Course Description

This course on Revolutionary and Early National America employs a thematic approach to assess the American Revolution and its legacy, the early national origins of American culture, society, and politics. What did the authors of the Declaration of Independence mean when they declared that “all men are created equal”? What was the purpose of the Declaration, and how was it as much an event as a document? Has its meaning evolved since 1776?

To what extent was the War for Independence a revolutionary war? Who fought, why, and what were the consequences of warfare in American communities? What was the relationship between the war and the American Revolution?
How and to what extent did the United States Constitution settle the Revolution? How did it attempt to create a “more perfect union”? What were (and are) its legacies?

How did African Americans, particularly free blacks in the urban North, experience Independence once it was achieved in the Revolution? If the Revolution ended slavery north of the Mason-Dixon Line, why didn’t the logic of liberation abolish slavery throughout the republic?

Was early national America a place of Reason or one of Sensibility? Was it a world filled with optimism or pessimism about the potential success of a republican society? And where did women fit into that world, public and private? How was early national America “gendered,” and what has been the legacy of that prescribed order of “Founding Fathers,” “Republican Mothers,” “rakes,” and “coquettes”? Were women “citizens”?

What did it mean to be an “American”? What was the nature of national identity in the Early Republic? How did nationalism emerge, and how was it practiced? How and why did early national scientists and humanists imagine that America was “Nature’s Nation”? Did the American landscape define America’s unique identity, and where did American’s Native people fit into nationalist histories and plans?

We will address these and other questions through five two-week units during the term.

Format and Requirements

This course will combine lecture with discussion, often weaving the two together to make class sessions interactive. Brief lectures will generally build upon, not simply recapitulate, readings. Students are responsible for completing reading and written assignments by the time indicated on the syllabus. These assignments will often provide the basis for class activity; students are expected to attend all class meetings and participate actively.

Note: because of the critical role of discussion in this course, excessive absence from class (4 or more absences) will result in a failing grade. Except in extraordinary circumstances, no work will be accepted late. Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course. Grades will be assigned according to students' performance on the following:

- Quality of class participation (about 10%).
- 7 short (approximately 750 words) essays (about 90%).
- There will be no exams.
Essay Policies
Students are required to write seven essays throughout the term, from among the essay topics provided for each week. All students must write essays for the weeks 2 and 10. For weeks 3 through 9, students must complete 5 additional essays. Students therefore may skip some essay assignments during the term, though they may not skip more than two weeks in a row. You may write additional essays (all 10 if you choose), in which case your essay grade will be based on the best seven essays submitted. Academic integrity is important. I will hold all students to the UO “Standards of Conduct.” Plagiarism will not be tolerated; all work must be your own, written for this class.

Required Readings:

These books are available at the University of Oregon Bookstore. Additional primary source readings will be available on Blackboard.

Syllabus
Prologue: The Revolution and the Battle over American History and Identity
The Revolution is a unique event in America’s historical consciousness—not only did it create the United States, but nearly everyone, across the political spectrum over two centuries—believes it was a “good thing.” Why? How has the history, public memory, and myth of the Revolution been deployed in the United States?

Week 1
January 4: Introduction.
Reading: runaway slave notice (Blackboard).
January 6: The mythic Revolution and its sanctifying power.  
Reading: Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes*, ix-x, 1-97.

**Essay Assignment:** In a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) explain and assess the title of Jill Lepore's book, and its implications for understanding the American Revolution and its long-term legacy. Due in class January 6.

**Unit 1: Declaring Independence**
This unit will examine the Declaration of Independence—one of the United States' sacred texts—as an event as well as a document. What were the Declaration's origins? What did the document “declare”? How was it “published,” that is, in the 18th-century sense of the word, *publicized*? Indeed, why do some scholar see it as much a performance as a text? How and why has the meaning of the Declaration changed since 1776?

**Week 2**


**Essay Assignment:** In a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) assess the transformation of the Declaration of Independence of 1776 into the Declaration of Independence as it was subsequently enshrined in American sacred ideology. Due in class January 13.

**Unit 2: The War for Independence/Revolutionary War**
It is worth noting that the American Revolution was hardly a sanitized, bloodless event; it was a war that cost the lives of thousands, destroyed and expropriated great amounts of property, and profoundly unsettled those who lived through it. This unit will examine the war, studying its origins, consequences, and effects, not only (or primarily) in military terms...
but to understand its social and political history. Was the war gendered? Was it fought for home rule or to determine who should rule at home? Was it a civil war? Was this anti-colonial war fought also to promote the colonial ambitions of the new nation? How did it affect American Indians? Did the war and military service alter social conditions in America? Through readings, discussion, and film, we will probe these questions.

**Week 3**


January 20: The War for Independence;

**Essay Assignment:** Despite the glorious images we have of citizen-soldiers rising as one to contest the tyranny of Great Britain in the War for Independence, in fact many Americans were reluctant patriots, neutral, or even hostile to the American revolutionary cause. Write a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) that analyzes the internal or even internecine dimensions of the war—that is, the extent to which it was a war fought among Americans, not merely against Great Britain. Due in class January 20.

**Week 4**

January 25: War in Black and White.
*Mary Silliman’s War* (a film).

January 27: The American Revolution and Film.
Conclusion of *Mary Silliman’s War* and discussion of the film.

**Essay Assignment:** In a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) review, critique, and historically assess the films *Mary Silliman’s War* and *The Patriot*. Due in class January 27.

