HST 296: The American Revolution

Instructor: Jordan E. Taylor
Class meeting: Tuesdays and Thursday, 9:20am–10:35am (all times Eastern!)
Office hours: Zoom office hours: Wednesdays and Thursdays, 4:00pm–5:00pm.

In-person and in-canine office hours: Mondays at 12:10pm at Chapin lawn (in front of Campus Center). Please wear a mask!

Course description

This course offers an overview of the political, social, and cultural history of the American Revolution and its era. It focuses heavily on the lived experience of ordinary people, including women, Native peoples, and African Americans. Here are some of the questions we will be returning to throughout the course:

- **Causes**: what caused the revolution? What was it about? What did words like "liberal," "republican," and "democracy" mean to the revolutionaries?
- **Ordinary people**: how did non-elites, women, Native peoples, and African Americans shape the revolution? How did it affect their lives?
- **Geography and chronology**: when and where was the revolution?

Learning objectives

- Origins: The American Revolution is often understood to be a moment of origins. Much of our course tries addresses the origins of independence, the Constitution, and American democracy. What does our understanding of those origins tell us about the present?

- Skills of analysis: This course will challenge students to carefully analyze primary sources through close reading, placing them in historical context, as well as thinking about authorship, medium, and audience.
- Change: This course engaged with one of the broadest questions that historians grapple with: how does change happen? The American Revolution was a moment of extraordinary change (as well as some extraordinary continuities). What brought about the American Revolution?

Course materials

We will be reading two books for our course. Both are available through the Smith College bookstore.

Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution* (ISBN: 0812981200).
David Waldstreicher, Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification (ISBN: 0809016508).

We will also be reading a few pamphlets from revolutionary America. I will provide online versions, but if you wish to secure a print version of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) you're welcome to do so. It is not available for sale, however, through the Smith College bookstore. All other materials will be available online through our class WordPress site.

Office hours

If you're not familiar with the concept of "office hours," they are a set period of time when your professors will be waiting for students to come talk with them. You might discuss the course, your work, get to know your instructor, raise concerns, or ask questions. Anything, really. Your professors are eager to talk to students in office hours. Attending office hours is a good way to ensure that your instructors know you.

I will hold regular Zoom office hours on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 4:00–5:00pm. We will meet in my personal Zoom room: https://smith.zoom.us/my/jordantaylor

You may schedule Zoom office hours appointments with me in 15-minute increments at the following URL: https://calendly.com/jordanetaylor/office-hours/ Signing up through this site will generate a reminder email and a calendar event for you. By default, these meetings are 15 minutes long. Please assume that there are students signed up both before and after you and be prompt about arriving on time and trying to wrap up on schedule (though I'm usually the offender in that regard).

If you are on campus and would like to meet in person outside, please let me know! I would be happy to meet with you outside (wearing masks).

If those times do not work for you, send me a message with some other times when you would be available, and we'll find a time that suits us both.

Mondays with Charlie

In addition to Zoom office hours, I will be holding walking "office hours" with my beagle Charlie. Each Monday afternoon at 12:10pm, Charlie and I will depart from Chapin lawn for a walk around campus. If you'd like to join us, just show up. I envision these walks as an opportunity to get to know students in a more informal space than normal "office hours." A few things to keep in mind:

- Please wear a mask throughout the walk. I will be wearing a mask. Charlie will not, but that is because he is a dog.
- Charlie is a very vocal hound dog. He *will* howl during walks, and his howl will be angry if he spots another dog. It will be funny the first time, but that cuteness will quickly diminish through repetition.
- Charlie is friendly and inquisitive. He likes to sniff people and doesn't have good boundaries. If you are allergic to dogs or if you prefer not to come into direct contact with a dog, we can meet over Zoom or in person without Charlie.
- If you would like to meet Charlie but would rather not walk with him, that's okay!
- Walking with Charlie is a good opportunity to chat about whatever is on your mind, but it is a less private and more distracted environment for discussing certain topics. If you want to discuss a grade or an assignment, for example, it might be difficult to do while on the move.

