



HIST 4490.002

The American Revolution: Causes and Consequences

TuTh 11:10AM - 12:30PM, WH 215

Fall 2026

Instructor

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1-2pm or by appointment: <https://calendly.com/gretaswain/15min>

Course Description

The outbreak of the American War of Independence (1775-1783), and the formation of the United States as a democratic political entity endure as pivotal events that not only transformed North America but also ushered in a global “Age of Revolutions.” This course will investigate the causes and consequences of the American Revolution by tracing the ties and tensions between Britain and its American colonies, examining the developments of the early 1770s which led colonists to wage war against the British Empire, considering the aftermath of the war, and gauging the Revolution’s impact on a local and global scale. We’ll begin with Great Britain’s imperial context immediately following its victory in the Seven Years War in 1763 and end with the ratification of the United States Constitution in 1789. We’ll also study the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts which shaped the Revolutionary era. The American Revolution was not a single, well-ordered event, as many people think, but rather a multi-sided conflict that unfolded in many different places amongst many different people. We will consider the many participants in the American Revolution and the different objectives those participants had, taking into account both the formative actions of those remembered as “founders” and the ways in which ordinary people shaped the course of events. And while the course will focus on the North American region which became the modern-day United States, it will also place the American Revolution in both an Atlantic World and global context. Finally, in this year marking the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we will pay special attention to how the nation’s founding has been remembered over time.

Course Objectives

- Understand key figures and major events that shaped colonial and Revolutionary America.
- Compare and contrast different interpretations of the Revolution's causes.
- Identify competing narratives of the Revolution in the Articles of Confederation and U.S. Constitution.
- Recognize historical narratives as arguments which can be evaluated based on evidence.
- Practice historical thinking skills, including close reading and analysis of primary source documents, contextualization, corroboration, evaluating evidence, recognizing silences, identifying continuity and change over time, and constructing arguments and interpretations.
- Critically analyze historical figures and their representations based on primary and secondary research.
- Develop research and writing skills through the creation of accessible history scholarship.

Course Texts

- Popper, Nicholas, ed. *The American Revolution: Essays on the Founding Era*. Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture and the University of North Carolina Press, 2026.
- Other readings and resources will be freely available online, through UNT libraries or on Canvas.

Grading and Assignments

Grading Scale

A student's overall letter grade for this course will be based on a standard ten-point percentage scale:

A 90-100%
B 80-89%
C 70-79%
D 60-69%
F 59% and lower

Assignments

In-Class Engagement (10%)

Studying the causes, consequences and remembrances of the American Revolution requires us to examine multiple geographies, themes and timelines. As a result, we will need to move through materials at a rapid pace to obtain a well-rounded understanding of our topic. It is therefore imperative that you keep on top of the readings, come to

class regularly and be an active participant in class activities. You will receive points for your attendance and participation. Your success in this course—both for learning and your grades—directly correlates with your level of active engagement (ex. attendance, attentive note-taking, asking questions, participating in small group discussions, etc.).

We will be using the iClicker software for in-class polls, questions and attendance. You must sign up for a free iClicker account to participate. iClicker can be accessed from your phone or computer. Further instructions will be given on the first day of class. At the end of the semester, I will drop your two lowest attendance/participation grades.

Discussion (10%)

During this semester you will engage with a significant number of primary and secondary sources. As historians, we are asked to examine these sources, think deeply about them, consider them within a larger context, form opinions (interpretations) about them and back up those claims with evidence. We are also asked to share our opinions, while also considering different perspectives from others. One way we will practice these skills is through class discussion of assigned readings and course material. These discussions will take place most weeks, on Thursdays, as indicated in the course schedule.

Discussion Leader

Two students will serve as discussion leaders (DLs) for each session. A sign-up sheet is available on Canvas so you can choose the date that works best for you. You must serve as a discussion leader at least once during the semester. As a discussion leader, you and your partner are expected to study the week's readings, develop discussion questions before class and then guide the class discussion—asking questions, calling on your fellow classmates and offering follow-up questions, as needed. Each discussion leader will turn in 5 thoughtful questions by the beginning of class on Tuesday of the week they will lead the discussion. See Canvas for further instructions.

Discussion Participation

For discussions when you are not serving as the discussion leader, you are still expected to be an active participant and will receive points for adding to the discussion. Come to class with a good knowledge of the assigned readings and be ready to discuss them, along with any course work you have completed. You can also preview the discussion questions before class in Canvas.

In-Class Writing (15%)

Throughout the semester, you will practice your historical thinking and writing skills by completing short writing assignments during class time in response to a prompt. The best way to prepare for this is by attending class and keeping up with the readings. I will drop your lowest in-class writing grade at the end of the semester.

Exams (40%)

You will take two exams on Thursday September 17th and Thursday December 10th. Exams will typically include multiple choice, key term identification, short answer and/or essay questions. Exams will be completed on Canvas using Lock Down Browser. If you have any issues with this or need an accommodation, please come talk to me at least 2 weeks before the exam date. There will be no make-up exams for unexcused absences without prior arrangements.

