

**History 169, Section 10
Revolutionary America
CRN 36265**

Professor Contact Information and Office Hours

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Office Hours: Thursday, 2-4:30, and by appointment.

Class Time and Location

2020 K St., Rm. 7, Thursday 11:10am-1pm

Course Description

The American Revolution is one of modern history's truly significant events. In the first action of its kind, not only one, but a series of European colonies collectively broke away from their mother country to form a separate nation. And not only a separate nation but the first modern republic, stretching over a vaster geographical expanse and encompassing a greater number and variety of peoples than anyone believed was feasible for such a polity. Their accomplishment inspired a series of democratic revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic, thereby reconfiguring the political order of the western world. Moreover, the American Revolution set the stage on which the great ironies of United States history have played out. The Revolution articulated universal human principles--life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness--and inaugurated a movement, radical for its time, toward white male political equality. At the same time, American social structure was predicated on steep racial and gender hierarchies and a toleration of stark economic inequality. The purpose of this course will be to discuss the political and social conditions of the revolutionary era, the spiral of political events that led to the American independence movement, the various meanings of the war to its participants, and finally, the consequences of the American victory and settlement for the nation as the whole, its various subgroups, and the international community. In the end, students are asked to grapple with the question of just how revolutionary was this revolution?

Learning Objectives

The goals of this course are to train students for the following:

1. To be able to express in conversation and writing the main events and themes in the history of the American Revolution in chronological order.
2. To be able to identify and critique selected historiographical debates in the field.
3. To be able to interpret and narrate Revolutionary American history from multiple perspectives, including those of American Indians and African American slaves.

5. To be able to interpret developments in revolutionary America within the context of major European events.
6. To understand the various kinds of sources used by scholars in the field and the challenges of interpreting them.

Grade Breakdown

- ◆ Participation: 10 percent of course grade. Appendix B, part II, contains the grading standard, but the basic rule is that students need to come to class with the readings complete and informed comments and questions at the ready. Merely showing up will not suffice.
- ◆ Take home midterm exam: 40 percent of course grade. Assignment described below.
- ◆ Take home final exam: 50 percent of course grade. Assignment described below.

Assignments

All exams should be printed in twelve point font with one inch margins all around and be stapled before submission. Students are encouraged to consult the guide, “Writing History,” in Appendix A of the syllabus before sitting down to writing. Please use parenthetical citations with the author’s name and page number, i.e. (Nash, 152). No footnotes or bibliography are necessary. Please note: students cannot cite sources other than those assigned on this syllabus, including materials from the web, without express permission from the instructor.

Take Home Midterm: In a well-written essay of no more than eight double spaced pages, draw on assigned readings and lectures to answer one of the following questions. Please clearly indicate which question you are answering. Due March 4th in class.

Question one: It took three imperial crises spread out over a dozen years for American colonists to determine that they needed to declare their independence from Britain in order to protect their British liberties. What do you see as the key moments in that process and why?

Question two: Do you see the American revolutionary movement as unified around shared political and constitutional arguments or fractured along lines of class, race, gender, and region.

Final Exam: In a well-written essay of no more than ten double spaced pages, draw on assigned readings and lectures to answer one of the following questions. Please indicate the number of the question you are answering. Due date to be determined. Exams should be delivered to David Silverman’s department mailbox in 335 Phillips Hall.

Question one: Do you see the Revolution as, first, a radical event that tore down a monarchical European order and replaced it with an egalitarian one, or, second, as a conservative movement that aimed at independence but intended to keep most of the old elite in power, or, third, as something else? Put another way, what do you see as the social and political ramifications of the Revolution?

Question two: What were the challenges of establishing a new republic in the wake of Revolution and how did the Founders and American society generally do at addressing those challenges?

