

University of Pennsylvania

Department of History



History 108
American Origins
MW 11:00 A.M.
with weekly sections
Fall Semester 2016

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A General Overview of the Course

The United States was not inevitable. With that assumption as its starting point, this course surveys North American history from about 1500 to about 1850, with the continent's many peoples and cultures in view. The unpredictable emergence of the U.S. as a nation is a focus, but always in the context of wider developments: global struggles among European empires; conflicts between indigenous peoples and settler-colonists; exploitation of enslaved African labor; evolution of distinctive colonial societies; and, finally, independence movements inspired by a transatlantic revolutionary age.

Course Requirements

Papers: At the end of each unit of the course you will write an essay of approximately 2,000 words in length, or about seven double-spaced pages. Instructions will be posted on Canvas around two weeks in advance of the due dates. On the assumption that you need time to develop your skills in writing these essays, their significance for your grade will increase with each assignment: the first paper will determine 20%, the second 25%, and the final 30%.

Discussion: Your contributions to the success of the class will determine approximately 25% of your grade. Quality, not quantity, is the key factor. Quality can take many forms, but it is difficult to achieve without regular attendance and active participation in weekly discussion sections (our preferred term for what are usually called “recitations”). These discussions are one of the most important parts of this course; unexcused absences from them will substantially affect your grade.

E-Mail Reactions to Readings: To help you prepare for discussion and to provide a way for you to show your involvement outside the classroom, a significant portion of your discussion grade will be based on responses to the readings, sent as e-mail messages to your T.A. before class time. These are due for at least 10 of our 14 discussion meetings. For more detailed instructions, consult your T.A.

You are responsible for observing due dates listed in this syllabus, as updated on the Canvas calendar.

Readings

The schedule below lists two kinds of readings for our course. **Background Reading** will not be discussed intensively in class, but, as the title suggests, is crucial for understanding the lectures and general context and will be vital when the time comes to write papers. Most background reading is from the on-line collaborative textbook called *The American Yawp*: <http://www.americanyawp.com>.

Reading for Discussion will receive much more intense attention in weekly recitations discussion sections. Many of these readings are online, accessible through Canvas.

The following books, which will be discussed in full, should be purchased and are available at the Penn Book Center, 34th and Sansom Streets:

Camila Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma: An American Portrait* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004)

Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: the First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998)

Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007)

Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)

Any changes to the reading schedule listed below will be posted on the Calendar section of Canvas.



SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

INTRODUCTIONS

“History is the memory of things said and done.”

—Carl Lotus Becker, 1932

“History is chaos and every attempt to interpret it otherwise is an illusion. . . . The historian may seek to escape these issues by silence or by a confession of avoidance or he may face them boldly, aware of the intellectual and moral perils inherent in any decision—in his act of faith.”

—Charles A. Beard, 1934

W. 31 August: **Interpreting North American History**

Week 1 Discussions: **Thinking Historically, Reading Historically**

Reading for discussion (Canvas):

Carl Lotus Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian” (1932)

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Mr. Everyman Buys Coal” (2009)

I. TWO WORLDS MEET, 1607–1763

“What could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men. . . . Which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace.”

—William Bradford, 1630

“If your king have sent me presents, I also am a king, and this my land.”

—Powhatan, 1608

- M. 5 September: *No Class (Labor Day)*
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 1; Chapter 2, Parts I–II: <http://www.americanyawp.com>
- W. 7 September: **Old Worlds and New Worlds**
- Week 2 Discussions: **New Worlds and Old Worlds**
Reading for discussion (Canvas):
 Christopher Columbus, Letter to Luis de Sant Angel (1493)
 Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1590), selections
 A French Story of a Native Story of the First Arrival of Europeans (1633)
- M. 12 September: **The First Americans: Early Seventeenth-Century Native Societies**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 2, Parts III–V.
- W. 14 September: **The Last Conquistadors; The First European Beachheads**
- Week 3 Discussions: **Natives and English; Tsenacomoco and Virginia**
Reading for discussion:
 Camila Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* (2004), entire.
- M. 19 September: **The English Puritans: Religion and Social Reform**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 2, Parts VI–VII.
- W. 21 September: **Pilgrims and Puritans: Which Way to America?**
- Week 4 Discussions: **The Puritans’ New England “City upon a Hill”**
Reading for discussion (Canvas):
 John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630)
 Virginia Anderson, “Migrants and Motives” (1985)
 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “John Winthrop’s City of Women” (2001)
- M. 26 September: **North America, Europe, Africa, and an Emerging Atlantic World**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 3, Parts I–II.

