online or in advance of class. Occasionally, I will provide you with shorter excerpts from primary materials to read and explore in class. You will be expected to come to each seminar prepared and having read anything I have provided you with in advance of class.

Week 1: September 6

"These are the times that try men's souls"

Thomas Paine

I will begin to introduce you to some of the readings and sources that we will be examining for the semester and we will talk about our interests and background in this field.

Week 2:

September 13

“Remember the ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands.”

Abigail Adams

Required Readings

Greene, Jack P. “The American Revolution.” *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 95–109.

Bumsted, J.M. “‘Things in the Womb of Time’: Ideas of American Independence, 1633 to 1763,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 31 (1974): 533–564.

Chronology Exam in Class

Primary Source Workshop

The Olive Branch Petition: <http://www.constitution.org/primarysources/olive.html>

Letters of the Delegates of the First Continental Congress

(September 5 to October 26, 1774)

Spend at least two hours browsing these letters in advance of class:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdglink.html>

Focus on sources from one person (choose anyone) and be prepared to discuss them in class

“Edmund Burke Urges Reconciliation with the Colonies,” in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Vol. 1., 117-121.

Week 3: September 20

“I think I can announce it as a fact, that it is not the wish...to set up for independency...I am as well satisfied as I can be of my existence that no such thing is desired by any thinking man in all North America; on the contrary, that it is the ardent wish of the warmest advocates for liberty, that peace and tranquility, upon constitutional grounds, may be restored, and the horrors of civil discord prevented”

George Washington

Required Readings

Read all the sections of the “American Revolution Reborn” Roundtable, *Common-Place* 14.3 (Spring, 2014) and watch the videos

<http://www.common-place.org/vol-14/no-03/intro/#.VJ7IGP8RDA>

J.M. Opal, “Common Sense and Imperial Atrocity,” *Common-Place* 9.4 (July, 2009):

<http://www.common-place.org/vol-09/no-04/forum/opal.shtml>

Jasanoff, Maya. “The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire.” *William and Mary Quarterly* 65 (2008): 205–232.

Kacy Tillman, “What is a Female Loyalist,” *Common-Place* 13.4 (Summer, 2013)

<http://www.common-place.org/vol-13/no-04/tillman/>

Edward Larkin, “What is a Loyalist,” *Common-Place* 8.1 (October, 2007)

<http://www.common-place.org/vol-08/no-01/larkin/>

Primary Source Workshop

“Charles Inglis The True Interest of America Impartially Stated 1776”:

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1776-1785/charles-inglis-the-true-interest-of-america-impartially-stated-1776.php>

“Daniel Leonard Argues for Loyalty to the British Empire,” in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Vol. 1, 110-114.

Due in Class: Summary and Description of American Revolution

Week 4: September 27

“Without the pen of Paine, the sword of Washington would have been wielded in vain.”

John Adams

Required Readings:

Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, 3-119.

Primary Source Workshop

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

You should read the entire text before class: <http://www.bartleby.com/133/>

Week 5: October 4

"May our land be a land of liberty, the seat of virtue, the asylum of the oppressed, a name and a praise in the whole Earth, until the last shock of time shall bury the empires of the whole world in one common undistinguished ruin!"

Joseph Warren

Class Presentations

Required Readings:

Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, 120-248.

Primary Source Workshop

Letters of Abigail and John Adams

Spend at least two hours reading these letters in advance of class:

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/letter/>

Week 6: October 11

"How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?"

Samuel Johnson

Required Readings:

David Brion Davis, "American Slavery and the American Revolution," in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Urbana, Ill., 1983): 283-301

You should have read at least one of your individual books. Be prepared to discuss what you've read thus far and we will try as a group to draw some connections among the works we have been reading.

Primary Source Workshop:

Letters of Delegates of the First Continental Congress (September 5 to October 26, 1774)

Spend at least two hours browsing these letters in advance of class:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdglink.html>

Focus on letters from one person (choose a different person than the last time) and be prepared to discuss them in seminar

“Boston King Seeks Freedom by Running Away to the British Army in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Vol. 1., 137-140.

Due in Class: Book Review

**Week 7:
October 18**

“The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I Am Not A Virginian, But An American!”

Patrick Henry

Required Readings

Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 1-93.

Primary Source Workshop

Letters of the Delegates of the Second Continental Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdglink.html>

(May 10, 1775 to December 12, 1776)

Spend at least two hours browsing these letters in advance of class:

Focus on sources from one person (choose anyone) and be prepared to discuss them in class

**Week 8:
October 25**

"There! His Majesty can now read my name without glasses. And he can double the reward on my head!"

John Hancock

Required Readings:

Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 94-229.

Primary Source Workshop:

American Declaration of Independence:

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

Dutch Act of Abjuration:

http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/dutch_independence_1581.html

Virginia Declaration of Rights:

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rbpebib:@field%28NUMBER+@band%28rbpe+17802200%29%29>

Jefferson's First Draft of the Declaration of Independence:

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1776-1785/jeffersons-draft-of-the-declaration-of-independence.php>

Steve Pincus, "No, Brexit was not Britain's 'Declaration of Independence.' It was the exact opposite," *The Washington Post* (June 29, 2016),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/29/no-brexit-was-not-britains-declaration-of-independence-it-was-the-exact-opposite/>

Week 9: November 1

"I dare say the men would fight very well if properly officered, although they are an exceedingly dirty and nasty people."

George Washington on his own army

Required Readings

Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 230-320

Primary Source Workshop:

"George Washington Seeks Congressional Support for the Continental Army," in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Vol. 1., 133-136.

"George Washington to the President of Congress, December 23, 1777, Valley Forge," <http://www.historycentral.com/documents/ValleyForge.html>

"Jospeh Brant Appeals to British Allies to Keep Promises," in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Vol. 1, 141-144.

"Treaty with the Six Nations Fort Stanwix October 22 1784": <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1776-1785/treaty-with-the-six-nations-fort-stanwix-october-22-1784.php>

Week 10: November 8

"The die is now cast; the colonies must either submit or triumph.... we must not retreat"

George III

*****No Class*****

**Week 11:
November 15**

"Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes! Then fire low!"

Israel Putnam

Required Readings

Paul Aron, "If the British Won,"

<http://www.common-place.org/vol-14/no-03/reviews/aron.shtml#.VJ7FrP8RDA>

JCD Clark, "British America: What if there had been no American Revolution?," in Niall Ferguson, ed., *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*. Basic Books, 2000: 125-174.

Term Paper Workshop

Today we will talk about how to write a strong paper and we will practice editing- You must bring at least a page that you have written for the final term paper to share with the other seminar members for editing

**Week 12:
November 22**

"They that can give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Benjamin Franklin

Required Readings

Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 321-380.

Primary Source Workshop

"Mercy Otis Warren Opposes the Constitution," in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Vol. 1, 159-163.

"Making the Case for the Constitution," in Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Reading the American Past*, Vol. 1, 154-158.

The US Constitution

The Haitian Constitution

Week 13:
November 29

"I confess that there are several parts of this Constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them: For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise. It is therefore that the older I grow, the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment, and to pay more respect to the judgment of others."

Benjamin Franklin

Individual 30 Minute Oral Exams- We will schedule these separately for this day

*****Your final term paper is due to me by email on December 17th by 4pm. There will be no exceptions or extensions*****