Course format

My goal for this course is for students to not only learn about the American Revolution but also learn skills of historical analysis, communication, and interpretation. The science of learning shows that students learn when they are engaged with each other, with the course materials (lectures, readings, etc.), and with their instructor. In our COVID-induced learning environment, it can be difficult to be as engaged with these three things as you would be in a typical, face-to-face classroom. We will be relying on a few tools to create opportunities for you to engage in meaningful ways with each other, the materials, and with me.

WordPress: Our WordPress site will be our class's "home base," rather than Moodle. I despise Moodle, and in the past students have said that they find the WordPress site easy to use. I will use Moodle as a grade book, because I am legally required to do so.

Slack: After the first few weeks of class, once we are all settled in, I will seldom communicate with you over email. Instead, I will use a class Slack "workspace." You will receive more details about setting this workspace up. You can ask questions, check in with other students, or share animal pictures on Slack.

Perusall: We will be collaboratively annotating our course's readings using the platform Perusall. Participating in Perusall annotation will boost your participation grade.

- Perusall code: TAYLOR-2NKQ4

Zoom: During class times, we will meet for Zoom discussions to discuss the readings, your questions, and other topics relating to that day's topic. These may last for the 75-minute class period, or shorter.

Participating in Zoom discussions will boost your participation grade. I will not be taking attendance for each Zoom discussion but will keep a general sense of who is participating and them and who is not. Your participation grade will be weighted heavily toward Zoom discussions.

Asynchronous videos: This is a lecture class. I will upload lectures ahead of class time and upload them to Perusall. You will be able to ask questions about the lecture through Perusall or during class time.

Frequently Un-asked Questions (FUQs)

Should I be in this class even though I'm not a history major or if I have never learned U.S. history? Yes! I don't expect you to have a background in history or extensive knowledge of the American Revolution. If you have never before learned about the American Revolution, I recommend talking to me and reading the free textbook chapter of the American Yawp on the topic.

Do I need to have a specific question to come to office hours? No! I always enjoy meeting and getting to know students regardless of whether you have a question. You're welcome to come to office hours to talk about history, your career plans, something I can help you with, or just about whatever else is on your mind.

When a reading appears on the syllabus, is it due on the day it's listed? Yes! Please come to class having completed the readings listed by that day on the syllabus.

Is the 18th century the same thing as the 1800s? No! The 18th century refers to the 1700s, which is confusing. The reason for this is that the "first century" of the Common Era began in the year 1 C.E. rather than the year 100 C.E.

If I don't say something over Zoom in class every day, will I get a poor participation grade? No. Participation is graded holistically. Show me that you're engaging with the material and your participation grade will be fine. Participation grades are a tool for rewarding engagement, not a way to punish quiet or reserved students.

If the syllabus says something is due at the end of the day, but I turn it in a half hour late, will I be penalized? No. Don't worry about turning an assignment in by exactly 11:59pm. I would rather you avoid unnecessarily stressing yourself out over an arbitrary deadline. If you find yourself compromising your physical, emotional, or mental health for an assignment deadline, let me know and we'll work something out.

Grading

- Weekly reflections (10%)
- Recipe assignment and reflection (10%)
- Mini-debates (10% total, 5% each)
- Fact-checking assignment (30%)
- Primary source reader assignment (25%)
- Participation portfolios (15% total, 7.5% each)

Grading scale: A: 92–100; A-: 90–91; B+: 88–89; B: 82–87; B-: 80–81; C+: 78–79; C: 72–77; C-: 70–71; D: 60–69; F: 59 and below.

Weekly reflections (10%)

Each week you will write a paragraph-length response to that week's course materials (discussions, readings, lectures, etc). A strong response will draw connections between different materials in order to make an original point. Your reflections should be relatively brief—no longer than a well-developed paragraph. They do not need to be formally written, but they should be clear enough for me to understand.

These will be due by the end of the week (by the end of the day on Friday). Because we will have 13 weeks of class, you will have 13 opportunities to turn in a weekly reflection. However, I will only count your ten best reflections toward your grade (each will count for 1% of your final grade). In other words, if you do the first ten reflections, you are welcome to take the last three off—or you can take three breaks at your discretion.

