

PL361 The American Revolution Revisited

M/W 1730-1900

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Office Hours: M 16:00-17:00, or by appointment

The American Revolution began as an independence struggle against the British Empire that set an example for anticolonial movements worldwide. It culminated in the framing of an unprecedented political system and the inauguration of a new science of government. The Revolution thus helped define the norms and institutions of the modern world, and chart a new vision of humanity. And yet, while first proclaiming to the world the principles of universal human rights and political liberty, the founding of the United States also led to constitutionalizing slavery and the mass-scale suppression and near eradication of native populations. Seeking to probe these profound paradoxes, this seminar will trace the sequence of events from the run-up to independence to the constitutional founding, and familiarize students with key ideas and influential actors. Situating the American Revolution in its historical context, and in the social and political dilemmas that shaped its course, we'll zoom in on the heated debates surrounding the Revolution's two main artifacts: the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. While striving to understand these documents on their own terms, we shall also consider major interpretations by way of interrogating the purpose of the American founding, and its significance today.

Required Texts

Course Reader

Additional Readings

- * Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*, (LIVERIGHT PUB CORP, 2015), ISBN: 9781631490446.
- * Robert J. Allison, *The American Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2015). ISBN 9780190225063
- * Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Classics, 2006), ISBN: 9780143039907
- * David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: Global History* (Harvard University Press, 2008), ISBN: 9780674030329
- * Gordon Wood, *Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution* (Oxford University Press 2021) ISBN: 978-0197546918

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Students are expected to have at their disposal a hard copy of the required text. Multiple copies of the required texts are available on loan from the library. The additional readings listed above and also others can be found on the library reserve shelf.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation

Careful preparation, regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Absences beyond two will affect the seminar grade.

Please note: arriving late or leaving in the middle of a session will count as half-absence. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes. The full attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Writing

Reflection paper and presentation: over the course of the semester, students will take turns to reflect on the proceedings of each week, and present these reflections at the beginning of the following week. The reflection paper should offer a concise (up to 1000-word) account of the week's reading and discussions by recapitulating the main themes, probing one important issue, and articulating questions for further discussion. The reflection papers should be posted on google classroom by midnight on Sundays.

Project Proposal and Final Essay: at the end of the semester students will write a substantial final essay of 3000 words on one aspect of the course material. Students are expected to devise their own final essay topic and submit (by Saturday, December 7) a 500-word proposal to be discussed with the instructor. The deadline for the final essay is Friday, December 20.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on seminar participation (30%); reflection paper and presentation (20%); a project proposal (20%) and final essay (30%).

Late Submission and Academic Integrity

Late papers will be downgraded in light of the policy outlined in the Student Handbook. Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Deadlines at a glance

Schedule for the reflection papers set up by Friday, September 6

Proposal for final essay due Saturday, December 7

Final Essay deadline: Friday, December 20

Schedule

Week	Monday	Wednesday	Assignment
Sept 2, 4	Introduction Thomas, America's Imperfect Founding https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ22sfmV1LM	Blackhawk, The Rediscovery of America	
Sept 9, 11	Blackhawk, The Rediscovery of America	Paine, <i>Common Sense</i>	
Sept 16, 18	Declaration of Independence Yannis Evrigenis	Declaration of Independence https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/declarationdraft.html	Allen, Our Declaration
Sept 23, 25	<i>Black Writers of the Founding Era</i>	Lepore, <i>These Truths</i> , ch. 4	
Sept 30-Oct 2	Morgan, <i>Inventing the People</i>	Articles of Confederation Vices of the Political System of the US The Virginia Plan	
Oct 7, 9	Objections to the Constitution: George Mason, Patrick Henry	The Anti-federalist: Brutus	
Oct 14, 16	The Anti-federalist: Cato, Sentinel	The US Constitution	
Oct 21-25	FALL BREAK		
Oct 28, 30	Federalist 9-10, 12	Federalist 14-15	
Nov 4, 6	Federalist 23, 24, 28	Federalist 31, 35	Kahan event
Nov 11, 13	Federalist 39, 40	Federalist 46, 47	
Nov 18, 20	Federalist 50, 51	Federalist 54, 55 Slavery and the Constitution	
Nov 25, 27	Federalist 57, 60, 62	Federalist 64,70	
Dec 2, 4	Federalist 78, 83	Federalist 84, 85	Final essay proposals
Dec 9, 11	Project session	Project session	<i>Franklin</i> (2024) 1619 project & its critics Arendt, <i>On Revolution</i> Jefferson-Madison
Dec 16-20	COMPLETION WEEK		