

# HISTORY 205: American History to 1865

## *Interpreting Early America: Myth and History*

**Professor  
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**Fall 2014**



Benjamin Franklin's suggestion for  
the Great Seal of the U.S. (1776)

**NOTE: This syllabus has been  
abridged to highlight the  
pedagogical approach.**

WELCOME to *Interpreting Early America: Myth and History*, a course that focuses our attention on the deep roots of "America" as we know it, from the First Nations who flourished across Turtle Island (a Native designation for North America) to the founding of the United States to the Civil War, an epic struggle over the nation's future. I want to help you succeed in this course! Feel free to drop by my office hours (or make an appointment) in order to discuss anything about the course.

### **BIG QUESTIONS**

Contrary to popular lore, historians are not encyclopedias of dates and names—not keepers of dusty lists. Historians do not simply describe past events but rather try to understand why things turned out the way that they did and also how the past helps us understand the present. Historians interpret a large number of sources from multiple perspectives to create narratives and explanations of the past. To study history is to enter into an ongoing discussion about the past and its meaning. Because historians expand their understanding by asking questions, I have organized this course around several big questions. These questions will suggest many other questions, few of which will have a single, simple answer. Nevertheless, historical interpretations do not boil down to mere "opinion"—they are rooted in evidence and logic—and I will require you to provide support for your interpretations in discussions, writing assignments, and exams.

*Overarching Questions:* How have prominent American myths both advanced and hindered freedom and equality, for which the United States claims to stand? How does your knowledge of early American history help you understand the present?

*Part 1:* What was life on Turtle Island like before the arrival of European colonizers? How and why did the First Nations of eastern North America lose most of their land by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century? How did First Nations resist colonization and manage to retain limited sovereignty—some control over their own fate?

*Part 2:* How and why did a group of colonies on the eastern edge of North America gain independence from the British Empire and create forms of representative government at the local, state, and national levels in the late 1700s? To what extent was this American Revolution based on material interests? To what extent was it based on democratic principles? To what extent were these interests and principles fulfilled, and for whom?

*Part 3:* Why did the states of the lower and middle South attempt to secede from the United States in 1860–1861? How and why did the remaining northern and "border" states fight a civil war that ultimately preserved the federal Union while dismantling the institution of slavery? What roles did African Americans themselves play in destroying slavery, and to what extent were their hopes achieved?

The course website (see below) includes additional questions for each part of the course as well as "essential questions" for every day of class. You should use these questions to help focus your attention and to guide your note-taking and studying throughout the semester.

## ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND GENERAL EDUCATION

In addition to evaluating your understanding of the big questions above, I will assess your ability to:

1. Think like a historian, with attention to context, multiple perspectives, and complex causation.
2. Read and interpret primary sources (documents from the time period being studied).
3. Explain and evaluate historical interpretations and arguments.
4. Express and support historical arguments in public discussion and in writing.

This course fulfills the Humanities General Education requirement. The questions and skills above reflect the General Education objectives for the Humanities, which state that all graduates should be able to:

1. Describe the humanities' unique ways of understanding major events and movements in Western and world civilizations.
2. Critically examine a range of literary, philosophical, and other cultural texts produced by those movements.
3. Articulate individual and social values within cultures and the implications of decisions made on the basis of those values.
4. Analyze and produce complex forms of expression.

## REQUIRED RESOURCES

- Camilla Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* (Hill & Wang, 2005)
- Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution* (Modern Library, 2002)
- Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War was Over* (Vintage, 2008)
- Fall 2014 Coursepack Bundle (Available at the Phoenix Bookstore, this bundle includes a spiral-bound *Historical Documents Reader*—labeled HDR on the assignment schedule—and a packet of *Class Outlines*, which I recommend that you organize in a 3-ring binder.)
- Miscellaneous Readings (to be accessed from the course website via D2L)

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

**Attendance and Participation:** Good attendance will help you earn points here, but to earn an “AB” or “A” in this category, you must participate regularly in whole-class discussions. **10 Points**

**Debate Preparation:** The schedule below includes 5 “Debating History” sessions where we will debate a key historical issue. To prepare for each of these sessions, you will submit a debate preparation paragraph using the course website. Each submission is worth 2 points. **10 Points**

**In-Class Assignments:** Eight times during the semester, I will collect brief in-class assignments, usually based on small-group work. Although you cannot make up these assignments, I will drop your lowest score. Each assignment is worth 1 point. **7 Points**

**Practice Exam:** The practice exam is due in class on Sept. 16. I will pass out a paper copy in class prior to the due date, but it will also be posted on the course website. If you cannot make it to class this day, you may submit your exam via email before class begins. **3 Points**

**Midterm Exams:** There will be 2 midterm exams worth 20 points each. Both midterms will focus on “For and Against” essays (see the website for details). I will post your scores on D2L and will provide feedback collectively to the class. You may visit me in my office to see your exams. **40 Points**

**Final Exam:** The written final exam will focus on Part 3 of the course but will also include a cumulative element. (University policy does not allow me to customize the final exam time for your personal convenience, unless you will have 3 or more exams on the same day.) **30 Points**

## COURSE SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

### **Part 1: THE FIRST NATIONS OF TURTLE ISLAND ENCOUNTER EUROPEANS**

Sept. 2 — 1.1: Introduction: Interpreting Early America: Myth and History

Sept. 4 — 1.2: Creation Stories and Culture

Sept. 9 — 1.3: Turtle Island: The “Indians’ Old World”

Sept. 11 — 1.4: European Exploration and the Ideology of Conquest

Sept. 16 — 1.5: Tsenacomoco before Jamestown (practice exam due in class)

Sept. 18 — 1.6: The Founding of the Virginia Colony

Sept. 23 — 1.7: Pocahontas, John Smith, and John Rolfe

Sept. 25 — 1.8: Debating History: Did Pocahontas Help Her People?

Sept. 30 — 1.9: African Slavery and White Freedom in Colonial America

Oct. 2 — EXAM 1

### **Part 2: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND THE CREATION OF THE UNITED STATES**

Oct. 7 — 2.1: The Tangled Roots of the American Revolution

Oct. 9 — 2.2: Republicanism and the American Revolution

Oct. 14 — 2.3: Debating History: What Was the American Revolution Really About?

Oct. 16 — 2.4: Making Republican Constitutions

Oct. 21 — 2.5: The Ratification Debate and the Bill of Rights

Oct. 23 — 2.6: The Democratization of the American Republic?

Oct. 28 — 2.7: First Nations and the United States: Removal Policy and Resistance

Oct. 30 — 2.8: Debating History: How Democratic Was the Founding of the U.S.?

Nov. 4 — EXAM 2

### **Part 3: SLAVERY AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR**

Nov. 6 — 3.1: Southern Slavery, Northern Economic Development, and Sectional Conflict

Nov. 11 — 3.2: Middle-Class Reform Movements and Antislavery

Nov. 13 — 3.3: Westward Expansion, Slavery, and Political Breakdown

Nov. 18 — 3.4: Abraham Lincoln and the Problem of Slavery

Nov. 20 — 3.5: The Secession Crisis and the Coming of the Civil War

Nov. 25 — 3.6: Debating History: What Role Did Slavery Play in the Coming of the Civil War?

Dec. 2 — 3.7: Emancipation, Confederate Defeat, and Union Victory

Dec. 4 — 3.8: Reconstruction: The “Unfinished Revolution”

Dec. 9 — 3.9: Debating History: How is Early American History Relevant Today?

Dec. 16 — Final Exam at 8 AM