Statement on Cheating and Plagiarism

The take home exams in this course are designed to introduce students to the historical method of asking broad interpretive questions about the past and then using primary and secondary sources to develop conclusions. Students are encouraged to consult lecture notes and readings while formulating answers. They may even discuss exam questions with one another as part of the mutual learning process. However, each student must act alone in collecting evidence and structuring and writing his or her essays. Moreover, he or she must be diligent about citing the sources of quotes and borrowed interpretations. The instructor will not hesitate to report students who have improperly collaborated together or plagiarized to G.W.'s Office of Academic Integrity. For your reference, that office defines cheating and plagiarism as follows:

Cheating: Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise . . . representing material prepared by another author as one's own work . . .

Plagiarism: Intentionally representing the words, ideas, or sequence of ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise; failure to attribute any of the following quotations, paraphrases, or borrowed information.

To discourage plagiarism, student cannot cite sources other than those assigned on this syllabus, including materials on the web, unless they have express permission from the instructors.

Books

The following books are available for purchase at the G.W. bookstore in the Marvin Center:

- ◆ Richard D. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, 2d ed. (Boston, 2000).
- ◆ Jack P. Greene, *Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789: A Documentary History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1975).

◆ Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York, 2006).

Readings and Lecture Schedule

Readings involve about 100 pages per week. Electronic reserve items are accessible through Blackboard (blackboard.gwu.edu). Reading assignments should be completed by each week's second meeting.

January 14: Colonial Society and Empire in the Mid Eighteenth Century

- ◆ Jack P. Greene, "The Preconditions of the American Revolution," and Richard R. Beeman, "The Emergence of Popular Politics," in Brown, *Major Problems*, pp. 47-69.
- ◆ T.H. Breen, "Ideology and Nationalism on the Eve of the American Revolution: Revisions Once More in Need of Revising," *Journal of American History*, vol. 84, no. 1 (June, 1997), 13-39. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, chap. 1.

January 21: The Seven Years' War and Backcountry Unrest

- ◆ P.J. Marshall, "Britain Defined by Its Empire," in Brown, *Major Problems*, 88-96.
- ◆ Alden T. Vaughan, "Frontier Banditti and the Indians: The Paxton Boys' Legacy, 1763-1775," *Pennsylvania History* 51 (Jan. 1984), 1-23. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 94-97, 98-99, 105-107.

January 28: The First Imperial Crisis: The Stamp Act

- ◆ Edmund S. and Helen M. Morgan, "The Assertion of Parliamentary Control and its Significance," in Brown, *Major Problems*, 119-27.
- ◆ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, chap. 2.
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 45-65, 68-78, 84-85.

February 4: The Second Imperial Crisis: The Townshend Acts

- ◆ T.H. Breen, "Boycotts made the Revolution Radical," and Pauline Maier, "The Townshend Acts and the Consolidation of Colonial Resistance," in Brown, *Major Problems*, 13-25, 128-136.
- ◆ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, chap. 3.
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 121-33, 136-41, 157-58, 163-72.

February 11: The Third Imperial Crisis: The Coercive Acts and the First Shots

- ◆ David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 138-48, 184-201, 202-32. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, chap. 4.
- ◆ Pauline Maier, "John Wilkes and American Disillusionment with Britain," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., vol. 20, no. 3 (1963), 373-95. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 174-77, 196-203, 211-38.

February 18: Declaring Independence

- ◆ Gordon S. Wood, “The Invention of Benjamin Franklin,” in his *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different* (New York, 2006), 65-90. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Pauline Maier, “Declaring Independence,” in Brown, *Major Problems*, 180-88.
- ◆ Bernard Bailyn, “1776: A Year of Challenge--A World Transformed,” *Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 19 (1976), 437-66. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 253-84, 292-97.

February 25: Warring for Independence

- ◆ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, chap. 5 and pp. 345-57.
- ◆ John Ferling, “‘The Caprice of War’: America’s Pivotal Victory at Saratoga,” and “‘Bloody and Severe’: The Pivotal Southern War, Early 1781,” chaps. 9 and 20 of his *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (New York, 2007), 204-41, 477-500. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 406-10, 413-22.

