The American War of Independence – the formative event in this nation’s history – gave birth to the modern world's first constitutional republic and fed a long struggle between the Revolution's twin ideals of republicanism and liberty. This course will consider the military campaigns as well as political and cultural influences in the revolutionary era, including Reformed Protestantism, English governmental traditions, and the imperial crisis. To provide a useful context for this discussion, the course will provide an overview of the progress of the American crisis from the French and Indian War through the Revolutionary War, the so-called “critical period,” and the formation of the new Constitution.

Generally, classes will be structured as a lecture and discussion. I expect students to attend class and to be prepared to participate in a discussion. I will not be taking regular attendance in this class, but attendance is in your interest; missing classes inevitably tends to hurt ones grade. Regular absences will be taken up by the professor. Exams will cover materials from lectures as well as the textbooks and readings. If you must miss a class, I suggest that you get notes from one of your colleagues. This class will, of course, be subject to the Honor Code.

Grades will be based upon a mid-term (37%), a final (50%), and questions (discussed below) (13%). (The professor reserves the right to modify these percentages on a case-by-case basis but will not do so to the detriment of a student.) Class participation can also assist a student’s grade. Any student who receives a “C-” or lower on the mid-term exam must schedule a meeting with the professor to discuss the exam and the class. Grading guidelines are posted to Blackboard.

The drop deadline for this class is March 15.

The textbooks for this class are:


The texts should be available in the bookstore, or you can obtain them on-line. (I recommend bookfinder.com, half.com, abebooks.com, and amazon.com). Make sure that you get the correct editions of Middlekauff and Brown. If you have difficulty locating a text, please let me know.

Other materials will be provided, posted on “Blackboard,” or placed on electronic reserve as needed. Only material listed as “Reading” is assigned; “Suggested Reading” and “Additional Reading” are listed for your benefit (and are certainly not a thorough or even balanced list of scholarship in the area). The reading is not perfectly spaced each day, so look ahead on the syllabus and plan your reading as necessary. Listed “Discussion Questions” are also for your benefit and may or may not be discussed in class.

**Questions Assignment:** Beginning with the second full week of class (January 28, 30, and February 1), once each week, by no later than 8:00 a.m. on the day of class, each student must post in the Blackboard Discussion Board for that week a question concerning the readings for that day. (The question can be submitted on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday for the readings for that day. With the exception of the week beginning March 11, when the mid-term is scheduled, a question must be submitted each week through the week of May 6.) The question might simply seek clarification of some point in the material. Preferably, the question should raise a broader matter of analysis or understanding and place the question in the context of the readings and the course. For example, one might ask of the readings for the first day:

If, as Wood argues, the general oppression of people inherent in a hierarchical system had to be eliminated (by the American Revolution) before more specific types of oppression could be addressed (e.g. oppression of blacks and women), wouldn’t we expect that the Revolution would be led, to a significant extent, by those who were particularly oppressed by hierarchy, i.e. people of a lower class or even religious dissenters? Does the extent to which the upper classes in America controlled the American Revolution undermine Wood’s thesis? Or does his thesis assume that the control of the upper class was something which developed after the Revolution itself, for example in the drafting of the Constitution?

A question and any background to understand its context should be no longer than a paragraph. Students should bring a copy of their questions to class. These questions will be graded and account for 13% of your grade. I encourage you to discuss questions on the readings with other students. As the semester proceeds, this may become a group project with students assigned to groups by the professor (in which case groups will change each week). Each group will be responsible for as many questions as there are members of the group. It will behoove you to meet to discuss these questions as a group: First, such a discussion will certainly improve the questions. Second, every member of the group will receive the same grade for the questions submitted by the group.

This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.
Students with a disability requiring special consideration: Hamilton College will make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please discuss it with me during the first two weeks of class. You will need to provide Allen Harrison, Associate Dean of Students (Elihu Root House; ext. 4021), with appropriate documentation of your disability.


Reading:


Discussion Questions:

How revolutionary is the Revolution? Compared to the French Revolution and the English Civil War?

What should we study about the Revolution?

