HISTORY 344: THE AGE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Department of History
University of Wisconsin–Madison

Professor Francis Russo
farusso@wisc.edu
Mosse Humanities Building 5216
Office Hours: Mondays, 1:30–3:30 pm
or by appointment

Course Syllabus
Fall 2025
Wednesdays, 3:30–5:25 pm
Education Building L151

William Walcutt, *Pulling Down the Statue of George III at Bowling Green, July 9, 1776* (1857), oil on canvas, Lafayette College Art Collection.

Johannes Adam Simon Oertel, *Pulling Down the Statue of King George III, New York City* (1853), oil on canvas, New-York Historical Society.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course students will learn about the history of the American colonies and the United States from the outbreak of the Seven Years War (1754–55) to the creation of the U.S. Constitution (1787), as well as major interpretations of the Revolution since the era itself to today. Students will read a wide range of primary and secondary sources, exploring the ideas and experiences of both famous and ordinary people, as well as the historical forces that shape people as collective groups. Topics covered include: the Seven Years War and other events leading up to the American Revolution, revolutionary ideology, the politics of American independence, the Revolutionary War, the development of state and national governments, the creation and ratification of the U.S. Constitution, the role of ordinary people in the politics of the time period, the problem of slavery in the Age of Revolutions, Native American power and loss, the impact of revolutions in France and Haiti, and the social and political legacies of the America Revolution.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this course, you will:

(1) Learn major events and concepts in the history of the American Revolutionary Era and become familiar with the Revolution's wide-ranging participants and their diverse aims and actions, as well as the divergent ways in which the Revolution affected different peoples in North America and the Atlantic World.
(2) Encounter key scholarly interpretations of the American Revolution and its legacies and increase your own ability to evaluate and assess these arguments.
(3) Improve your ability to read and think critically, analyze primary sources and use historical evidence to craft historical arguments, and communicate your ideas effectively.
(4) Increase your ability to reflect on your own relationship to the historical memory of the American Revolution within the contemporary United States.

FORMAT AND STUDENT-INSTRUCTOR INTERACTION

This is an in-person course. We will meet on Wednesday each week for seminars, where attendance is required. These seminars will provide the main source of regular and substantive interaction with you through direct instruction, information and clarification about course content, and, most of all, directed discussion of the material under consideration. At least once during the semester, students are also required to consult with me one-on-one to discuss the course and their preliminary ideas about a final paper topic (see schedule below).

CREDIT INFORMATION

This is a 3-credit course. The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities, which include our regularly scheduled class meetings on Wednesdays throughout the fall semester as well as continuous reading, writing, preparing for seminars, and other learning activities outside of class.

COURSE DESIGNATION & REQUISITES

This course can fulfill a Social Science breadth requirement. It also counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in the College of Letters and Science. The requisite for this course is sophomore standing.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS, ASSESSMENT, AND POLICIES

Readings

Readings for this course comprise both excerpts from secondary sources and short primary sources. Most of these readings have been made available on Canvas and are marked with an * on the schedule below. There are three books that we will read in full or in large part, and you are required to acquire physical copies. These books are available on course reserve in College Library, yet I highly recommend that you obtain new or used copies to own and keep for yourself. Most of the books on this syllabus are available from online retailers for a very low cost and are excellent books that can become your friends for life. If you have any concerns whatsoever regarding the cost of required books, please come see me at the start of the semester and we will find an easy accommodation. We will go over all expectations about physical and digital reading practices on the first day of class.

Required Texts

Woody Holton, *Liberty is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution* (Simon & Schuster, 2021)

Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787–1788* (Simon & Schuster, 2010)

Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Beacon Press, 1999)

Recommended Texts

Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (Oxford, 1976)

Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (Vintage, 2012)

Assignments and Assessment

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Participation	40%
Paper 1: 250th Report	15%
Paper 2: Pamphlet	15%
Final Paper	30%

Your letter grade will be calculated as follows:

A:	93% +
AB:	87.5 – <93%
B:	82.5 – <87.5%
BC:	77.5 – <82.5%
C:	70 – <77.5%
D:	60 – 69.9%
F:	<60%

***Informed, Responsive Class Participation* (40%)**

Our class is an opportunity to get to know your classmates intellectually, ask each other questions, help others answer theirs, and finally decide what you think. Everyone must complete the readings before class and participate in discussion throughout the semester in an informed, responsive way. By "informed," I mean informed by a close reading of our texts, and by "responsive," I mean responsive to each other, listening and responding to each others' observations, analyses, and questions.

Before each class meeting, I will distribute a few questions about the reading. Choose one of the questions. We will begin class with a go-round in which each of you will take about three minutes to answer your chosen question. You can speak extemporaneously, from an outline, or from a written statement, whatever makes you most comfortable. The go-round will provide a springboard for our conversation, so listen to others' ideas. Where do you agree or disagree? What questions occur to you?

A major goal of this class is for you to interpret the readings and decide what you think. What you learn in this class, and the quality of our experience together, depends on your reading closely, coming to class with informed ideas and questions, and being prepared to help your classmates answer theirs.

