Concepts of Revolutionary Freedom in the Americas

When the United States declared its independence from Britain in 1776, a radical experiment in democracy and nation building began. A disparate, polyglot, multi-ethnic group of people created a new nation, whereas “Old World” nations were generally based on homogeneity in language and culture, a shared ancestry, and a longstanding sense of belonging to a specific region. As the United States began to tell the story of a new nation built on supposedly rational ideas of tolerance, equality, and property rights, the voices that came to the fore and sustained the historical record were decidedly not so. Yet the old worlds that collided to create this new nation, as through much of the New World, had other ideas. While the United States republic is in many ways a text, the narrative of a democratic experiment, it was not penned exclusively by the “founding fathers.” The influences of Europeans, Native Americans, Haitians, and other people of African descent are also integral to this exceptional story and its radical manifestations of freedom. Through a hemispheric, transnational, or Atlantic World lens, this class constructs a different archive of revolutionary freedom in the Americas and strives to include all of the old worlds that made this one new.

Required Texts:


**Expectations and Outcomes:**

In this seminar, I expect you to draw on the skills and insights of years one through three to produce historical work that is original and significant. For graduate students, this work should make a unique contribution to the field.

Class discussion and participation are integral to developing these ideas, thus attendance, preparation, and engagement are very important.

**Sources**

Students will add to their own knowledge base through active directed reading focused on primary documents and relevant secondary sources.

We will practice extensive and sophisticated engagement with primary sources, both in print documents and at an archival level.

Students will study with the historiography of the field, understand the different methods and schools of thought secondary sources draw from, and engage them directly in their own research and writing.

**Writing and Collaboration**

The seminar paper will illustrate development of a complex and sustained historical argument, properly supported with evidence from primary and secondary sources.

The presentation of that argument will come together in clear, correct and compelling prose.

The research process will be properly documented through footnotes and bibliography.

Research and argument will develop through engagement with peers in discussion of both source material and the process of writing history.

Research presentations will foster positive and effective discussion of other students’ research through constructive critique as well as facility in discussing your own project.
Grades will be determined according to the following mathematical breakdown:

Dialogic Response Papers 10%
Critical Article Analysis 10%
Critical Positioning Essay 15%
Collaborative Presentation 15%
A.P.C. 15%
Seminar Paper 35%

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

**Dialogic Response Papers**—Each week you will write a response to the reading or a commentary on a classmate’s response paper. These will constitute the majority of your public writing for this course. Response papers should each be 1-2 pages (typed, double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12-point font) and commentaries should be a thoughtful paragraph. You will post each response paper on the course blog prior to the class period in which it is due; you will post a commentary on someone else’s response by 9PM the day after class. Bring one hard copy of each response paper and commentary to class to receive credit for completing it on time, and once I return this copy to you, save it for resubmission at midterm and at the end of the semester. Criteria for response papers and commentaries will be explained on a separate handout. 10% of final grade.

**Critical Article Analysis**—Choosing one of the journal articles or book chapters from the syllabus that most interests you and that will help focus the research question for your seminar paper, you will complete an extensive outline of that article. Specific instructions will be distributed. 10% of final grade.

**Critical Positioning Paper**—Also known as a literature review, the critical positioning paper summarizes and paraphrases the arguments of other historians pertaining to your research question. It also explains your contribution, challenge, or refinement of that question. This comprises a draft of your seminar paper that covers secondary sources. Specific instructions will be distributed. 15% of your final grade.
Collaborative Presentation—Presentations will take place throughout the semester. Essentially, you work with a classmate to provide the key points about the week’s topic and lead discussion. Ideally, you will introduce primary sources that you plan to address in your seminar paper. Specific guidelines will be provided on a separate handout. 15% of final grade.

Attendance, preparation, and contributions to class discussion (A.P.C.)—This course will be run as a seminar, which means that all of us, together, will create the substance of the course based on our engagement with course readings and our willingness to share our ideas publicly. Every seminar member’s informed participation is vital if our discussions are to be as rich and stimulating as possible. A.P.C. will be assessed by attendance, attentiveness, participation in the dialogue, and quizzes to test your understanding of the reading. 15% of final grade.

