In this course we will study the passage through an extraordinary series of changes of a quarrelsome assemblage of British colonies, huddled together on the western rim of the Atlantic world. The years between the Anglo-French imperial conflicts of the 1740s and Thomas Jefferson’s election to the presidency of the United States, in 1800, saw the transformation through war of these remote American settlements into a revolutionary nation. The traumatic events of this era made the modern world’s first republics and set in motion an age of democratic revolutions. And the political questions left unresolved at its close would help to ensure the death, and rebirth, of the United States sixty years later.

By any standard this was a remarkable epoch in the cultural, economic, military, political, and social life of early America, and in many respects of the whole European-influenced world. During these years European Americans took part in the first global military conflict (the Seven Years’ War); fought the world’s strongest power to a standstill, consummating what became the first in a series of movements in this hemisphere for colonial independence; founded some of the most radically democratic states in history; dismantled slavery in some places and fortified it enormously in others; shrunk, for a time, the young British empire, in which they forced permanent changes; fought with and terrorized dozens of Indian nations, metastasizing to claim great spans of land; formally experimented with unusual relations between church and state; drafted and barely approved the United States Constitution; and provided economic and ideological preconditions for the French Revolution, helping to launch Europe on two decades of devastating war. Along the way, and without at first having meant to, they nearly, but not quite, succeeded in patching together a territorial state on the European model. In the end the idiosyncratic federal republic they made instead—in its limits and inequities as much as its aspirations—bore the marks of many of the unexpected experiences the first citizens of the United States had passed through together.

Some of the questions we will consider in this course are: What were the 18th-century empires good for? How and why did the American Revolution begin? Was it a democratic movement? How did Britain lose the revolutionary war? Did the American states ever come to constitute a nation? What good did independence from Britain do them? And what part did national sentiment play in uniting or fragmenting the old British empire and the new United States?

Readings are drawn from recent works of early American history and selected primary sources (for an introduction to reading early printing and handwriting, see the handout posted under “Resources” on this course’s Sakai website).
REQUIREMENTS

The course requirements are as follows.

1. Faithful attendance at each course meeting (see “Attendance, Electronics, and Plagiarism,” below, for details) and active participation in discussions during the bi-weekly recitations—which requires careful reading, week by week, of the assigned books and articles (30% of the final grade: 10% from attendance and 20% from your contributions in recitation).

2. An in-class midterm examination, meant to provide an early gauge of your progress, consisting of an essay question and a section of short identifications drawn from the lectures and readings (20% of the final grade).

3. An original essay of 4–6 pages, written using a limited selection of online primary sources (20% of the final grade; see “Research Essays and Office Hours,” below, for details).

4. A final examination, consisting of two essay questions and a section of short identifications drawn from the lectures and readings (30%).

RESEARCH ESSAYS AND OFFICE HOURS

The essay assignment is to write a 4–6 page essay based on original research. You will conduct the research in one of several electronically-encoded primary sources available over the Internet. The sources available to you include the most important newspapers of the eighteenth-century North American colonies, as well as most of the books, pamphlets, broadsides, and magazines printed in colonial North America or Britain. You will select one of these sources and search it by keyword for any term of your choice that gets at issues central to the era of the American Revolution—on the order of “currency,” or “militia”—to find out what early Americans wrote and thought about that topic, or how it related to their lives. The use of secondary sources is strenuously discouraged, since this assignment is all about seeing what you are able to discover by looking at and trying to make sense of primary evidence on your own. (For further details, please see the handout describing this assignment, posted under “Resources” on Sakai.)

Your research keyword must be approved in consultation with me. My office hours are held Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 10:00 to 11:00, and it is a good idea to form the habit of visiting them as often as you can. You should make an appointment at the online scheduling site: http://www.supersaas.com/schedule/psilver (available days are shown on the overview calendar in white highlighting). My office is Van Dyck 2C, my office telephone is (848) 932–8512, and my email address is peter.silver@rutgers.edu.

Your completed research essay is due by the start of lecture on Tuesday, April 30, as a P.D.F. posted to “Assignments” on Sakai. Essays submitted one or two classes late will be marked down one or two letter grades, respectively, and essays submitted more than two classes late will fail. You have the sole responsibility for making sure your essay is uploaded properly, which means it is part of the assignment both to check your file before uploading
it and to ensure that the upload completed. If your submission is incomplete, blank, or unreadable, it will be graded as an incomplete or missing essay. If you must later resubmit it, it will be subject to the standard penalties for a late essay—but since I will not have seen the flaws in a submission until I try to grade it, those penalties will have grown more damaging than with a simple late submission.

ATTENDANCE, ELECTRONICS, AND PLAGIARISM

Attendance is required at all course meetings. One accidental absence is allowed, and absences for serious illness (which you need to document and report to the university administration using the web form at https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra) will be accounted for. Arriving late to class twice will count as an absence. One to four absences will lower your grade by one-half to two letter grades. More than four can result in failing the course.

Laptops are permitted in class for note-taking only—not, under any circumstances, surfing the web, chatting, or emailing. Any use of smartphones is flatly prohibited. Please switch them off and stow them away during class.

Any form of plagiarism on any course assignment or examination will result in a failing grade. Since you are responsible from the first day of this course for fully understanding what constitutes plagiarism, if you are ever in any doubt you should ask. For examples of verbatim and `mosaic' plagiarism, inadequate paraphrases, uncited paraphrases or quotations, and copying, see http://tinyurl.com/harvardplagiarismguide.

BOOKS

The following required course books should be ordered from Amazon. The correct editions can be found by clicking on the links under “Resources” on Sakai, or by searching for the I.S.B.N. numbers after their titles. Assigned articles and chapters from books not on this list will be posted to Sakai in P.D.F. format.