Biography Project (25%)

As part of a 4000-level course, you will practice and demonstrate your historical thinking, research and writing skills by creating an interactive, biographical timeline of a historical figure during the American Revolution, based on primary and secondary sources. We will have an in-class workshop that will teach you how to use Timeline.js (<https://timeline.knightlab.com/>) to build your timeline. Your timeline "slides" should mostly focus on your subject's experience during the "Revolutionary Era" (to include the years immediately preceding or following 1776-1783), and explain who the individual was, what they did during the Revolutionary Era, and the larger context surrounding their lives. Finally, you will highlight how your subject has been remembered throughout history. You will provide at least one example of how your figure has been portrayed in the media/popular culture (political cartoon, song, film, Broadway musical, etc.) and offer your critical analysis of the portrayal based on your primary source research.

Course Schedule

Week / Theme	In Class	Readings	Assignments
Week 1: Framing the Revolution 8/18 - 8/20	T: Introductions, syllabus, & how to succeed in this class R: Lecture & Discussion	- Popper, <i>The American Revolution (TAR)</i> , Preface and Introduction (Canvas) - W. Caleb McDaniel, "How to Read for History," 2008. - Sharon Leon & Sarah Whelan, "Historical Thinking," 2008. - Mary Lynn Rampolla, <i>A Pocket Guide to Writing in History</i> , "Introduction," pg. 1-7, "Reading Actively in History," pg. 24-28 and "Taking History Exams," pg. 44-46 (Canvas)	- Discussion Leader Sign Up, due Sunday 8/23 at 11:59pm
Week 2: Britain's Imperial Crisis	T: Lecture R: Discussion	- Rampolla, <i>A Pocket Guide to Writing in History</i> , "Evaluating Primary	

8/25 - 8/27		Sources,” and “Evaluating Secondary Sources,” pg. 8–22 (Canvas) - <i>TAR</i>, Woody Holton, “Catalysts of Revolution: Delaware and Shawnee Diplomats versus Patriot Land Speculators” -Except from Calloway, <i>The Scratch of a Pen</i> (Canvas)	
Week 3: Popular Mobilization & Resistance 9/1 - 9/3	T: Lecture R: Discussion	- <i>TAR</i>, Mary Beth Norton, “The Seventh Tea Ship: Aftershocks of the Boston Tea Party” - <i>Worlds Turned Upside Down</i> podcast, Ep. 10, “The Stamp.” -Select Primary Sources	
Week 4: The Road to Rebellion 9/8 - 9/10	T: Lecture R: Discussion	-<i>TAR</i>, Michael A. McDonnell, “The Burning of Norfolk: Patriot Leaders Become Reluctant Revolutionaries” -Select Primary Sources	
Week 5: Declaring Independence 9/15 - 9/17	T: Lecture R: Exam #1	- <i>TAR</i>, Robert Parkinson, “The Lifeblood of Revolution: Newspaper Networks and the Movement for Independence” -Rosemarie Zagarri, “The Declaration’s Grievances Against the King” -Thomas Paine, “Common Sense” (1776) - “Declaration of Independence” (1776)	- Exam #1
Week 6: War for Independence	T: Lecture R: Discussion	- <i>TAR</i> , John Ruddiman, “Disciplined by Orderly Books: Negotiating Power in	

9/22 - 9/24		the Continental Army” -Select Primary Sources	
Week 7: Global War 9/29 - 10/1	T: Lecture & Timeline.js Workshop R: Discussion & Finish Timeline.js Workshop	-Select primary sources	
Week 8: Women, Families & Communities at War 10/6 - 10/8	T: In-Class Film: "Mary Silliman's War." R: Discussion	- <i>TAR</i> , Linda Kerber, "Women Invited to War: Sacrifice, Service, and Survival" -Select Primary Sources	
Week 9: Loyalism 10/13 - 10/15	T: Lecture R: Discussion	- <i>TAR</i> : Maya Jasanoff, "The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire" - "Book of Negroes" (1783)	
Week 10: Slavery, Race, and Freedom in Revolutionary America 10/20 - 10/22	T: Lecture R: Discussion	- <i>TAR</i> , Benjamin Quarles, "Behind the Man behind the Gun: Black Spies, Servicemen, and Enslaved Laborers" - Adam McNeil, "Norfolk to Nova Scotia: Judith Jackson's Crooked Road to Freedom" -Select Primary Sources	
Week 11: Confederation / Limits of Revolution 10/27 - 10/29	T: Lecture R: Discussion	- <i>TAR</i> : Eliga Gould, "Independence and Interdependence: The American Revolution and the Problem of Postcolonial Nationhood" -Excerpt from Rosemarie Zagarri, "Revolutionary Backlash"	- Biography Project due 10/30 at 11:59pm

		-Select Primary Sources	
Week 12: U.S. Constitution 11/3 - 11/5	T: Lecture R: Discussion	-George Mason, "Objections to the Constitution" (1787) - James Wilson, Speech at the Pennsylvania Ratifying Convention against a Bill of Rights (1787)	
Week 13: Early Republic 11/10 - 11/12	T: Lecture R: In-Class Film: "Empire of Reason"	-Select Primary Sources	
Week 14: Memories of the American Revolution 11/17 - 11/19	T: Lecture R: Discussion	- <i>TAR</i> , Alfred Young, "From Deference to Defiance: A Boston Shoemaker and the American Revolution" -Select Primary Sources	
11/24 - 11/26 - Thanksgiving Break			
Week 15: Legacies of the American Revolution 12/1 - 12/3	T: Lecture R: Discussion & Exam Review	-Select Primary Sources	
Final Exam Week	Thursday December 10th, 10:30am-12:30pm		-Exam #2