

## HISTORY 311: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY ERA

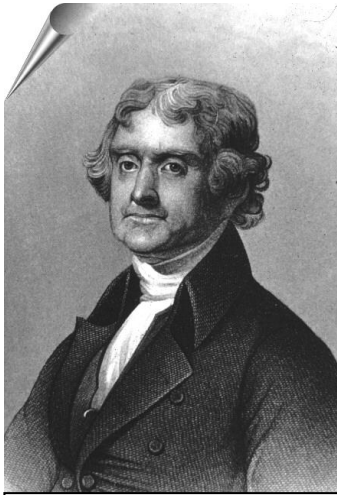
Professor Billy Smith bgs@montana.edu

Fall 2011

Office: Wilson 2-166

Office Hours: Monday 1-3:00; Friday 9-10

This course focuses on the social and political history of Americans during the second half of the eighteenth century. It deals primarily with British America during the late colonial period, the political causes and consequences of the American Revolution, the question of whether the conflict was merely a War for Independence or truly a "Revolution," the Constitutional Convention and the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. In all of these topics, the actions and experiences of a variety of groups of Americans—including white males, women, African Americans, and Native Americans—will be explored.



Thomas Jefferson (white leader)

Because it was such a fundamental event in American history and because its "meaning" (however that is interpreted) is so often alluded to by Americans, studying the American Revolution can provide us with a deep understanding of the country and times in which we live. Are we a radical and revolutionary country in our heritage or a conservative one without a true revolutionary past? Are we a democracy, a republic, or neither one? Why? What is the meaning of the claim that "all men (or people) are created equal" and that everyone enjoys the right to the "pursuit of happiness?" In addition, the lives of women, blacks, and Indians as well as white men underwent significant transformations during this period. The history of the Revolutionary Era should shed light on these and a host of other important issues relevant to our own lives.

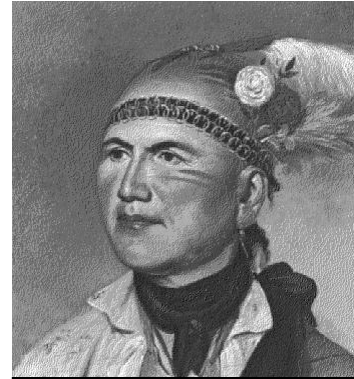
This class may be somewhat different from other classes that you have taken in that it weights the assigned readings, class discussions, and especially student participation in the class quite heavily. You need to read carefully and outline the assignments and to participate in weekly discussions of them. This means that you **must** keep up with the weekly reading; otherwise, you will not be able to engage in discussions. You should make this commitment if you want to benefit fully from this class. Discussions of the readings will occur once each week, generally on Wednesday. In addition, each student will participate in a "group project" which focuses on a specific historical issue from the period. The group will present its findings orally to the rest of the class.

Since this class depends heavily on student participation and interaction, attendance is expected at every meeting except for such extraordinary reasons as your own death (or a completely uncontrollable urge to ski). As adults, the decision about class attendance is up to you.

However, scholarly studies (and our own experience) have shown that students who attend class regularly learn much more and earn, on average, more than one grade higher than those who attend erratically. We encourage you to attend class regularly, even on perfect ski days!

**Readings:** The assigned readings are indispensable and perhaps the **most important** component to understanding the course. The best readers are not passive, but they interact with the readings by taking notes and asking questions about the author's arguments and evidence. Most importantly, they take notes after each chapter that they read. Without a set of notes on the readings, it will be very difficult for you to perform very well in class discussions or on the essays. Taking careful notes also helps you learn the material much more effectively.

**Lectures:** The lectures will present one interpretation of American history, but it is not the only possible interpretation, nor necessarily the "right" interpretation. The lectures are no more "definitive" than are the books you will read. Listen to them critically, ask questions, and take notes. Approach them not as the word of God to be copied down in note form and then regurgitated in papers and exams (although it is crucial to take notes if you actually hear God speak). The lectures are simply one more ingredient in your own development of an interpretation of the Revolutionary era.



*Joseph Brant (Iroquois leader)*

**Class Discussions:** Class discussions are vital to the course because they make you take an active part in your education. Learning to express your ideas orally is an essential part of becoming an educated person. Moreover, the more you participate, the more you will both enjoy and learn from the course. To encourage you to come to discussions prepared to participate, 50 points (17% of your course grade) is based on your participation in discussions. There may be an occasional "surprise" quiz, which will count as part of the discussion grade. Your class attendance and your asking questions when other groups give oral presentations also will count as part of your discussion grade. If you attend class regularly but do not participate in discussions, you will receive, at best, a "C" for class discussion. Equally important, your discussion grade will depend on the quality more than the quantity of the ideas you express. If you are shy or otherwise have difficulty participating in discussions, please see me in my office during the initial weeks of class and I will fashion an alternative grading assignment. Indeed, please see me at anytime during the semester if you are having problems in the class.

**Group Projects and Individual Essays Analyzing Primary Documents:** Besides the regularly assigned readings, you will be required to read one or two additional pieces which contain "primary documents" written by a contemporary during the Revolutionary Era. Each student will write one paper (maximum 4-pages, double-spaced, typewritten) analyzing the documents. In addition, each student will be part of a group (or "Revolutionary Cell") of students, all of whom read the same document. Each group will make a 15 to 20 minute (maximum) presentation to the class about the document. The group will need to meet once or twice outside class to decide how they want to present the material. They are free to present it by any means they feel is appropriate, educational, imaginative and/or humorous, as long as they interpret the material for the rest of the class. The essays are due on the day of your group's presentation. Because the class is arranged around the presentations, a late paper will be penalized one grade

for each day it is late. Late presentations in class unfortunately are not permitted. The group presentation in class will count 10 points (~3% of your course grade), while your essay will count 30 points (10% of your course grade). The topics and detailed instructions for group presentation are indicated on a separate handout.