- W. 28 September: **Virginians and the Evil Weed Tobacco**
- Week 5 Discussions: **Enslaved Africans and Plantation Economies**
Reading for discussion
 Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone* (1998), pp. 1–141
- M. 3 October: **From Colonies to Provinces: The Early Eighteenth Century**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 3, Parts III–VI; Ch. 4, Parts I–IV
- W. 5 October: **North American Provinces in Eighteenth-Century Empires**
- Week 6 Discussions: *No Class (Fall Break)*
- M. 10 October: **Contests for a Continent**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 4, Parts V–VII
- W. 12 October: **The Seven Years War and the Transformation of North America**
- Week 7 Discussions: **British Americans and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire**
Reading for discussion (Canvas):
 T.H. Breen, “An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690-1776” (1986)
 Ellen Hartigan-O’Connor, “‘She Said She did not Know Money’”: Urban Women and Atlantic Markets in the Revolutionary Era” (2006)
 Benjamin Franklin, selections from *Autobiography* (1784, 1789).
- Su. 16 October: **PAPER ON PART I DUE AT 11:00 p.m.**

II. THE AGE OF ATLANTIC REVOLUTIONS AND THE EMERGENCE THE U.S. REPUBLIC, 1763–1815

“We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world.”

—J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, 1782

“We excite your attention to consider, how hateful slavery is in the sight of that God, who hath destroyed kings and princes, for their oppression of the poor slaves”

—Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, 1794

- M. 17 October: **Roots of Imperial Crises; Roots of Revolutions**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 5, Parts I–IV
- W. 19 October: **From Resistance to Revolution(s)**

- Week 8 Discussions: **Republicanism and the Spirit of '76**
Reading for discussion (Canvas):
 Thomas Paine, selections from *Common Sense* (1776)
 “An American” (Charles Inglis), *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated* (1776)
 The Declaration of Independence (1776)
- M. 24 October: **“Who Should Rule at Home”?: Many Revolutions**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 5, Parts V–VI; Ch. 6, Parts I–V
- W. 26 October: **“Who Should Rule at Home”?: Many Wars for Independence**
- Week 9 Discussions: **Republicanism Reborn or Betrayed?: The Federal Constitution**
Reading for discussion
Individual assignments from the following (Canvas):
 The Federal Constitution (1787)
 Robert Yates, *Brutus*, no. 1 (1787)
 The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of Pennsylvania to their Constituents (1787)
 James Madison, *The Federalist*, nos. 10, 39, 51 (1787)
 The Bill of Rights (1789-1791)
- M. 31 October: **Two Kinds of Republicans: Debating The U.S. Revolution's Future**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 6, Parts VI–XI
- W. 2 November: **The 1790s: Jeffersonians vs. Hamiltonians**
- Week 10 Discussions: **What Kind of U.S. Republic?**
Reading for discussion (Canvas):
 Thomas Jefferson, Selections from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785)
 Alexander Hamilton, “Report on Manufactures” (1791)
 Henry Knox, “Report . . . Relative to the Northwestern Indians” (1789)
- M. 7 November: **Oh, Canada: An Anti-U.S.?**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 7.
 Alan Taylor, “Remaking Americans: Louisiana, Upper Canada, and Texas” (2014) (Canvas)
- W. 9 November: **Oh(io), Mississippi, Rio Grande: An Ante-U.S.?**
- Week 11 Discussions: **An “Empire for Liberty” and an Empire for Slavery**
 Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 217–365.

- M. 14 November: **The U.S. in the Era of Atlantic Revolutions**
Background reading for this week (Canvas):
 Douglas Egerton, *et al.*, “Revolutions and Counterrevolutions: A Season of Irony, 1789–1804”
- W. 16 November: **The Last Wars for Independence?**
- Week 12 Discussions: **Remember the Ladies?**
Reading for discussion
 Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (2007), entire
- Su. 20 November: **PAPER ON PART II DUE, 11:00 p.m.**

III. REVOLUTIONARY LEGACIES, 1815–1850

“Democratic communities . . . are constantly filled with men who, having entered but yesterday upon their independent condition, are intoxicated with their new power. They entertain a presumptuous confidence in their own strength, and as they do not suppose that they can henceforward ever have occasion to claim the assistance of their fellow creatures, they do not scruple to show that they care for nobody but themselves.”

—Alexis de Tocqueville, 1840

- M. 21 November: **The New Generations of the 1820s**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Chs. 8–9
- Week 13 Discussions: **The New U.S. Politics of the 1830s**
Reading for discussion (Canvas):
 Andrew Jackson, Annual Message to Congress (1830)
 Henry Clay, Defense of the American System (1832)
 Alexis de Tocqueville, selections from *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840)
- M. 28 November: **New Controversies over an Old Problem: Masters and Slaves**
Background reading for this week:
 None.
- W. 30 November: **New Controversies over an Old Problem: Natives and Newcomers**
- Week 14 Discussions: **Native Americans, U.S. Americans, and Mexican Americans**
Reading for discussion
 Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (2008), entire

- M. 5 December: **Empires and Republics in the Nineteenth Century**
Background reading for this week:
American Yawp, Ch. 10;
 Douglas Egerton, *et al.*, “The Ebb and Flow of Empire, 1804–1830” (Canvas)
- W. 7 December: **Republics and Empires in the Nineteenth Century**
- Week 15 Discussions: **Looking Backward; Looking Forward**
Reading for discussion:
 Daniel Webster, “Plymouth Oration” (1820)
 William Apess, *Eulogy on King Philip* (1836)
 The Seneca Falls Declaration (1848)
 Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (1852)
- M. 12 December: **American Origins?**
Recommended reading:
American Yawp, Chs. 11–12.
- F. 16 December **FINAL PAPER DUE**, 2:00 p.m.