Recipe assignment and reflection (10%)

In 1776, a Patriot committee jailed a New Hampshire man named Oliver Parker in part because evidence arose that he had once written the following "Receipt [*sic*, presumably he meant Recipe] for a Whig."

> Take of conspiracy and the root of pride three handfulls two of ambition and vain glory, pound them in the mortar of faction and discord, boil it in 2 quarts of dissembling tears and a little New England Rum over the fire of Sedition till you find the scum of folly wood to rise on the top, then strain it through the cloths of Rebillion, put it into the bottle of envy, stop it with the cork of malice, then make it into pills called Conspiracy of which take nine when going to bed say over your hypocritical prayer, and curse your honest neighbor in your bed chamber and then go to sleep if you can, it will have so good an effect that all the next day you will be thinking how to cozzen cheat lie and get drunk abuse the ministers of the Gospel, cut the throats of all honest men and plunder the Nation.

Make a recipe for the American Revolution. Pay attention to the following:

- What are the causal factors that provoked the revolution? How can you represent those in ingredients as Parker did?
- What are the appropriate proportions? Which causal factors were more important in bringing the American Revolution about? More important causal factors should be in higher proportions.
- In what manner did these causal factors need to be combined and mixed in order to catalyze into a revolution? How can you represent the actions that combined them together in a way that is appropriate for a recipe?
- What are you going to make? For Parker, it was a pill called "Conspiracy" that you could take before going to bed, which would alter your behavior. You can stick with the "pill" idea, but you can also think in terms of food or something else. Be creative!

Accompanying the recipe, you will write a brief ~500–600-word reflection that explains your thought process and how your recipe demonstrates your personal interpretation of the American Revolution. The project will be assessed according to the following criteria: creativity, connection to course materials, and effort.

Mini-Debates (10% total, 5% each)

On April 29, our class will convene to debate the question "Should the U.S. Constitution have been ratified?" The class will be split into a pro-ratification and an anti-ratification group.

On May 6, our class will convene to debate the question "How revolutionary was the American Revolution?" The class will be split into two groups. One group will argue that the American Revolution was significantly revolutionary and created a great deal of significant change. A second group will argue that the revolution ultimately changed little.

Ground rules for debate:

- These are low-stakes events.
- Grades will be assessed individually, based on your participation.
- Everyone must speak at least once in each debate.
- Teams will take turns speaking.
- I will moderate and I will call on students from each team in turn.

If you miss either debate, you must turn in a 700–800-word essay answering the same prompt. Make-up papers will be due one week after the debate.

Fact-checking assignment (30%)

You will create a short fact check about some sort of contemporary claim about the American Revolution or its era. This could be a claim made in an essay, social media, in a speech, a piece of popular culture, or something else.

The more recent the claim is, the better. Ideally, it should be something within the last year, but I may allow exceptions to this on a case-by-case basis. It must be some sort of a *falsifiable* statement about the American Revolution. "Falsifiable" means that it can be proven to be wrong. For example, the claim "George Washington was America's greatest president" is unfalsifiable because it is subjective. But the claim "George Washington single-handedly won the American Revolutionary war" would be falsifiable, because it can be proven that other people made important contributions to the war effort.

Throughout the course, pay attention to references to the American revolutionary era in popular culture, politics, and whatever communities or branches of society you participate in. If you're having trouble finding an appropriate statement, you can usually find references to the American Revolution in political speeches and political discourse. If you continue to have trouble, please let me know and we'll work together.

N.B.: This is a final research project, worth nearly a third of your final grade. You should take it as seriously as you would a research term paper. Plan ahead and ask for help when you need it!

Proposal: You must turn in a proposal identifying the statement that you are fact checking by class time on May 4. We may discuss these in class.

Fact check: Based on the materials and discussion for our May 4 class, you will create a fact check about your statement and publish it as a blog post on our class WordPress site. It should be as short or as lengthy as it needs to be, but something like 500–800 words might be a good range to shoot for. This is due by the end of the day on May 19.

Reflection: Along with your fact check, you will turn in an approximately 300–400-word reflection that considers the process behind your fact check. It should demonstrate the relationship between your fact check and course themes/ideas/materials.

The fact check project will be graded according to the following criteria:

- Thoroughness: Your fact check should cover all relevant aspects of the statement. It should demonstrate a thorough grasp of the relevant historical material.
- Writing: Your fact check should be clear, well-written, and obey the basic rules of effective fact-checking and the science of corrections.
- Originality: Ideally, your piece of fake news should not have been previously fact-checked by a prominent fact checker. If it has been previously fact-checked, you must demonstrate original research that differs from previous efforts.
- Effort: Your project should demonstrate a significant amount of effort, especially in terms of your research. This fact check is worth a quarter of your final grade, and I expect you to perform substantial research (with my guidance).
- Significance: Your fact check should demonstrate that the claim you're examining is significant and meaningful. Why does this claim about the American Revolution matter?

Primary source reader assignment (25%)

As a class, we will create a primary source reader for high school teachers and students studying the American Revolution. Each student will excerpt and contextualize a portion of a larger primary source and will also provide discussion questions about the source. Here are more detailed guidelines:

- **Choosing a person**. You may choose a source from a list I will distribute. Any of the sources below should tell us something important about the revolutionary era. However, I have not read each of them in depth, so I cannot guarantee that they are each ideal candidates.
    - If you wish, in consultation with me, you may find a person/source on your own. Your person must have created some kind of larger source such as a work of literature, memoir, diary, etc. You must run this by me before proceeding.
- **Research**: It's important to find as much context as possible about the individual you are examining and the events they are describing. Most of these are relatively obscure people, but a few (Joseph Plumb Martin, Phillis Wheatley, etc) are more well known. A simple Google search may provide basic context (identity, dates of birth and death, nationality, etc). However, try to move beyond Google to make use of scholarly resources such as JSTOR, Project Muse, etc. You may also consider searching the name of your subject in an early American source database such as America's Historical Newspapers, Founders Online, or Early American Imprints.
    - I am available to help with your research. Please send me a message if you're stuck, if you're uncertain about something, or if you feel like you don't know how to get started.
- **Excerpt:** You should produce a substantial excerpt, in the range of 600–800 words, though more or less may be acceptable depending on the material. The excerpt does not need to be continuous (i.e., you can extract different parts of the same source, though if doing so is confusing for your reader, you must provide context in brackets to explain what's going on).
    - In many cases, you can copy-and-paste a source's text if it has previously been transcribed. You can check this with a quick google search on a unique-seeming sentence in quotation marks.
    - If you are transcribing a source yourself, *please* make every effort to double and triple check your transcription.
    - Your excerpt should clearly tell your reader something meaningful about the American Revolutionary era. Some of these memoirs or diaries begin well before the revolution or continue well past it. As a rule of thumb, anything in the range of 1763–1800 is probably okay. Anything beyond those eras should be run by me before proceeding.
- **Introduction:** You must also produce a mini-introduction to the excerpt in the range of 150–300 words. As appropriate, it should:
    - Identify the author, providing a sense of their overall life. Where does this source/story/anecdote/diary fit into that trajectory? (i.e., if they were a child when they wrote this, that would be a good thing to note)

    - What do we know about this source? It's important to identify not only the kind of source (diary, letter, memoir, etc) but also anything we know that's relevant about the conditions of its production. (i.e., if it was dictated rather than written, if it was written 50 years after the fact, etc)
    - Provide relevant historical context that will help the reader to understand the source and its significance. Don't overestimate how much your reader knows about the American Revolution. (i.e., if it's describing a particular battle or a moment in the revolution, you should describe that)
    - Identify, in a broad way, the significance of this source. (i.e., does it provide an unusual perspective on the revolution?)
    - List your sources.
- **Footnotes**: If you wish, you may insert explanatory footnotes that identify particular people, phrases, words, or other matters that may be unfamiliar to your audience.
- **Discussion Questions**: At the end of your page, you will provide a series of 2-4 discussion questions that students should consider after reading the source.
    - Good discussion questions should not just ask questions that the reader can answer in a simple, straightforward way. They should be more open-ended.
    - A good discussion question prompts a reader to return to the text, make connections with more familiar concepts, or place the text in a different context.
- **Audience:** Your audience for this project is U.S. high school students (whom you should not expect to be very familiar with the American Revolution) and their teachers.
- **Publicity and privacy:** This project will be made public on the internet. You may choose to attach, or not attach, your name to your final product (and you may choose what version of your name to attach).

