

University of Pennsylvania  
Department of History



History 108  
American Origins  
MW 11:00 A.M.  
with weekly sections  
Spring Semester 2019

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Office Hours:  
MT, 3:30–4:30 P.M.

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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 1600 to about 1820, 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:** A review essay of about 1,000 words is due on 7 February and will determine approximately 15% of your grade. An optional second review essay may be submitted on 25 April. If you complete this second assignment, only the higher of the two grades will be counted. The major portion of your grade will be determined by take-home exams due on 17 March and at the scheduled time for the final exam. These exams will take the form of essays approximately 2,000 words in length, which will ask you to demonstrate your understanding of the lectures, readings, and class discussions. Each of these papers will determine about 30% of your grade. Instructions for all assignments will be posted on Canvas at least two weeks in advance of the due dates.

**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. Eleven opportunities for these messages are listed below. You must complete at least eight of them. The weekly deadline for students in the Thursday afternoon section is 9:00 a.m. Thursday. The deadline for all others is 6:00 p.m. Thursday. Please use regular email, not Canvas messaging. Embed your response in the text of your message; do not use attachments. For further guidance, consult your T.A.

***You are responsible*** for observing due dates as listed in this syllabus and as updated on Canvas. Be sure to check the schedule on Canvas regularly.

## 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. Most of these readings are online, accessible through Canvas. In addition, the following books should be purchased. Copies are available at the Penn Bookstore and from online retailers:

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)

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



# ***SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS***

## **INTRODUCTION**

“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. 16 January: **Interpreting North American History**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Introduction: <http://www.americanyawp.com>

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)  
*Email Response opportunity 1*



## **I. WORLDS MEET, 1600–1763**

“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. 21 January: *No Class (Martin Luther King, Jr., Day)*

W. 23 January: **“Old Worlds,” “New Worlds,” and Cold Worlds**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 1, Parts I–III: <http://www.americanyawp.com>

Week 2 Discussions: **Old Worlds Meet New 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), selection  
 An Innu Native Story of the First Arrival of Europeans (1633)  
*Email Response opportunity 2*

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- M. 28 January: **Europeans' Routes to the Americas**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 1, Parts IV–V, Ch. 2, Parts I–II.
- W. 30 January: **Spain's Roots in the Americas**
- Week 3 Discussions: **Spain's Reputation in the Americas**  
*Reading for discussion:* (Canvas)  
 The *Requerimento* (1510)  
 Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Destruction of the Indies* (1542; 1583 English edition)  
 "The New Laws of the Indies" (1542)  
*Email Response opportunity 3*
- M. 4 February: **Native North America's New Old World**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 2, Parts III–V.
- W. 6 February: **Old England's New World of "Virginia"**
- R. 7 February: **REVIEW ESSAY DUE, Thursday, 4:00 P.M.**
- Week 4 Discussions: **Natives and English; Tsenacomoco and Virginia**  
*Reading for discussion:*  
 Camila Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* (2004), entire.
- M. 11 February: **The English Puritans: Religion and Social Reform**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 2, Parts VI–VII.
- W. 13 February: **Pilgrims and Puritans: Which Way to America?**
- Week 5 Discussions: **The Puritans' New England "City upon a Hill"**  
*Reading for discussion* (Canvas):  
 John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630)  
 Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Zion's Savior* (1654)  
 Virginia Anderson, "Migrants and Motives" (1985)  
*Email Response opportunity 4*
- M. 18 February: **North America, Europe, Africa, and an Emerging Atlantic World**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 3, Parts I–IV.
- W. 20 February: **Virginians and the Evil Weed Tobacco**
- Week 6 Discussions: **Enslaved Africans and Plantation Economies**  
*Reading for discussion*  
 Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone* (1998), pp. 1–141  
*Email Response opportunity 5*
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- M. 25 February: **Contests for a Continent**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 3, Parts V–VI; Ch. 4, Parts I–III
- W. 27 February: **From Colonies to Provinces: The Early Eighteenth Century**
- 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).  
**Email Response opportunity 6**
- M. 4 March: *Spring*
- W. 6 March: *Break*
- M. 11 March: **Britain’s Eighteenth-Century Empire**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 4, Parts IV–VII.
- W. 13 March: **The Seven Years War and the Transformation of North America**
- Week 8 Discussions: **The Transformation of North America: Review and Prospect**  
*Reading for discussion: None*
- Su 17 March: **PAPER ON PART I DUE, Sunday, 5:00 P.M.**



## II. THE AGE OF ATLANTIC REVOLUTIONS AND THE EMERGENCE THE U.S. REPUBLIC, 1763–1820

“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. 18 March: **Roots of Imperial Crises**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 5, Parts I–III.
- W. 20 March: **Roots of Revolutionary Ideology**
- Week 9 Discussions: **Roots of Crises in the Continental Interior**  
*Reading for discussion* (Canvas):  
Robert Navarre, *Journal of Pontiac’s Conspiracy* (1763)  
*A Declaration and Remonstrance . . . of the Frontier Inhabitants* (1764)  
*Email Response opportunity 7*
- M. 25 March: **Patterns of Provincial Resistance**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 5, Part IV.
- W. 27 March: **From Resistance to Revolution**
- Week 10 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* (1776)  
The Declaration of Independence (1776)  
*Email Response opportunity 8*
- M. 1 April: **“Who Should Rule at Home”?: Many Wars For Independence**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 5, Parts V–VI; Ch. 6, Parts I–IV.
- W. 3 April: **How to Rule at Home?: Constitution-Making and Remaking**
- Week 11 Discussions: **Republicanism Reborn or Betrayed?: The Federal Constitution**  
*Reading for discussion* (Canvas):  
The Federal Constitution (1787)  
Robert Yates, *Brutus*, no. 1 (1787)  
James Madison, *The Federalist*, no. 10 (1787)  
*Email Response opportunity 9*
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- M. 8 April: **“Who Should Rule at Home?”: Many Revolutions**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 6, Parts V–VI
- W. 10 April: **Two Kinds of Republicans: Debating The U.S. Revolution's Future**
- Week 12 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)  
**Email Response opportunity 10**
- M. 15 April: **The 1790s: Jeffersonians vs. Hamiltonians**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 6, Parts VII–IX  
 Alan Taylor, “Remaking Americans: Louisiana, Upper Canada, and Texas” (2014)  
 (Canvas)
- W. 17 April: **The 1790s: The Dis-United states**
- Week 13 Discussions: **Empires of Liberty and Empires of Slavery**  
*Reading for discussion:*  
 Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 217–365.  
**Email Response opportunity 11**
- M. 22 April: **The Many Revolutions of 1800**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
*American Yawp*, Ch. 6, Parts IX–X, Ch. 7, entire
- W. 24 April: **The Last Wars for Independence?**
- R. 25 April: OPTIONAL REVIEW ESSAY DUE, Thursday, 4:00 P.M.**
- Week 14 Discussions: **Remember the Ladies?**  
*Reading for discussion*  
 Rosemarie Zagarrri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (2007), entire
- M. 29 April: **Republics and Empires in the Nineteenth Century**  
*Background reading for this week:*  
 None
- W. 1 May: **American Origins?**
- Exam Week: FINAL PAPER DUE at scheduled exam time**