JANUARY 22–24: Beginnings

1. An introduction to the American Revolution
2. The empire in a teacup: Commerce and control in Europe, Asia, and America

Suggested background reading:


JANUARY 29–31: Defeat and disarray

3. The navy: Source of pride and imperial irritant
4. Recitation: Losing the Seven Years’ War: Francophobia and Indian-hating


John Maylem, Gallic Perfidy: A Poem (Boston, 1758)

FEBRUARY 5–7: The empire triumphant

5. Winning the Seven Years’ War: William Pitt and the Americans
6. Triumph and reform: The army and the people in the interior and New York City

Anderson, Crucible of War, chaps. 32, 37–38, 40, 44, 46, and 54

William Knox, “Hints Respecting the Settlement of Our American Provinces” (1763), in Thomas C. Barrow, “A Project for Imperial Reform … ” (in Notes and Documents), William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 24 (1967): 113–126 only

FEBRUARY 12–14: Two imperial crises

7. Rioting and repeal: The Stamp Act crisis and Pontiac’s War


Vision of Neolin, the Delaware prophet (1761 or 1762), in *Journal of Pontiac’s Conspiracy, 1763*, ed. Mary Agnes Burton (Detroit: Michigan Society of the Colonial Wars, [1912]), pp. 23–32, even-numbered pages only


FEBRUARY 19–21: The outbreak of violence

9. Principle and politics: Rights, representation, sovereignty, equality, and slavery

[John Dickinson], *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania, to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies* (Philadelphia, 1768), nos. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 12 (pp. 3–13, 18–22, 29–38, and 65–71)


FEBRUARY 26–28: Ordinary people

11. Committees and coercion: Mobilization, boycott, and revolution from below
12. RECITATION: Discussion of Revolutionary diaries


Robert Munford, “The Patriots: A Comedy in Five Acts” (1777), in A Collection of Plays and Poems, by the Late Col. Robert Munford … Now First Published Together, ed. William Munford (Petersburg, Va., 1798), act I, scenes i and v–viii; and act II, scene i only

Selections from The People the Best Governors, or a Plan of Government Founded on the Just Principles of Natural Freedom ([New Hampshire], 1776)

Selections from one of three sets of revolutionary-era diaries or memoirs written by North Americans from different regions, classes, genders, and political allegiances:


(2) The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774–1777 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925)


MARCH 5–7: Independence

13. War aims and mission creep: Independence and monarchy

14. Washington nearly loses the war: The agony of New Jersey

[Thomas Paine], Common Sense, Addressed to the Inhabitants of America … (Philadelphia, 1776), parts 1–2 (pp. 7–31), and excerpt from appendix (pp. 83–90)


MARCH 12–14: MIDTERM WEEK

15. Waterborne war: British naval triumphs and a defeat
16. IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAMINATION

SPRING RECESS (MARCH 16–24)

MARCH 26–28: Mixed loyalties

17. Loyalism: Dream and reality in the South, the mid-Atlantic, and individual minds
18. The loudest yelps for liberty: The Revolution in the South


APRIL 2–4: Expelling enemies

19. The war in the interior: Anglophobia and Indian-hating
20. RECITATION: The Loyalist diaspora and a new British empire

Peter Silver, “Barbarism and the American Revolution” and part of “The Postwar That Wasn’t,” in Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), chaps. 8–9, pp. 227–285 only (with endnotes at pp. 374–382)


APRIL 9–11: The new North America

21. Aftermaths: Post-imperial economics and the world of the Northwest Ordinance
22. Moral capital: Antislavery and the Revolution in the North


APRIL 16–18: Echoes of past arguments: The 1780s

23. Rebellion and counter-revolution: The people and the Constitution
24. Recitation: A road closed: Ratification and the Anti-Federalists

Excerpts from constitutional convention proceedings for May 29 (pp. 75–80); May 31 (pp. 84–86); June 8 (pp. 116–119); June 15 (pp. 131–134); June 18 (pp. 140–149); June 19 (2nd entry under this date, pp. 156–158); June 25 (pp. 166–171); June 26 (p. 175–178, ending after Hamilton’s speech); June 28 (starting with Franklin’s speech)–June 29 (pp. 185–192); June 30 (starting with Bedford’s speech, pp. 196–198); July 5 (pp. 203–204, ending with Bedford’s reply); July 10 (pp. 210–211); July 13 (pp. 215–217); July 14 (starting with King’s speech)–July 16 (pp. 219–223); July 23 (pp. 241–246); August 7 (pp. 269–273); and September 17, 1787 (pp. 339–344), in The Constitutional Convention and the Formation of the Union, ed. Winton U. Solberg, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990)

Memorandum by Alexander Hamilton on the Constitution’s prospects, September 1787, and [Francis Hopkinson], “The New Roof,” Pennsylvania Packet, December 29, 1787—both in


**APRIL 23–25: Cultures of revolution**

25. “Almighty God hath created the mind free”: Christianity and the Revolution

26. The rights of women and of men


**APRIL 30–MAY 2: Post-colonial America (Research Essays Due)**

27. The tumultuous 1790s: The repercussions of international war

28. Recitation: The ‘revolution of 1800’: Was there an American nation?

Research essays due: Research essays must be posted to Sakai, under “Assignments,” by the start of class on Tuesday, April 30. See “Research Essays and Office Hours,” above, and the handout describing the essay assignment on Sakai, under “Resources,” for full details.


**Final Examination (May 15, 4:00 – 7:00 P.M.)**