**Unit 3: United States Constitution—“A More Perfect Union”**
If the American Revolution began on April 19, 1775 at Lexington and Concord, when did it end— with the Treaty of Paris (1783), with the ratification of the Constitution (1787), with the War of 1812? Various historians might answer differently—indeed some might argue that it is still going on. The War for Independence was a negative act; it severed the colonies' ties with Great Britain and declared that the several states were independent. But what did that mean? How would Americans make sense of their struggle, bring order to their new polity, and create a new government, or governments? The United States Constitution is certainly central to America's revolutionary settlement. This unit probes its origins, meanings, and implications, not only in the early national period but into the present day.

Week 5
February 1: Settling the Revolution: the Articles of Confederation and “the united states of America.”
Reading: Brown, Major Problems, 341-88; Countryman, Constitution, 3-29.

February 3: Settling the Revolution: the Constitution.

Essay Assignment: Write a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) that assesses the meaning, significance, and implications of the Northwest Ordinance. What was its purpose? Was it consistent with or at odds with the assumptions of the Articles of Confederation? With the Constitution? How did it promote or obstruct American nationalism? Due in class February 3.

Week 6
February 8: Ratification and the Science of American Politics.
Reading: Brown, Major Problems, 439-82; Countryman, Constitution, 89-111.

February 10: Liberty, Rights, Legacies.
Reading: Brown, Major Problems, 311-40; Countryman, Constitution, 112-63; Lepore, The Whites of Their Eyes, 98-125.

Essay Assignment: Write a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) that treats a contemporary constitutional issue (e.g., judicial appointments,
executive privilege, *habeas corpus*, gun control, war powers, federalism, Pledge of Allegiance, church-state connections) in the historical perspective of the early national period. Analyze specifically how or why an understanding of the creation and early development of the Constitution helps inform us about that issue or controversy. Due in class February 10.

**Unit 4: Slavery and Emancipation in the New Republic**

This unit explores the Revolution's "contagion of liberty": the implications of revolutionary ideals and circumstances for African Americans, especially in the North where slavery was immediately or gradually abolished. Readings and discussions will probe the meaning of "freedom," "equality," and "liberty"; consider early national black experience in northern seaboard cities; assess the issue of race; and ask, not merely why was slavery abolished in the North? But why it was institutionalized in the United States Constitution, and why it continued—indeed expanded—in the South?

**Week 7**


February 17: Abolition and Race in the Early Republic.

**Essay Assignment**: Using the assigned documents (in an essay of approximately 500-750 words), assess the arguments forwarded by anti-slavery and abolitionist critics and activists in America during the Revolution and early years of the new republic. Due in class February 17.

**Week 8**

Reading: Nash, *Race and Revolution*, 57-87, 177-201 (chapter 3 documents); Banneker-Jefferson correspondence (Blackboard); Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn*, chapter 16 (Blackboard); Carey, *Short


Essay Assignment: Write a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) that uses the writings of various black leaders, including Prince Hall, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, James Forten, and George Lawrence, as well as other documents as appropriate, to assess the shifting context of African American freedom and liberty in northern cities in the early republic. Were conditions improving or declining for northern free blacks during this period? How did African Americans defend and advance their claims for liberty and equality, and why was such a defense necessary? Due in class February 24.

Unit 5: Gender, Sensibility, and American Culture in the New Republic of Letters
What sort of country would the United States become? What did it mean to be an “American”? Could the new American republic endure, particularly given its diversity and divisions? American intellectuals believed that national unity and survival required the creation of a vital national culture and identity, through the cultivation of a new American language, literature, mythology, art and iconography, and educational system.

In addition, American nationalism was gendered. The Revolution had offered contradictory opportunities and sent mixed messages to American women. On the one hand, women were critical to the war effort; as such, they assumed a new, public role in social and political life, especially as a force for virtue in the new republic. On the other hand, older prescriptions against women in public life—and the equation of “public women” and prostitutes—persisted, and law and custom continued to subordinate and constrain women as daughters or wives. If new educational opportunities emerged for women, there were few legitimate outlets for women's energies and talents. Women such as Hannah Webster Foster reflected the ambiguities of gender for women in the new nation. Would—should—the new republic be a place of female as well as male freedom and liberty? Was America a place of rationality and reason (gendered male) or feeling and sensibility (gendered female)? Through
Foster's novel *The Coquette* we will probe the social and cultural world of early national America, its gendered implications, and the ways that this world was constituted through print.

**Week 9**

March 1: Women, Gender, Citizenship.


**Essay Assignment:** Write a short essay (500-750 words) that evaluates the character of Eliza Wharton and places her in the context of late 18th-century American debate about American womanhood. What were the prescribed social and political roles of women, and how might they fulfill them? Did Eliza measure up? Would readers admire or condemn her?

**Essay Assignment:** How does Hannah Webster Foster's novel, *The Coquette*, answer the following question: Is, or should, the new republic be a place of female as well as male freedom and liberty? Write a short essay (approximately 500-750 words) using Rosemarie Zagarri's essay to help explore this question. Due in class March 3.

**Week 10**

March 8: Sensibility and Novels in the Republic.
Reading: *The Coquette*, letters 54-74.

March 10: Consequences and Legacies of the Revolution.

**Essay Assignment:** Find a contemporary media reference (e.g., a newspaper article or blog piece) to the events, people, principles, or institutional arrangements of the Revolution and assess its use in an essay of about 2-3 typed pages (approximately 500-750 words). Use Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes*, to inform your analysis. Due in class March 10.