March 4: Divisions throughout the Whole

- ◆ Film: Mary Silliman’s War
- Midterms due.**

March 11: The Revolution’s Losers

- ◆ Sylvia R. Frey, “Slavery Attacked and Defended,” and Ira Berlin, “The Revolution in Black Life,” in Brown, *Major Problems*, 262-85.
- ◆ David J. Silverman, “The Curse of God: An Idea and its Origins among the Indians of New York’s Revolutionary Frontier,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., vol. 66, no. 3 (July 2009), 495-534. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Brown, *Major Problems*, 257-61.
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 393-95.

March 25: A New American Order

- ◆ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, chaps. 6 and 8.
- ◆ Lance Banning “What Happened at the Constitutional Convention,” Jack N. Rakove, “Ideas and Interests Drove Constitution-Making,” and Leonard W. Levy, “The Politics of the Bill of Rights,” in Brown, *Major Problems*, 419-39, 473-81.
- ◆ Greene, *Colonies to Nation*, 505-508,

April 1: Troubles to the Westward

- ◆ Alan Taylor, “‘To Man Their Rights’: The Frontier Revolution,” in Ronald Hoffman, ed., *The Transforming Hand of Revolution: Reconsidering the American Revolution as a Social Movement* (Charlottesville, 1995), 231-57. **Electronic reserve.**
- ◆ Gregory Evans Dowd, “A Spirit of Unity, 1783-1794,” ch. 5 of his, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, 1992), 90-115. **Electronic reserve.**

April 8: Creating a Federal State

11/28: Mr. President and the Perils of Partisanship

11/30: Discussion

Reading:

◆ Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York, 2002), ch. 4. **Electronic reserve.**

◆ Joanne B. Freeman, "Duelling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996), 289-318. **Electronic reserve.**

April 15: Adams, Jefferson, and the Revolution of 1800

◆ Nash, *Forgotten Revolution*, epilogue.

◆ Paul Douglas Newman "The Federalists' Cold War: The Fries Rebellion, National Security, and the State, 1787-1800," *Pennsylvania History* 67 (Winter, 2000), 63-104. **Electronic reserve.**

◆ Douglas R. Egerton, "Gabriel's Conspiracy and the Election of 1800," *Journal of Southern History* 56 (1999), 191-214. **Electronic reserve**

April 22: International Legacies of the American Revolution

◆ Jack P. Greene, "The American Revolution," Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution," Virginia Guedea, "The Process of Mexican Independence," and Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "The Emancipation of the Americas." In *AHR Forum: Revolutions in the Americas*, *The American Historical Review* 105 (February 2000), 92-152. **Electronic reserve.**

Appendix A: Writing History

(courtesy of James Axtell and Andrew Isenberg)

I. Organization

There is no mystery about writing history. Writing is simply the transfer of thought to paper; both writing and thinking are done in words. To be able to write clearly is to be able to think clearly--and vice-versa.

The purpose of writing is to communicate information, ideas, opinions, or feelings to other people. Unless the other people “get the message” you intend to convey, you have failed to communicate effectively. Put another way, the reader can’t guess what you meant to write, only what you actually wrote. Thus, as a writer you have two major tasks. The first and most difficult is to establish clearly in your own mind what you want to say. The second task is to find the most effective way to convey your message to the reader.

The first task--straight thinking--can be greatly aided by an outline. After you have completed your research, put your notes aside. On a separate set of small cards jot down--one point to a card--all the points you need to make. Divide the cards into piles--one pile for each group of points closely related to each other. Arrange your piles of points into a sequence: which points are most important or come chronologically first, which should be saved for last? Which must you present before others in order to make the others understandable? Now, within each pile, do the same thing--arrange the points in a logical, understandable order. This simple procedure will give you an outline, needing only a title, introduction, conclusion, and transitions between sections.

A title should, if possible, be like a line of poetry--capable of saying a great deal with hardly any words. It should in some way express the whole work, its themes, and even something of its outcomes.

