

## HTS 4005 – Seminar in American History: The American Revolution

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Office hours: Wednesday, 1-3 p.m.  
or by appointment

### **Purpose:**

This seminar offers an introduction to the literature of the era of the American Revolution, which remains one of the most enduring and engaging sub-fields in American history. Along the way, the seminar will also focus on the way historians do their work, paying special attention to the skills essential to the historian's craft – careful and analytical reading, clear and graceful writing, and effective and engaging speaking – all of which are quite valuable in almost any professional endeavor.

A seminar is not a spectator sport. When it works well, a seminar is a student-driven discussion in which the instructor sets the basic framework and moderates the conversation but otherwise leaves students to exchange and debate ideas with each other. Each student must therefore assume responsibility for the success of the seminar by coming to each class meeting well prepared for taking an active part in the discussion, having already read the assigned works with attention to both the specific information and the broader ideas and implications that come from the readings. Coming to class without having done the requisite preparation or without having the week's readings in hand will constitute being counted absent for the day.

To help facilitate that preparation, each student will have an assignment for one of the days indicated by \*\* on the syllabus. Selected students will be asked to prepare brief, two- or three-page papers on the assigned readings, and those papers will be submitted to the class BuzzPort site *no later than 9 p.m. on the Tuesday* prior to the class meeting on Wednesday. All other students will be expected to submit at least one discussion question and one example of good (or bad) scholarly writing to the class BuzzPort site *no later than 9 a.m. on Wednesday* of the class meeting. The brief essays and questions will help shape the afternoon's discussion. The goal, ultimately, is to create an intellectual environment in which we can all engage in informed analysis of the history of the Revolution and its consequences.

### **Readings:**

(Note: The books listed below are available for purchase at Engineer's Bookstore or through an online vendor. Additional short selections from other works will be available online through J-STOR or on informal reserve in the HTS Student Reading Room, 219 DM Smith, where they can be read or taken out briefly to be photocopied.)

Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers*

Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and their World*

Woody Holton, *Forced Founders*

Pauline Maier, *American Scripture*

Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*

Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution*

Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*

## Course Requirements:

There are **three written exercises**, two of which are brief: the **overview exam** based on Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution*, on January 17, and the **2-3 page paper** described above. The major written product for each student will be a **research paper**, around 20 pages in length and based on primary and secondary sources. It is important to begin thinking of a topic, however tentative, early on in order to explore research possibilities and locate appropriate resources. I will meet with each student on February 7 to help define the topic and to suggest research strategies, and I will be available for subsequent meetings as needed. Please note the deadline for submitting an initial outline and bibliography (February 21). The final draft of the paper must be submitted in hard copy to the HTS office (110 DM Smith) by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 2.

During the last several weeks of the course, students will be divided into groups for two sorts of **presentations**: first, biographical perspectives on several of the leading lights of the Revolutionary era, which will supplement the assigned reading in Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers*; and second, student research projects. In both cases, each presenter will provide a brief reading assignment (less than 50 pages) for other members of the class.

Because a seminar is dependent on student participation, the attendance policy is simple: no one is to miss any class except in the most critical circumstances, such as your own serious injury or illness or death in the immediate family. Otherwise, any absence will result in a reduction of the final grade by as much as one grade group per missed class.

The final grade for the semester will be based on the following considerations:

- Participation (submission of preliminary questions, active engagement in discussion, group presentation) – 40%
- Short paper and overview exam – 10% each
- Research paper – 40%

In this, as in all HTS courses, the provisions of the Georgia Tech Honor Code will apply to all student work, and violations will result in appropriate sanctions.

## Class Schedule

Jan. 10 – Introduction

Jan. 17 – Overview exam on Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution* pp. 3-88

Jan. 24\*\* – Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (HTS reserve);  
Edmund Morgan, *Prologue to Revolution* (HTS reserve)

Jan. 31\*\* – Pauline Maier, *American Scripture*;  
Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence* (handout);  
Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (HTS reserve)

Feb. 7 – Individual meetings on research projects

Feb. 14\*\* – Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, pp. vii-142;  
Barbara Clark Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution” (*William and Mary Quarterly*, J-STOR);  
John Shy, “Hearts and Minds: The Case of ‘Long Bill’ Scott” (HTS reserve)

- Feb. 21\*\* – Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and their World*;  
Gregory Nobles, “Revolution in the Neighborhood” (HTS reserve)  
(**Research project outlines due**)
- Feb. 28\*\* – Woody Holton, *Forced Founders*;  
Rhys Isaac, “Evangelical Revolt” (*William and Mary Quarterly*, J-STOR)
- Mar. 7\*\* – Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*;  
Garry Nash, “Could Slavery Have Been Abolished?” (HTS reserve)
- Mar. 14\*\* – Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution*, pp. 91-166;  
Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, pp. 180-207;  
Alfred Young, “How Radical was the Revolution?” (HTS reserve);  
Allan Kulikoff, “Was the American Revolution a Bourgeois Revolution?”  
(HTS reserve)

### **SPRING BREAK**

- Mar. 28 – Biography presentation I: Benjamin Franklin and George Washington  
Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, Preface and Chapters 3 and 4  
Additional readings assigned by presenters
- Apr. 4 – Biography presentation II: Thomas Jefferson and John Adams  
Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, Chapters 2, 5, and 6  
Additional readings assigned by presenters
- Apr. 11 – Student research presentation I  
Additional readings assigned by presenters
- Apr. 18 – Student research presentation II  
Additional readings assigned by presenters
- Apr. 25 – Student research presentation III  
Additional readings assigned by presenters