

HIST3xx: Revolt and Reform in the Early American Republic

Prof. Cory Young, Semester TBD

Class Time: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

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Image courtesy of the [Library of Congress](https://www.loc.gov/), idea borrowed from Prof. Dael Norwood.
The Eagle Map of the United States, 1833.

Course Description: Early in the second act of *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda’s genre-bending musical about the early United States, George Washington reminds his stubborn protégé: “Winning was easy, young man / Governing’s harder.” Colonists had clamored for reform within the British Empire and, unsatisfied, settled on revolt as American revolutionaries. Leaders of thirteen newly independent states now found themselves in the position of needing to form, and reform, and reform again, something like a nation. A girl born in Georgetown, Maryland on 1 July 1776 would live under four constitutions by the time she turned twelve.

The early American republic was a time of imagination and improvisation, of uncertainty and disagreement. This was not the founding era, but an era of fits and starts—of revolt and reform. In this seminar we will examine how the diverse inhabitants of what is now the United States experienced the country’s first half century. We will study politics, economics, and culture, and we will consider race, class, and gender. Together we will seek to answer the related questions of “what was America?” and “who was an American?”

Learning Goals

Students will be able to...

- define the early American republic
- develop their skills [as historical thinkers](#)
- analyze and intelligently discuss a variety of historical sources
- assess secondary materials
- locate primary sources using online databases and archives
- perform novel historical research
- empathize with a diversity of historical actors
- draw meaningful connections between the past and the present

Classroom Requirements and Expectations

In order to succeed, students must...

- come to class having engaged meaningfully with that week's materials
- respect the right of their peers to ask questions, make comments, and express responses
- complete all assignments
- have no more than one unexcused absence
- demonstrate growth

Grade Breakdown

- Attend office hours, 1%
 - This is only required once, but recommended regularly
- Participation, 33%
 - See classroom requirements and expectations
- Lead Discussion, 5%
- Editorial Evaluation/Petition, 15%
- Mapping Freedom, 15%
- Research Paper, 25%
- Peer Review, 5%
- Complete course evaluation, 1%
 - We will make time for this during the final exam period

Assignments

- Lead Discussion, 5%

Rolling deadlines

- Each week one student will be responsible for leading discussion. This includes preparing discussion questions, selecting a passage or footnote for close analysis, and finding and introducing a relevant primary source that complements the week's readings. Discussion leaders will be graded on preparedness, not outcome.

- Editorial Evaluation/Petition, 15%

Due any time before Thanksgiving break

- The idea of the “founding” or the “founders” often rears its head in the news. For this assignment, you are to select an editorial that invokes this idea (consider setting a Google Alert) and, in 1000 words, evaluate how it does so. What is the author trying to accomplish? How do they use history? What do they include and what do they choose to leave out? Are they accurate? Consider why the author has chosen to appeal to the early American republic and evaluate their success. Bonus points for sending your response as a “letter to the editor.”

OR

Observers occasionally refer to the American media as the “fourth branch of government,” recognizing the role it plays in constraining the other three. Yet this phrase can also refer to the people and their civil prerogatives. With this in mind, you are to compose a roughly 1000-word petition to your local, state, or federal representative about a contemporary issue you would like them to address. Petitions can propose legislation, voice a grievance, or make the case for why a representative should or should not support a certain policy. Exercise your first amendment rights! Bonus points for actually delivering the petition.

- Mapping Freedom, 15%

Due Week 7

- Fostering digital literacy is an increasingly central component of humanities education. Historians may work in archives, but more and more these archives exist online. It is incumbent upon students of history to familiarize themselves with digital tools and techniques. To that end, your task is to map the journey of a person described in Isaac T. Hopper’s *Tales of Oppression* using Google Maps software. You will then use library resources to locate a primary source that pertains to this person’s story and attach it to your entry. The end result will be an interactive archive of slavery, kidnapping, and refuge.

- Research Paper, 30% (+ Peer Review, 5%)

Outline due Week 13, Final Draft due Friday, 12 December

- Students will compose a 4000-word (10-12 page) research paper on an original topic in the history of the early American republic, broadly defined. Our weekly themes suggest possible topics. Other topics include, but are not limited to: labor, cultures, immigration, imperialism, warfare, the law, and Atlantic connections. You must ask an original question, grounded in a reasonable sampling of the historiography, that analyzes primary source evidence. Small, thoughtful questions produce successful research papers.

First you will produce a thorough outline that includes your research question, thesis statement, topic sentences, secondary materials, and primary source evidence for peer review. Completing this outline is required for a passing grade.

Grading Policy

Student work that meets all expectations earns a B. This means that it advances an original argument, supports it with sufficient evidence, adheres to the conventions of scholarly writing, and contains minimal errors. A-level work meets all expectations, and excels in originality, sophistication, and style. C-level work is lacking in one or more of the basic categories of expectation (argument, evidence, conventions, accuracy), but demonstrates clear effort. Work that fails to demonstrate effort earns a D.