Evaluation of attendance: According to university policy, you are allowed one absence with no penalty. I strongly advise you to save this absence for unavoidable conflicts or illnesses because any absence will negatively affect your attendance, preparation, and contributions (“A.P.C.”) grade. Note that I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences except in extreme cases (e.g., hospitalization or extended serious illness).

Evaluation of preparation and contributions: The primary evidence of your preparation for class discussion will be the quality of your oral contributions and the posts you make to the class blog before or after class. “Quality” contributions are characterized by frequent reference to details and specific passages in the readings as well as by the ability to identify the larger questions raised by a given reading; thus, you cannot contribute meaningfully if you have not read attentively each day’s assignment prior to class. With this in mind, your oral contributions to class will be evaluated for the extent to which they reflect a careful reading of daily assignments; enhance our collective understanding of important issues and ideas in the readings; and build constructively on the contributions of other participants. Please note that monopolizing class discussion will NOT earn you a higher "A.P.C." grade. Quality, not quantity, of participation is what matters.

Overall evaluation of attendance, preparation, and contributions. Assuming you miss no class meetings this semester, maintaining an attentive, engaged, and respectful presence in class (that is, meeting the basic expectations of a seminar-style class) will earn you a 2.5 for this portion of your final grade, provided that your oral contributions and/or your daily in-class journals reflect consistent preparation for class. Regular, thoughtful, and helpful contributions to class discussion have the potential to raise your “a.p.c.” grade to a 3.0, a 3.5, or even a 4.0 if your contributions
are truly outstanding. Texting, tweeting, or using any electronic device results in a zero A.P.C. for that class.

**Seminar Paper**—The final paper will focus on reconstructing an archive of revolutionary freedom that views the Americas in an original way or challenges previously-held assumptions. Details and steps to complete this assignment will be provided each week of class. 35% of final grade.

**OFFICE HOURS**

Please come see me with your problems, questions, and suggestions. I strongly encourage every student to make an appointment for a visit early in the semester and to return throughout the semester.

**LATE WORK, RE-WRITE POLICY, PLAGIARISM**

Extensions for written work are not granted except in cases of illness or other serious contingencies. Extensions are not granted because of computer malfunction, heavy workload, failure to bring the assignment to class, etc. Late work will be penalized when the final course grade is calculated; depending on the level of severity, that grade could be reduced by one level (A- to B+, for example) or more. You are generally better off submitting a good paper late rather than a hastily-composed one on time. All incidents of plagiarism are serious. Extended, conscious acts of plagiarism may result in failure of the assignment or failure of the course.

**PROTOCOL**

No electronic devices are permitted in class. If you use a device to text or communicate during class, you will be asked to leave the class for the remainder of that period. Pencils or papers and notebooks and the class readings will be the only items you have on your desk.

**SCHEDULE**

Please note that the following schedule of readings is not definitive or complete. We can add primary documents throughout the semester and the order of readings might be altered. Also, additional secondary readings could be required.
Week 1: *Introduction: The Enlightenment and Its Exceptions*

Handouts to be distributed in class.

http://www.nyhistory.org/exhibitions/revolution-the-atlantic-world-reborn

Week 2: *Navigating the Turns: Atlantic, Hemispheric, and Transnational Histories*


Week 3: *American Exceptionalism and the Democratic Experiment*

Lynd. *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*

Week 4: *Early American Revolutionary Thought*

Continue Lynd.


**Week 5: Agrarian Ideals and Agrarian Justice**


**Week 6: That Other Revolution...**


Excerpts from:


*Additional Readings* (not in coursepack—searchable through JSTOR and Project Muse)


**Week 7: Revolutionary Loyalty**

Begin Gilbert, *Black Patriots*

Primary Sources TBA

**DUE: Critical Article Outline**

**Week 8: Freedom and Belonging**

Continue Gilbert, *Black Patriots*

**Week 9: The Right of First Occupancy**

Dennis, *Seneca Possessed*.
**Week 10:** Liberal Theory Revisited

**DUE:** Critical Positioning Essay


---

**Week 11: Research Week**

This week is reserved for an archival trip to be announced; it might, however, occur earlier in the semester and be switched with one of the preceding week's topics.

---

**Week 13: Mini-Conference**

For information on Western’s Mental Health Services visit [http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/](http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/).