As you read, it is always a good idea to ask:

1. What specific evidence does the author provide for his or her argument?
2. Does the author interpret the evidence in a convincing way?
3. Given the other readings we have done this semester, what aspects of the book do you find surprising, questionable, or insightful?
4. What questions about the past does the author leave unanswered that you would like to understand?

Paper 1: Report for the 250th **(15%)**

A 5-page creative paper demonstrating your understanding of the causes of the American Revolution as we have encountered them in weeks 2–5. For some unknown reason, everyone alive except for our class has forgotten why the American Revolution occurred. This is especially problematic given the nation is currently experiencing the 250Th anniversary of 1776. Your task is to prepare an official report for the National 250th American Revolution Committee on the origins of the Revolution. The report should be 5 pages long and have two sections. In the first section (1–4 pages), you should explain the direct causes of the American Revolution with reference to *at least three* groups, sets of ideas, or events in North America and Great Britain that we have studied so far in the course. The emphasis should not be on summarizing the specific groups, ideas, and/or events, but on explaining how they *related to* and *influenced* one another during this period of history. All information in the report must be properly cited using material from the course. In the second section (1 page), you should explain why understanding the specific historical issues you identify in analyzing the causes of the American Revolution are significant for contemporary United States citizens.

Paper 2: Pamphlet **(15%)**

A 2–3-page creative paper demonstrating your understanding of two perspectives on the Revolution covered in the weeks 2–10. Violence has already broken out at Lexington and Concord. Writing in the voice of (1) a British loyalist fleeing from New York City (based on Jasanoff), (2) a British interpreter representing neutrality on behalf of the Oneida Nation (based on Martin and Blackhawk), or (3) a worker in Philadelphia inspired by *Common Sense* (based on Foner), write a pamphlet evaluating the ideas and perspectives of one of the other two figures. Do not spend any time summarizing the books: you are writing a pamphlet to persuade and mobilize people who are familiar with both types of reasoning. Focus on identifying convergent or divergent aspects that you see in the two perspectives, and explain why they are morally, socially, or politically significant to you.

Final Paper **(30%)**

An 8-10-page paper about one aspect of the American Revolution's consequences. In addition to the material listed on the syllabus, the final paper should include at least one of each of the following about your chosen subject: one digital primary source, one archival or printed primary source, one appropriate secondary source (a book or article published by a university press).

The Wisconsin Historical Society and UW–Madison University Libraries hold rich primary and secondary sources on nearly all aspects of the American Revolution. We will discuss in class how to use these

resources effectively and turn them into tools to explore your own interests and widen your own knowledge. We will also discuss effective research and writing techniques to help you communicate and present your ideas coherently and elegantly. **You must discuss your paper topic with me individually before Week 10, and you must submit a thesis statement and an outline of your paper before our individual meetings in Week 13.** We will discuss all expectations about the final paper in class.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity:
Academic integrity and honesty are of paramount importance. Cheating and plagiarism are not allowed under any circumstances. All work that you turn in must be your own, so take time to familiarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Guidelines for proper citation and attribution are available at the UW–Madison Writing Center.

"Artificial Intelligence":
Think critically about the advantages and risks of using Generative AI during your education and in your life. AI programs are not citable authorities and the sources that AI programs cite are not reliable. Submitting AI-generated text for what is supposed to be your own is plagiarism. Moreover, using these tools for more than clerical tasks short-circuits the development of your ability to think through, comprehend, and communicate knowledge to yourself and others. There is simply no substitute for knowing things yourself, no matter what field, profession, or life path you choose. If you would like help brainstorming an idea or studying for this course, I encourage you to come to office hours to talk with me about your own ideas. Remember, you are smarter than AI. It can do things faster, but not necessarily better. Your grade will be lowered if your engagement and understanding of course material is faulty by relying on it. Your own hard work and use of human creativity are the best guarantees to receive a good grade in this course and to gain the knowledge and intellectual skills that will last you a lifetime.

Communication:
The great pleasure of teaching is getting to know students. Come by my office hours or make an appointment to discuss any of the course material. For brief, procedural questions about the class, you should first consult this syllabus. Secondarily, emailing me is fine.

Laptops:
Laptops are only permitted during seminar (with internet disconnected for the duration of the seminar) to pull up required reading materials for that class period when no physical copy is available. Phones and all other electronic devices must be silenced and out of sight for the duration of seminars.

Disability policy:
If you have a disability that requires special arrangements, please let me know at the beginning of the semester, and we will be more than happy to find an accommodation.

SCHEDULE

9/3 Week 1. Introduction to the Course

9/10 Week 2. The British Atlantic Empire: Triumph and Crisis

Woody Holton, *Liberty is Sweet*, 3–47.

*Colin Calloway, "America and Americans in 1763" in *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (2006), 19–46.