An introduction, like a title, should “hook” the reader and engage his or her attention and interest right away, in the opening sentence if possible. The introduction should contain a thesis statement that expresses the idea, the argument, you want to communicate in your paper. The thesis carries the paper from the introduction to the conclusion. If you read a paper with a clearly articulated thesis, the central argument of the paper sticks with you after you put the paper down. By contrast, a paper with a weak or unclear thesis wanders, leaving the reader without a clear sense of the author’s point.

In the body of your text, each paragraph should represent a complete, coherent idea, such as the top card in the aforementioned piles. The first sentence of the paragraph--the topic sentence--makes a statement. The sentences following provide evidence to support that statement. A full paragraph should contain at least four sentences. The concluding statement rephrases the argument of the paragraph and

provides a transition to the next paragraph. Ideally, it also demonstrates to the reader how the paragraph relates to the main thesis.

Your conclusion should actually conclude your argument, not merely repeat earlier material. Although no new material should be introduced, a conclusion should present a new perspective on the points already covered and/or suggest future directions for thinking about the subject.

II. Principles of Writing History

Accuracy: “In the realm of History, the moment we have reason to think we are be given fiction instead of fact, be the fiction ever so brilliant, our interest collapses like a pricked balloon.” (G.M. Trevelyan).

Clarity: “The written word should be clean as bone, clear as light, firm as stone . . .” (Anon.)

Conciseness: “. . . two words are not as good as one.” (Ibid.)

Vigor: “Dull history is bad history to the extent to which it is dull.” (Jack Hexter)

III. Do’s and Don’ts

-- Find yourself a trusted proofreader, ideally someone who is reasonably intelligent and educated, but not an expert in your field. Have him or her read--or better yet, listen--to the final product. If he or she does not understand your argument or find your account compelling, you should go back to the writing block.

-- Do not assume that your reader has a professor’s knowledge of your topic. Introduce your characters, give dates and locations, and define terms that would be unknown to a liberally educated adult reading public.

-- Do not assume that your reader knows the historical profession’s jargon and catchphrases, such as contextualize, racialize, discourse, gendered, subaltern, imagined community, invention of tradition, middle ground, etc.

-- Use the simple past tense and an active voice. Passive construction obscures agency and causation. Take this example of passive writing: “The soldiers *were ordered* by their commander to attack the Cheyennes. Dozens of men, women, and children *were killed*. Later, it was admitted that mistakes *were made*.” Instead, this sequence should read: “The soldiers’ commander ordered them to attack the Cheyennes. They killed dozens of men, women, and children. Later, the soldiers admitted that they made mistakes.”

-- Be specific and direct rather than general or abstract. “The aborigines of New England could not contain their mirthful appreciation of the invaders,” really means, “The Indians laughed at the Puritans.”

-- Refer to people, not books or sources. Not, “*Federalist* No. 10 tells us . . .” but “During the ratification debates James Madison wrote . . .”

-- Avoid unspecific referents (this, it, they). “The snow covered the cabin. It lasted all week.” (and then, presumably, collapsed . . .)

-- Avoid textual references to yourself. Use of “I” suggests a lack of objective distance, as does use of “we” to refer to groups in the past (“our nation”; “we” instead of “Americans,” etc.). And as Mark Twain said, “only kings, editors, and people with tapeworm have the right to use the editorial ‘we.’”

-- Avoid the generic male. Use inclusive language.

--No prepositions (for, to, with) at the end of a sentence.

--Avoid over-reliance on block quotations and certainly never use more than one per paragraph. Avoid ending a paragraph with a block quotation.

--Always make sure the source of the quotation is clear:

Not: Indians believed that powerful spirits inhabited nature. “The Indian’s world was filled with superhuman and magical powers which controlled man’s destiny and nature’s course of events” (Martin, 1974).

But rather: Indians believed that powerful spirits inhabited nature. As the historian Calvin Martin writes, “The Indians’ world”

-- Conceal your scaffolding. Avoid “this paper will prove . . .,” “as I argue below,” and similar references to your own writing act. Just prove and argue your points without fanfare.

