

PL361 The American Revolution Revisited

MW 1730-1900

Instructor: Ewa Atanassow

Guests: TBA

Contact: e.atanassow@belin.bard.edu

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

This seminar is a part of a two-course exploration of the two eighteenth century revolutions- the American and the French- that helped shape the norms and institutions of the modern world, thus charting a new vision of humanity. Chronologically first, the American revolution began as an independence struggle against one of the world's most powerful empires, which set an example for anticolonial movements worldwide. And yet, while first proclaiming to the world the principles of universal human rights and political self-determination, the founding of the United States also constitutionalized slavery and led to mass-scale suppression and near eradication of native populations. Probing these profound paradoxes, this course will open by tracing the historical arc of the American revolution from the run-up to independence to the constitutional founding, and familiarize students with the sequence of events 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 produced by the Revolution's two main artifacts: the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. While striving to understand these debates on their own terms, we shall also consider major historiographical interpretations by way of interrogating the meaning and purpose of the US founding, and its significance today.

Required Texts

Course Reader

The Federalist (The Gideon Edition), Edited with an Introduction, Reader's Guide, Constitutional Cross-reference, Index, and Glossary by George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001). http://lf-oll.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/788/0084_LFeBk.pdf

Additional Readings

* Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (Yale University Press, 2023), ISBN 9780300244052

* *Black Writers of the Founding Era*, edited by James G. Basker and Nicole Seary (Library of America, 2023), ISBN-10: 9781598537345

* Jill Lepore, *These Truths* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), ISBN: 978-0393357424

* Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People* (W. W. Norton & Company; 1989) ISBN: 978-0393306231

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 George Thomas's piece Lepore, New Americanism	Origins I: The rediscovery of America	
Sept 9, 11	Origins II: Lepore, These Truths	Origins III: Morgan, Inventing the People	
Sept 16, 18	Paine, <i>Common Sense</i>	<i>Black Writers of the Founding Era</i>	
Sept 23, 25	Declaration of Independence	Declaration of Independence	Guest seminar?
Sept 30-Oct 2	Douglass, What to the Slave is the Fourth of July	The Articles of Confederation and the Virginia Plan	
Oct 7, 9	Objections to the Constitution: George Mason, Patrick Henry	The Anti-federalist: Brutus, Cato, Sentinel	
Oct 14, 16	The Constitution Defended: James Wilson and Noah Webster	The US Constitution Federalist 1-5	
Oct 21-25	FALL BREAK		
Oct 28, 30	Federalist 9-10 [Utility]	Federalist 14-15 [Size]	
Nov 4, 6	Federalist 23,24,28 [Security]	Federalist 31, 35 [Taxation]	
Nov 11, 13	Federalist 39, 40 [Enumerated powers]	Federalist 46, 47 [Separation of powers]	Kahan special event
Nov 18, 20	Federalist 52, 54, 55 [Representation]	Slavery and the Constitution	
Nov 25, 27	Federalist 62, 64	Federalist 70 The unity of the executive	
Dec 2, 4	Federalist 78, 83	Federalist 84, 85	Final essay proposals
Dec 9, 11	Project session	Project session	Franklin 1619 project /critics Arendt, On Revolution
Dec 16-20	COMPLETION WEEK		