Day 2: Friday, January 25

Reading:

Brown, *Major Problems*, Chpt. 2, pp. 27, 47-69


Suggested Reading:


Discussion Questions:

Were the colonials “British” at the end of the French & Indian War? What made one, or a people, “British” at this time?

Is class status and economic structure the best way to measure revolutionary changes?

Does the parent-child metaphor for British-American relations enlighten or obscure?

Day 3: Monday, January 28: Empire: up to and including the French and Indian War.
Reading:

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpts. 1 and 2 (52).

**Day 4: Wednesday, January 30**

Reading:


Suggested Reading:


Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

What were the seeds of the Revolution after the French & Indian War? (Are they only visible with hindsight?)

When did the Revolution occur? When did the Revolution become inevitable?

**Day 5: Friday, February 1: Stamp Act Crisis**

Reading:

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpts. 3-4.

Additional Reading:

**Discussion Questions:**

Why was the Stamp Act passed? What was the basis of colonial opposition?

What was the significance of the Declaratory Act? Why did the Rockingham Whigs support it?

What institutions supported colonial resistance?

**Day 6: Monday, February 4: Stamp Act Crisis**

**Reading:**


Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 5.

**Discussion Questions:**

What role did the difference in “republican virtue” and individual rights play at this time? When/how does this change in America? What is the significance of this?

**Day 7: Wednesday, February 6: 1767-1774: Prelude to Revolution**

**Reading:**

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 7.


**Suggested Reading:**


**Additional Reading:**


**Discussion Questions:**

When does war become inevitable? Why?
Day 8: Friday, February 8

Reading:

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 8, Chpt. 9, pp. 180-98.


Discussion Questions:

Did the colonists provide a rationale ideological basis for opposition to the Townshend duties? How much of the opposition was economic/social?

How central was the press in the American Revolution? Why?

Why did the island colonies in the West Indies not join the effort in opposition to British control? Why not Canada?

Day 9: Monday, February 11: 1774-1775: Coercion and Response

Reading:


Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

Was British initial response to non-importation and riots intentionally muted? Was there an alternative?

What was the significance of the Boston Massacre?

What was the significance of the Boston Tea Party?

Did the British unite colonies with essentially different views or did the colonists unite?

Day 10: Wednesday, February 13

Reading:

~ 6 ~


**Discussion Questions:**

Was there a British conspiracy against American liberties? If so, what was it? If not, how could the Americans be so mistaken? Did it matter?

What were the Intolerable (Coercive) Acts? Did they threaten other colonies?

What is significance of 1st Continental Congress?

**Day 11: Friday, February 15: 1775: The Coming of War: Lexington and Concord**

**Reading:**


Orders from General Gage to Colonel Smith:

Report of Massachusetts Provincial Congress:
http://www.faulkner.edu/academics/artsandsciences/socialandbehavioral/readings/hy/lexington.aspx

Massachusetts’ Depositions:
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/shots/concern.html

Report of Major Pitcairn:
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/revolution/account3_lexington.cfm

Report of Colonel Smith:
http://www.faulkner.edu/academics/artsandsciences/socialandbehavioral/readings/hy/lexington.aspx

Report of Lord Percy:

Report of General Gage (excerpt):
Diary of a British Subaltern Officer:  
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/amrev/shots/concord.html

Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

What was the “shot heard ‘round the world” and why did it matter? Why was the impact so great?

What was the impact of Lexington and Concord in England?

Could war have been averted at this time?

Who took up arms and why? Did they persevere and grow adamant at British actions or get weary and discouraged?

Day 12: Monday, February 18: 1775: Continental Congress and Independence

Reading:


Patrick Henry, *Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death* Speech (posted Blackboard).


Discussion Questions:

What was the significance of Henry’s (and others’) rhetoric against tyranny? What confidence can we have in the accuracy of Henry’s reported speech?

What influence did Bunker Hill have on the British?

Why did Canadians not rally to the American cause? What were the implications?

~ 8 ~
Day 13: Wednesday, February 20: Independence

Reading:


*Declaration of Independence* (w/ edits) (posted Blackboard).

*Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms* (posted Blackboard).