-- Occasionally integrate quotations into your prose and vary your introductions. “George Washington said . . . ,” and “Martha Washington said . . . ,” over and over again is boring. More interesting is: “The nation,” George Washington exclaimed, “runs the risk of dissolution.” The first time you quote someone, give his or her full name and a brief identification.

-- Minimize the use of “very,” which is unspecific.

-- Clergymen: Father Leclerq (Catholic), but the fathers. Protestant clergymen have honorific, not ecclesiastical, titles: thus, the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew, but not Rev. Mayhew. Their jobs should be referred to as minister or pastor, not reverend.

-- Dates: In the text centuries must be written out in lower case letters: “the seventeenth century,” not “the 17th Century.” If the date is a modifier, it is hyphenated as if one word: “fifteenth-century chivalry.” Decades do not get apostrophes: e.g. 1650s.

-- Avoid contractions: can’t, don’t, wasn’t, they’re, etc.

-- Do not use “feel” when you mean “think.”

-- Avoid slang: “After all the head-banging at Saratoga, the British Army was wickedly reamed.”

-- Avoid ethnic clichés and outdated euphemisms: When the braves could stand no more, they went on the warpath against the white man. The red man, unlike the Negro, had the resources to fight back.

-- Ellipses (. . .) are not needed in a quotation unless you omit something from the middle or end of a complete sentence that begins with a capitalized word. Ellipses warn the reader that something (perhaps vital) is missing. You may use any fragment of a quotation without ellipses at the front and back because the lack of a capitalized first word announces its incompleteness.

-- In anything shorter than a book, thesis, or dissertation, a bibliography is unnecessary. Footnotes or, in the case of this class, parenthetical citations will suffice.

-- When quoting from edited collections, cite the author of the quoted article, not the editors of the book.

-- Proofreading is the essential last act of writing. Do it with a dictionary in hand and do not depend solely upon your computer’s word or grammar check.

Appendix B: **Grading Guideline**

I. Papers

An **A** or **A-** paper is one that is good enough to be read aloud in class. It is clearly written and well organized. It demonstrates that the writer has conducted a close and critical reading of the texts, grappled with central issues raised in the course, synthesized the readings, discussions, and lectures, and formulated a perceptive, compelling, independent argument. The argument shows intellectual originality and creativity, is sensitive to historical context, is supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples, and, in the case of a research paper, is built on a critical reading of primary material.

A **B+** or **B** paper demonstrates many aspects of A- level work but falls short of it in either the organization or clarity of its writing, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the quality of research. Some papers or exams in this category show flashes of insight into many of the issues raised in the course. Others give evidence of independent thought, but the argument is not presented clearly or convincingly.

A **B-** paper demonstrates a command of course or research material and understanding of historical context but provides a less than thorough defense of the writer's independent argument because of weakness in writing, argument, organization, or use of evidence.

A **C+**, **C**, or **C-** paper offers little more than a mere summary of ideas and information covered in the course, is insensitive to historical context, does not respond to the assignment adequately, suffers from frequent factual error, unclear writing, poor organization, or inadequate primary research, or presents some combination of these problems.

Whereas the grading standards for written work between A and C- are concerned with the presentation of argument and evidence, a paper or exam that belongs to the D or F categories demonstrates inadequate command of course material.

A **D** paper demonstrates serious deficiencies or severe flaws in the student's command of course or research material.

An **F** paper demonstrates no competence in the course or research materials. It indicates a student's neglect or lack of effort in the course.

Late papers: Students will be penalized two-thirds of a letter grade (e.g. from a B+ to a B-, a B- to a C, etc.) for every day an exam is late.

II. Class Participation

A student who receives an **A** for participation typically comes to class with questions about the readings in mind. An **A** discussant engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

A student who receives a **B** for participation typically does not come to class with questions about the readings in mind. A **B** discussant waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some discussants in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.

A student who receives a **C** for discussion attends regularly but is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion.

A student who fails to attend class regularly and adequately prepared for discussion risks the grade of **D** or **F**.