*Benjamin Franklin, *et al.* Albany Plan of Colonial Union (1754)
*Royal Proclamation of 1763
*George Washington to William Crawford, September 17, 1767
*Two Images of Paxton Boys and the Massacre of Susquehannock Indians at Conestoga

9/17 Week 3. Stamps to Tea: Imperial Reforms and Patterns of Provincial Resistance

Woody Holton, *Liberty is Sweet*, 48–162.

*John Dickinson Exhorts the Colonists to Opposition (1767–1768)
**Boston Gazette* [reporting the Boston Massacre], March 12, 1770
**London Chronicle* [reporting the Boston Massacre], April 26–28, 1770
*John Adams Reflects on the Boston Tea Party (1773)

9/24 Week 4. Common Sense?: Ideological Origins of Revolution

*Eric Foner, "*Common Sense* and Paine's Republicanism" in *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (1976), 71–106.

*Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776)

10/1 Week 5. Declaring Independence: From Resistance to Revolution

Woody Holton, *Liberty is Sweet*, 167–267.

*Exchange between Samuel Seabury (A. W. Farmer) and Alexander Hamilton:
-- Seabury, "Free Thoughts on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress" (1774)
-- Hamilton, "A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress" (1774)
-- Seabury, "A View of the Controversy, &c. In a Letter to the Author of a Full Vindication" (1774)
-- Hamilton, "The Farmer Refuted" (1775)

10/8 Week 6: The War: An Empire Divided

+ + Due by the start of class: Paper 1: 250th Report

Woody Holton, *Liberty is Sweet*, 264–307, 343–359, 476–512.

*George Washington Asks Congress for an Effective Army (1776)
*Marquis de Lafayette to his wife, Adrienne Lafayette, en route to the United States (1777)

10/15 Week 7. Separation Anxieties: Loyalists

*Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles* (2011), 19–109.

*Loyalists at the Outbreak of the Revolution, 1775–1776

10/22 Week 8. The Revolution from Indian Country

*Ned Blackhawk, "Settler Uprising: The Indigenous Origins of the American Revolution," and "Colonialism's Constitution: The Origins of Federal Indian Policy," in *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (2023), 139–206.

*James Kirby Martin, "Forgotten Heroes of the Revolution: Han Yerry and Tyona Doxtader of the Oneida Indian Nation," in Alfred F. Young, Ray Raphael, and Gary B. Nash, eds., *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of a Nation* (2011), 199–214.

*Oneida Indians Declare Neutrality (1775)
*Mohawk Leader Joseph Brandt Commits the Loyalty of His People to Britain (1776)

10/29 Week 9. Revolutionary Reverberations: France and Haiti

*David P. Geggus, "The Effects of the American Revolution on France and its Empire" in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *A Companion to the American Revolution* (2000), 523–30.

*Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of Democratic Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* (2006): 643–74.

11/5 Week 10. Revolutionary Women + *Visit to the Wisconsin Historical Society!*

+ + Due by the start of class: Paper 2: Pamphlet

*Rosemary Zagarri, "The Rights of Women" in *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (2007), 11–45.

*Abigail and John Adams Converse on Women's Rights (1776)
*Judith Sargent Murray, "On the Equality of the Sexes" (1790)

11/12 Week 11. The Problems of Slavery and Freedom

*Christopher Leslie Brown, "The Problems of Slavery" in Jane Kamensky and Edward G. Gray, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution* (2012), 427–46.

*Gloria Whiting, "Emancipation without the Courts or Constitution: The Case of Revolutionary Massachusetts," *Slavery & Abolition* (September 2020): 458–78.

*Gary B. Nash, "The African Americans' Revolution," in Jane Kamensky and Edward G. Gray, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution* (2012), 250–72.

*Phillis Wheatley, "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth" (1772)
*Black Petitions for Freedom in Massachusetts (1774)

11/19 Week 12. Building a New State: Confederation and Constitutions

*Jack N. Rakove, "The Articles of Confederation, 1775–1783" in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *A Companion to the American Revolution* (2000), 281–86.

Pauline Maier, "The View from Mount Vernon," "The Morning After," "The Pennsylvania Ratifying Convention," and "Playing the After Game," in *Ratification* (2011), 1–49, 97–124, 435–468.

*Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, Federalist Papers, Nos. 10, 51 (1787–88)

11/26 Week 13. No Class – Meet Individually with Professor Russo

12/3 Week 14. Remembering the American Revolution

Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* (1999).

12/10 Week 15. How Revolutionary was the American Revolution?

Woody Holton, *Liberty if Sweet*, 517–569.

*Historians Debate One Another (read these excerpted articles below in this order):
-- Gordon Wood, "Radical Possibilities of the American Revolution," in *Major Problems in American History* (2012)
-- Michael Zuckerman, "Rhetoric, Reality, and the Revolution: The Genteel Radicalism of Gordon Wood," *William and Mary Quarterly* (1994)
-- Gordon Wood, "Equality and Social Conflict in the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* (1994)

*Frances Wright, "Address to the People of Philadelphia... [on] the Fourth of July" (1828)

Final Paper Due: Thursday, 12/18, before 11:59 pm.