*Olive Branch Petition* (posted Blackboard).

Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

What determined support for independence or reconciliation among members of the Continental Congress in 1775-76?

Why was *Olive Branch* petition drafted as it was?

What was the impact of *Common Sense*? Why?

Characterize the differences in the Jefferson draft and Congressional Declaration of Independence.

Were there an American people in 1776? If so, what made them such?

Day 14: Friday, February 22: Military Developments: 1776-1777

Reading:

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 15.

Additional Reading:

~ 9 ~


**Discussion Questions:**

Why was New York defended in the summer of 1776? Why did it become the center of British controlled territory?

How culpable is Washington for the failures of 1776? 1777?

Was Charles Lee a traitor, incompetent, or both?

**Day 15: Monday, February 25**

**Reading:**

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 16.

**Additional Reading:**


**Discussion Questions:**

How, and why, did the British fail in the campaign of 1777? Why did Howe and Burgoyne fail to raise significant Tory support?

What is the impact of Saratoga in Britain? France?

Why did the militias fight for Gates?

**Day 16: Wednesday, February 27**

**Reading:**


**Discussion Questions:**
How do we evaluate the role of the militia in the Revolution? Given Washington’s concerns with the militia, why was it retained as the primary means of defense after the War?

Day 17: Friday, March 1: Expanded War and British Response

Reading:


Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

What did France hope to achieve through the Revolutionary War? Given French interests, did France enter the War too early or too late?

Discuss the outline of the French alliance. How did this differ from what the Americans initially hoped to achieve?

What do we take from the fact that the average American soldier was “poorer, more marginal, less well anchored in society,” B209, than the average citizen?

Why has Valley Forge taken on mythical proportions in American memory?

Day 18: Monday, March 4: Other Wars

Reading:


Additional Reading:


Day 19: Wednesday, March 6: Military Developments and a Southern War: 1778-1780

Reading:

Middlekauff, Glorious Cause, Chpt. 18.

Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

What were the implications of the partisan war in the South? Why did it rage with such ferocity?

Why did Clinton, Cornwallis and Stewart find so little loyalists support in the South?

How should we evaluate the militia in light of the southern and northern campaigns?

How close to collapse was the American cause in 1780? What were the primary problems the patriots faced?

Day 20: Friday, March 8: Military Developments and a Southern War: 1778-1780

Reading:

Middlekauff, Glorious Cause, Chpt. 19.

Suggested Reading:

Middlekauff, Glorious Cause, Chpt. 20.

Day 21: Monday, March 11: War at Sea (and Review)

Reading:

~ 12 ~
John Ferling, “‘We Have Occasioned a Good Deal of Terror’: The War at Sea” in Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) (electronic reserves).

Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

Did British action against “neutral rights” help or harm its war effort? How would this policy change with the end of the American Revolution?

Do the naval forces supporting the patriots have a significant influence on the war or is this more of an interesting diversion?

Day 22: Wednesday, March 13: Mid-term Exam

The examination will likely include multiple choice, short answer and an essay question (grammar and writing count). Topics can include anything from the class discussions or the reading assignments.

Day 23: Friday, March 15: Movie and discussion: Mary Silliman’s War.

Mary Silliman's War is an award-winning film on the American Revolution. The film relates the true story of a remarkable woman, whose husband, a patriot leader, was kidnapped from their home by a band of Tories. Left to fend for herself and their children as she sought her husband's release, Mary Silliman's story presents an important perspective on the War for Independence. It is based on the biography by Richard and Joy Day Buel, The Way of Duty (Norton, 1984).

SPRING BREAK

Day 24: Monday, April 1: International Conflict and Diplomacy

Reading:


**Additional Reading:**


**Discussion Questions:**

As historians, what else would you like to know to evaluate the varying claims about diplomatic failures and successes in the American Revolution?

Did the entry of France prolong the war or shorten it? What would have been the alternative?

**Day 25: Wednesday, April 3: Yorktown, Peace and Newburgh**

**Reading:**

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 22.


Peace Treaty of Paris, 1783 (posted Blackboard).