Late work loses one-third of a letter grade for each day that it is late. In other words, work that would have earned a B+ becomes a B, then a B-, etc. Of course, sometimes life gets in the way. Students who have a compelling reason for requesting an extension must clear it with me *at least three days* before the assignment is due. Emergencies are the exception to the rule.

Students reserve the right to appeal a grade, as professors are human beings who make mistakes. Any student wishing to do so must schedule an appointment with me, bring their original work with any comments, as well as a paragraph explaining why, specifically, they feel they should have earned a different grade.

Email Policy

Although I am quite good about responding to emails, I reserve the right to keep free my evenings and weekends, just as you reserve the right to yours. If you send me a message during ordinary business hours, I will make every effort to respond that day. If you send me a message during the evening, you may not receive a response until the next day. If you send me a message over the weekend, I guarantee a response Monday morning, although I might respond earlier.

Before sending *any* email, please check the syllabus or the assignment sheet. Twice. These aren't just for fun.

Academic Honesty

As a Hoya, you have agreed to abide by the Georgetown University honor system, pledging the following: *"In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system: to be honest in every academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together."* In the context of this course, this means no plagiarism and no hostile antagonism. You can avoid these pitfalls by citing your sources in the [Chicago-Turabian style](#) and assuming that your peers question and comment in good faith. It is *always* acceptable to ask for clarification of a point. We will talk more in class about what constitutes plagiarism and what sources are acceptable to cite. This is not always intuitive.

Student Accommodations

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Georgetown University policy, students who self-identify and provide sufficient documentation of a qualifying disability are

entitled to receive reasonable academic accommodations. *All students* should familiarize themselves with the various forms of support available through Georgetown's [Academic Resource Center](#).

Course Readings

Week 1: Imagining The Early Republic

August 27

- Secondary
 - Ferguson, *Reading the Early Republic*, introduction, chapter 1
- Primary
 - [Churchman](#), *Rudiments of National Knowledge*, introduction, table of contents, pages 99-113, 244-8
 - [Irving](#), “Rip Van Winkle”

Week 2: Revolt

September 3

- Secondary
 - Jasanoff, “The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire”
 - Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History*, chapter two
 - LISTEN: *Ben Franklin's World*, “[Episode 128](#): Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History*”
- Primary
 - Declaration of Independence
 - 1779 New Hampshire freedom petition

Week 3: Governing

September 10

- Secondary
 - Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present*, introduction, chapters one & two
 - WATCH: “Shays’ Rebellion: America’s First Civil War”
- Primary
 - The Articles of Confederation
 - 1780 Pennsylvania Gradual Abolition Law

Week 4: Governing Again

September 17

- Secondary
 - Maier, *Ratification*, introduction, chapter 14, epilogue
 - Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, introduction, chapter 1
- Primary

- The U.S. Constitution

Week 5: Liberty and Slavery Pt I

September 24

- Secondary
 - Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*, introduction through part four
- Primary
 - “[Testimony in the Trial of Gabriel](#), 6 October 1800”

Week 6: Liberty and Slavery Pt II

October 1

Meet at Jefferson Memorial

- Secondary
 - Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*, part five through epilogue
 - Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, appendix
- Primary
 - Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, excerpts from queries fourteen and eighteen

Week 7: Republican Mothers

October 8

- Secondary
 - Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship*, chapter one
 - LISTEN: *Free Library Podcast*, “[Erica Armstrong Dunbar](#) | *Never Caught: The Washington’s Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*”
- Primary
 - Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes”

Week 8: The Black Republic

October 15

- Secondary
 - Fick, “The Haitian Revolution and the Limits of Freedom: Defining Citizenship in the Revolutionary Era
 - White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*, chapter four
 - Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation*, pages 227-45
- Primary

- Haitian Declaration of Independence

Week 9: The Native Republic

October 22

- Secondary
 - McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, preface, chapters fourteen through nineteen
 - Perdue, “Clan and Court: Another Look at the Early Cherokee Republic”
- Primary
 - Cherokee Constitution

Week 10: Securing the Early Republic

October 29

- Secondary
 - Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism*, introduction and chapter two
 - Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*, introduction, chapters four and five
- Primary
 - Arrowsmith, “A map of the United States of North America,” [1811](#)
 - Arrowsmith, “A map of the United States of North America,” [1819](#)

Week 11: Political Bodies

November 5

- Secondary
 - Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America*
- Primary
 - Prince Hall advertisement, *American Mercury*, 14 March 1791, p. 4

Week 12: Reform Pt I

November 12

- Secondary
 - Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, introduction through chapter four
- Primary
 - Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, 22 April 1820

Week 13: Reform Pt II

November 19

- Secondary
 - Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*,

chapters five through eight

- Primary
 - Explore sources on the [Georgetown Slavery Archive](#)

Thanksgiving, No Class (Thank Abe Lincoln)

Week 14: Remembering the Early Republic

December 3

- Secondary
 - Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*, introduction and chapter seven
- Primary
 - Daniel Webster, “Adams and Jefferson are No More”
 - Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”