To excerpt a primary source is to make an argument that this source matters and that it helps us to understand something about the past (in this case, the American Revolution). Your project will be graded according to how effectively you make that argument.

Participation portfolios (15%, 7.5% each)

I will be taking note of your attendance and participation in class. However, your attendance and participation grade will be assessed based on two "participation portfolio" assignments. These are simple. You will turn in a short, one-page-or-less document that self-assesses your level of participation in our class. Participation may be determined based on the following: annotations, discussion in Zoom meetings, asking questions (either during or outside of class), attending office hours, or otherwise demonstrating engagement with the course material.

Your participation portfolio will be a simple Google form. It will ask you to consider the following:

- A self-assessed grade. What participation grade do you believe that you earned for this half of the course? I may adjust this grade, either upward or downward, based on my own perceptions.
- Any extenuating circumstances that you wish for me to be aware of. Was your attendance or participation limited because of something outside of your control? You don't need to provide details and you aren't required to disclose anything. However, anything you include here will be confidential.
- Specific examples of your engagement with the course.

Unit 1: What Caused the American Revolution?

Week 1: Introductions

Tuesday, Feb. 16: Course introduction

Thursday, Feb. 18: Interpreting the American Revolution

- Michael Hattem, "The Historiography of the American Revolution: A Timeline."
- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "'Pursuits of Happiness': Dark Threads in the History of the American Revolution," (2011).
- Skim: "The 1776 Report."
- Lecture video: Interpreting the Revolution (historiography)
- Lecture video: North America and Britain on the Eve of Revolution

Week 2:

Tuesday, Feb. 23: Land

- Jeffrey Ostler, The Great Fear of 1776 (2019), *Age of Revolutions* blog.
- Woody Holton, *Forced Founders,* ch. 1 (35 pages).
- Lecture video: Settler Colonialism and the American Revolution.

Thursday, Feb. 25: Taxation and Economics

- Lecture video: Imperial Crisis.
- Reactions to the Stamp Act.
- Jonathan Shipley, *Speech Intended to have been spoken in the House of Lords* (1774).
- Franklin, "Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One," (1773).
- Continental Association.

Week 3:

Tuesday, March 2: The Mob

- Lecture video: Mob Violence
- Gordon Wood, "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution," (1968). (8 pages)
- Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets," (1968). (37 pages with lots of footnotes)
- Michael Zuckerman, "The Polite and the Plebeian," *Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution* (2013), 47–61

Thursday, March 4: Print and Big Ideas

- Lecture video: Ideologies and Nationalism
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776).
    - Question: to what extent does *Common Sense* reflect the ideas of the Great Awakening, Enlightenment liberalism, or classical republicanism?
- Trish Loughran, "Disseminating Common Sense," (2006). (28 pages)

Week 4:

Tuesday, March 9: Fear and Propaganda

- Lecture video: Propaganda?
- Lecture video: Wrap-up of unit: Structure, culture, and agency.
- Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution,* prologue and ch. 1.

Unit 2: War and Independence

Thursday, March 11: Declaring Independence

- Lecture video: The Many Declarations of Independence
- Declaration… Setting Forth the Causes and Necessity of Their Taking Up Arms (1775).
- Instructions to the Representatives of the Town of Boston (1776).
- Parkinson, "Friends and Enemies in the Declaration of Independence" (2019). (23 pages)

Week 5:

Tuesday, March 16: Grievances

- Lecture video: What did independence mean?
- Maier, *American Scripture,* ch. 3.
- Declaration of Independence (1776).
    - Please annotate this heavily in Perusall!