**Short “Reflections on Films” Essay:** A 2-page essay of your reflections about two films that will be shown in class. It counts 10 points.

**Mid-Term Essay:** A mid-term essay will count 100 points (33.3% of your course grade). You will receive several questions at least one week in advance of the exam. We will select one of the questions for you to answer on the day of the exam.

**Final Exam:** Three or four essay questions, from which we will select one or two, will be given to you one week before the final exam. The essay is designed to test your ability to work with and think critically about the materials of the course. This essay will count 100 points (33.3% of your course grade). The final exam will occur in our regularly scheduled classroom.

<b>Grading Summary:</b>	<u>POINTS</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
Class discussion	50	16.7%
Paper Interpreting Primary Document	30	10.0%
Oral presentation in class	10	3.3%
Short “Reflections on Films” (2 pages)	10	3.3%
Mid-Term Essay Exam	100	33.3%
Final exam essay(s)	<u>100</u>	<u>33.3%</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>

**D2L:** Handouts and required essays will be available though Desire to Learn on the MSU website: <https://ecat.montana.edu/>

**Required Books: (all available at bookstore)**

1. David Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*
2. Alfred Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution*
3. Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*
4. Billy G. Smith, ed., *Life in Early Philadelphia*
5. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*.

**Required Essays:** available on D2L: <https://ecat.montana.edu/>

6. Thomas Paine, “The Age of Reason” (excerpts)
7. Ira Berlin, “The Revolution in Black Life”
8. Colin Calloway, “Corn Wars and Civil Wars: The American Revolution Comes to Indian Country”
9. Jon Butler, “Does the First Amendment Separate Church and State?”

## SCHEDULE FOR Fall 2011

Week 1 (8/29-9/2): **Introduction: Colonial America**

Reading: Begin reading for Week 2

Week 2 (9/5-9/9): **British Imperial Acts & American responses**

Monday, Sept 5: Labor Day Holiday—no classes

Friday Discussion: *Paul Revere*, Introduction and pages 1-173 & 281-295

Week 3 (9/12-9/16): **Urban “Mechanics”**

Wednesday Discussion: *Liberty Tree*, chapter 1 (Mechanics)

Week 4 (9/19-9/23): **Rebels in the Streets**

Wednesday Discussion: *Liberty Tree*, chapters 2 and 8

Week 5 (9/26-9/30): **Massacre & Common Sense**

Monday **Group Presentation: Boston Massacre**

Wednesday Discussion: (1) Paine, "Common Sense" (2) Paine, "Age of Reason" (excerpts) **and** (3) *Liberty Tree*, chapter 6

Week 6 (10/3-10/7): **Declaration of Independence**

Monday: Group Presentations (1) Poverty and (2) Equality & Justice

Wednesday Discussion: *Liberty Tree*, chapter 5

Week 7 (10/10-10/15)

**Exam**

Week 8 (10/17-10/21) **The Revolutionary War**

No reading assignment

Friday: Group Presentation on Wartime Experiences

Week 9 (10/24 – 10/28) **Loyalists and African Americans**

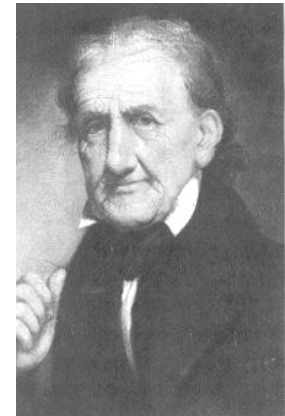
Monday: Group Presentation on Loyalists

Wednesday Discussion: (1) Berlin, "The Revolution in Black Life" and (2) Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, chapter 8

Week 10 (10/31 – 11/4) **African Americans in the Revolutionary Era**

No reading assignment

Wednesday: Group Presentation on (1) "Runaways" and (2) "Prisoners"



George Hewes, Boston shoemaker



Slave woman, name unknown

**Week 11 (11/7-11/11): Women in the Revolutionary Era**

Monday Discussion: Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, Intro & chapters 1-4, 6, 9, & 10

Wednesday: Group Presentations on "Two Women" and "Marriage & Death"

Friday: Veteran's Day Holiday

**Week 12 (11/14 – 11/18) Women in the Revolutionary Era**

No reading assignment

Wednesday and Friday: Required films about American Revolutionary Era

**Week 13 (11/21-11/25): Women in the Revolutionary Era**

Monday All Students: Short 2-page paper Due

Thanksgiving Holiday: Wednesday & Friday No class

**Week 14 (11/28 – 12/2) Indians in the Revolutionary Era**

Wednesday Discussion: (1) Calloway, "Corn Wars and Civil Wars" and (2) Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, chapter 7

Friday: Group Presentation on "Native Americans"

**Week 15 (12/5-12/9): U.S. Constitution & the New Nation**

Wednesday Discussion: Young, *Liberty Tree*, chapter 4; **and** Butler, "Does the First Amendment Separate Church and State?" (only 2 pages)

Final Exam: Thursday, December 15, 8-9:50 am