

## History 387: Revolutionary America

Fall 2023

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:15

“The world will never be the same.” –Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Alexander Hamilton,” 2015

“Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss.” –Pete Townshend, “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” 1971

“The History of our Revolution will be one continued Lye from one End to the other.”

—John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 1790

Prof. Rob Harper, he/him/his

rharper@uwsp.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00-2:00, Wednesdays, 3:30-4:30, Thursdays, 1:00-2:00, or by appointment.

### Course Description and Learning Outcomes

History 387 introduces students to the study of North America in the era of the American Revolution (roughly 1763-1800). After completing the course, you will be able to:

- Describe key aspects of the history of revolutionary America
- Identify and interpret primary sources useful for studying revolutionary America
- Explain major ideas in the historiography of revolutionary America

### Required Texts

- Fenn, *Pox Americana* (PA), text rental
- Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History* (ARCH), text rental
- John Patrick Coby, *The Constitutional Convention of 1787*, required for purchase
- All other handouts, readings, etc. will be posted on Canvas.

### Contacting me

*Helping you learn is the most important and most rewarding part of my job.* If you have questions about the course, or want to improve your performance, please either visit me during office hours or contact me by email at [rharper@uwsp.edu](mailto:rharper@uwsp.edu) to make an appointment. Please include “History 387” in the subject line.

### Assignments and workload

To succeed in this class, you must attend and participate regularly, complete all assigned reading, and take effective notes on readings, lectures, and class discussions. Absences from class, either physical or mental, will bring down your grade. As with any three-credit course,

you should expect to spend *6-9 hours each week* on coursework outside of class. If you are worried about your progress, please contact me ASAP to discuss how to improve.

### **Critical reading and notetaking**

In a college-level history course, effective reading requires different approaches from those that may have worked for you in the past. For all materials in this course, ask yourself these questions:

- Who wrote this? When? For what audience? Why?
- How is this reading related to other things you've learned?
- What do you find most interesting, surprising, or challenging about this reading?
- What questions do you, as an individual, have about this topic? Is the reading answering them? What new questions does the reading make you think about?

Active reading and notetaking will enable you to remember much more, and for much longer, than rote memorization. For each assignment, take handwritten notes (during in-class work, you may refer to handwritten notes, not electronic ones). It usually works best to read one section, then quickly summarize it in a couple of sentences or a short list of key ideas, then move on to the next section. If possible, review your notes before class. For every hour of reading (or listening or viewing), spend no more than 5-10 minutes taking notes. Your notes are for your eyes only.

### **Reading journal**

Throughout the semester you will regularly write about assigned readings (and videos, podcasts, etc.) You will choose which assignments to write about, but you must submit at least ten in total, with at least three each in units 1, 2, and 4. In each unit, you will submit approximately one journal entry for every two reading assignments.

To complete each journal entry, you will write thoughtfully about the material for about 30 minutes. Specific guidelines will vary (and will be posted in Canvas), but in general you will:

1. Share your experience with the assigned material (your expectations, things you found interesting or challenging, and/or questions and concerns about the material).
2. Respond to specific questions provided in the assignment prompt.

In some cases you may not know the answers to the questions, or you may not understand everything in the material. That's okay: writing thoughtfully about it will earn full credit. I am especially interested in finding out what you think and how you feel about the assigned reading. You may find it helpful to start writing by summarizing what you read, but you will not earn credit unless you also share your thoughts about it and answer the assigned questions.

Journal entries are due the morning of the relevant class meeting. To accommodate unforeseen circumstances I will accept them up to 24 hours late with no penalty. After that, late journal entries will earn no more than half credit. No journal entries will be accepted after the end of the unit in which they are assigned.

### **Reacting to the Past: *The Constitutional Convention of 1787***

In the final unit of the course, you will take on the role of an actual participant in the framing of a new system of government. *The Constitutional Convention* is an immersive role-playing game in which each participant seeks to achieve individual and factional goals. You will read a variety of sources, complete short writing assignments, deliver speeches, and negotiate and strategize with other players (your classmates), who may or may not share your goals. To succeed, you will have to learn a great deal about eighteenth-century political ideas, the various factions at the Convention, and how the framers resolved their differences. Your unit grade will include the following components, scored according to how well you use the relevant source materials.

- Quizzes on assigned readings
- Two short papers (for most roles, these will total about three double-spaced pages each)
- The quality and persuasiveness of public speeches, and/or private negotiating
- A participation score that reflects your engagement in the game
- A short reflection paper reviewing your experience in the game
- Bonus points for achieving objectives specified in your role sheet

### **Critical review essay**

You will write a critical review essay (about 5 double-spaced pages) evaluating either: an article or book chapter assigned in unit 2, or a different scholarly article or book chapter that you choose, with my approval (if you choose this option, you must get my approval in writing at least one week before the deadline). Your essay must:

- Clearly explain the author's main argument, including the author's use of primary sources
- Critically evaluate that argument (this is your essay's thesis)
- Provide ample specific examples (paraphrased, not quoted) to support your assessment
- Discuss whether, and how, the article/chapter adds to our understanding of eighteenth-century North America
- Cite page numbers from the article/chapter in parentheses, as appropriate
- Be clearly written and free of technical errors

### **Final essay**

What should Americans know about the Revolution? At the start of the semester we looked at controversies surrounding the musical *Hamilton*, the 1619 Project, and the 1776 report, among others. Clearly, Americans disagree strongly about how to tell revolutionary American history.

For your final essay you must offer your own answer to this question, drawing on (and demonstrating) what you have learned this semester. You may sympathize more with one interpretation or another, but for this assignment you should offer your own unique take. In other words, you may NOT argue simply, “the 1776 Commission is right because...” or “the 1776 Commission is wrong because...” What would you recommend if you were appointed to such a commission yourself?

In about five double-spaced pages (not counting citations), you must:

- Explain what Americans should understand about revolutionary America
- Support your claims with specific examples from a wide range of course material
- Situate your argument within the context of both academic historiography AND recent public debates
- Cite all sources in Turabian-style footnotes
- Be clearly written and free of technical errors

### **Grading**

Participation and engagement:	10%
Short assignments:	10%
Reading journal:	20%
<i>Constitutional Convention</i> :	20%
Critical review essay:	20%
Final essay:	20%

### **Students with Disabilities**

I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Any student requesting such accommodation must first meet with UWSP Disability Services staff. That meeting should take place as early in the semester as possible. No accommodation will be granted until I receive and agree to a formal plan approved by Disability Services.

### **Academic Integrity**

Cases of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, will be formally reported following the policies laid out in UWSP's Student Academic Disciplinary Procedures. Plagiarism consists of submitting work created by someone else as your own. For more information on academic integrity, please ask me or consult [this brochure](#). Students found to have committed academic misconduct will receive an F for the course.

## **Course Outline**

*Specific assignment requirements and deadlines will be posted on Canvas.*

Unit 1, Sept. 5-21: The Revolution Today

Unit 2, Sept. 26-Oct. 19: A Revolutionary Continent

Unit 3, Oct. 24-Nov. 16: The Constitutional Convention

Oct. 26: Critical Review Essay due

Unit 4, Nov. 21-Dec. 14: The Turbulent Seaboard

Final essay due at the end of the final exam session: Wednesday, Dec. 20, 12:15 p.m.