Thursday, March 18:

- Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost,* introduction, ch. 1–7 (84 pages)
- Video lecture: A Global War?

Week 6:

Tuesday, March 23:

- Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost,* ch. 8–12. (84 pages)
- Video lecture: A Continental War?

Thursday, March 25:

- Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost,* ch. 13–14. (81 pages)
- Video lecture: Experiences of ordinary soldiers.
- Video lecture: Why did the Americans win?

Unit 3: Winners and Losers

Week 7:

Tuesday, March 30:

- Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost.* Ch. 15–16 and conclusion. (82 pages)

- Video lecture: Global consequences of the war
- Video lecture: Consequences of war for Natives.

Thursday, April 1: Loyalists
- Video: The Loyalist Diaspora
- Ruma Chopra, "Loyalist Women in British New York, 1776–1783," in Foster ed., *Women in Early America,* 210–223.
- Kimberly Nath, "Left Behind: Loyalist Women in Philadelphia during the American Revolution," in *Women in the American Revolution,* 211–223.

Week 8:

Tuesday, April 6: Mountain Day!

Thursday, April 8: "Remember the Ladies"
- Video: Was there an American Revolution for women?
- Abigail Adams and John Adams full letter exchange (1776).
- Ruth Bloch, "The American Revolution, Wife Beating, and the Emergent Value of Privacy," (2007). (29 pages)
    - Content note: domestic violence.

Week 9:

Tuesday, April 13: Enslaved People
- Video: Black Americans during the War
- Video: Antislavery
- Video: Race and Revolution.
- Petitions of enslaved people in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut.
- Petition of Amelia County, Virginia.
- Pension application of Jehu Grant (1832).

Thursday, April 15: The Great White Male
- Due by class time: Primary Source Reader Project — Full Draft.
- No reading due.
- Lecture video: Gentility and classical republicanism
- Lecture video: Democracy

Unit 4: Revolution and Nation

Week 10:

Tuesday, April 20: The Forgotten 1780s
- Woody Holton, "Did Democracy Cause the Recession That Led to the Constitution?" (2009) (28 pages)

- Lecture: Are you better off now?

Thursday, April 22: Making the Constitution
- Lecture: Compromises
- Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution,* ch. 2.

Week 11:

Tuesday, April 27: Making the Constitution
- Lecture: The Constitution and Democracy
- Read and annotate the U.S. Constitution.
    - On Perusall, try to identify pieces of the Constitution that are either confusing or that relate to a specific piece of context that our course materials have identified for you.

Thursday, April 29: Ratification
- Lecture: The Drama of Ratification
- Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution,* ch. 3 and epilogue.

Week 12:

Tuesday, May 4: Fact-Checking the Past
- Skim with purpose: Caulfield, "Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers."
- Read: FactCheck.org, "Our Process."
- Read: Cook and Lewandowsky, "Debunking Handbook."
- Due by class time: proposal for fact-checking assignment.
- In class: pre-debate meeting.

Thursday, May 6: The Revolutionary Settlement
- Video: Atlantic Revolutions
- Video: When Did the American Revolution Really End?
- Read: Eustace, "Liberty, Slavery, and the Burning of the Capital."
    - Note: we won't be able to discuss this in class, so please focus your attention on Perusall for this reading.
- In-class debate: "How revolutionary was the American Revolution?"

Week 13: Memory

Tuesday, May 11: Founders Chic
- Lecture: The Cult of the Founders
- Lyra D. Monteiro, "Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton," *The Public Historian* (Feb. 2016).
- Annette Gordon-Reed, "Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson and the Ways We Talk About Our Past," *New York Times,* Sept. 17, 2017.
- Alexis Coe, "Chernow Gonna Chernow," (2021).

Thursday, May 13: Mythologies of the American Revolution

- Schocket, "Truths That Are Not Self-Evident," from *Fighting over the Founders* (2015). (32 pages)
- Pick one episode of the PBS Documentary "Liberty's Kids" and watch it.

Wednesday, May 19:

- Fact-checking assignment due.