**Discussion Questions:**

Assess the importance of the Franco/American alliance? Did France get what it deserved?

Why did the British lose the War?

What did the British do wrong both in colonial administration and losing the war?

**Day 26: Friday, April 5: Mutinies and Discipline**

**Reading:**

~ 14 ~


Washington’s speech at Newburgh (posted Blackboard).


*Suggested Reading:*


*Additional Reading:*


**Discussion Questions:**

How serious a threat to the new republic was Newburgh? Why did it fail?

**Day 27: Monday, April 8: Articles of Confederation: Success and Failures**

**Reading:**


*Suggested Reading:*


**Additional Reading:**


**Discussion Questions:**

What were the successes and failings of the Articles of Confederation?

Were the differences in the union in the 1780s primarily sectional, class-based, religious, etc.?

What was the role of the Northwest Ordinance in ending slavery?

What was the threat that Shays’ Rebellion suggested?

Was the “Critical Period” critical or is this a reactionary rationalization?

**Day 28: Wednesday, April 10**

**Reading:**


Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison (January 30, 1787) (posted Blackboard).

**Additional Reading:**

~ 16 ~
Day 29: Friday, April 12

Reading:


Discussion Question:

Evaluate the successes and failures of the state governments as inheritors of the Revolution.

Day 30: Monday, April 15: Constitutional Convention

Reading:


Suggested Reading:


Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:


What were the bases of the Great Compromise and the slavery/commerce compromise? Relate these to the purposes of the Revolution.

~ 17 ~
What was the significance (and wisdom, or lack thereof) of making the Constitution dependent upon “the people”?

Why is the mythology of the Constitution’s history so important in America today?

What is the significance of sectional differences in the 1780s and as the Constitution is drafted? Are the larger fault-lines north-south or east-west?

**Day 31: Wednesday, April 17: Ratification of the Constitution**

**Reading:**


**Suggested Reading:**


**Additional Reading:**


**Discussion Questions:**

Why was ratification successful in the face of serious anti-federalist opposition? How serious was the risk of non-ratification?

What was the role of sectional, class and religious conflict in adoption of the constitution?

Is the Constitution a “sacred text” in America? Should it be? What does that mean?
Looking at the map of ratification, what factors seem to control support or opposition to the Constitution? Why does Georgia support?

Day 32: Friday, April 19: Loyalists

Reading:

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 21, pp. 563-78.


Suggested Reading

Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, Chpt. 21, pp 544-63

Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

What were patriot policies toward Loyalists? Were these wise? What else might have been done?

Did loyalists have an alternative?

Day 33: Monday, April 22: Native Americans

Reading:


Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

How did Indians’ participation affect the War? Were there other options (for the British, the Americans, the Natives)?

Day 34: Wednesday, April 24: African Americans and Slavery

Reading:


Additional Reading:


**Discussion Questions:**

How central should the “central paradox” of American history be to our study of the American Revolution?

How was the revolutionary spirit reflected in treatment of African Americans?

**Day 35: Friday, April 26: Religion and Religious Freedom**

**Reading:**


**Suggested Reading:**


**Additional Reading:**


**Discussion Questions:**

What role did religion play in the coming or resolution of the American Revolution?

What was the impact of the Revolution on religion in America? How does one evaluate the view of the “Founders” on questions of religious liberty?

Was religious liberty inevitable in a United States of America?
Day 36: Monday, April 29: Women and the Revolution

Reading:


Additional Reading:


Discussion Questions:

How did women’s roles change as a result of the American Revolution?

Day 37: Wednesday, May 1: Women and the Revolution (continued)

Reading:


Suggested Reading:


Day 38: Friday, May 3

Reading:


Day 39: Monday, May 6: Issues in the Historiography

Reading:

~ 22 ~

**Day 40: Wednesday, May 8**

**Reading:**

Morgan, *Challenge*, Chpts. 4-5.

**Suggested Reading:**


**Day 41: Friday, May 10**

**Reading:**

Morgan, *Challenge*, Chpts. 6-7.

**Day 42: Monday, May 13: Catch-up and Review**

**Reading:**

Selected Additional Readings on the Revolution:


