HISTORY 620: THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC

In the wake of their successful revolution, Americans of all sorts sought to create a nation that matched their own vision of a free, independent, republican society. But they often disagreed vehemently about exactly what such a nation should look like. Who should rule, and how? What economic and social policies should the nation pursue? Where did the United States fit into a larger community of nations? What did it mean to be an American? Who was included and who was excluded in that definition? This course explores these crucial issues in the history and historiography of the newly independent United States from approximately 1783 to 1828. Topics will include questions of American identity and nationalism, the ideology and practice of politics, economic change and class conflict, geographic expansion and sectional tensions, Native American strategies and reactions to the new United States, the role and status of women, the place of slavery in the republic, the evolution of African American communities and identities, and the effects and meaning of religious awakening.

REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation:
Active and informed participation in discussion is the central element of the course. Our meetings will consist entirely of discussion of the assigned readings, so it is essential that you do the reading (both the main text and any required supplemental reading) and come prepared to discuss it. You can use the questions on the “Helpful questions” document (in the “Assignments” section of the Blackboard site) as a way to get started on thinking through the reading.

Discussion serves as a way of exploring and thinking about historical works and questions that gives us a more complete and complex understanding than any single point of view can provide. Classes are more enjoyable and intellectually rewarding for everyone when as many people as possible contribute. Participating in scholarly discussions of this type is a skill in and of itself, and working on this skill is part of the purpose of the course. Thus, regular, positive contributions to discussion are a baseline expectation for the class.

“Weekly” Reaction Papers:
You must write six (6) one- to two-page reaction papers on the weekly reading. The particular weeks are up to you and don’t need to be decided in advance, just make sure you do six. Also note that an additional week will be taken up by your book review essay (see below)—you may not submit a reaction paper for that week.
The reaction papers should have one paragraph summarizing the book’s argument and project as succinctly as possible without sacrificing accuracy and important nuances, and another paragraph on your critical response to this argument/project and its execution in the book (in this case “critical” does not necessarily mean negative, but rather engaged and analytical). Your response should focus on substantive intellectual and interpretive issues rather than matters that are primarily aesthetic or formal (e.g., there were too many big words, it was boring, you felt maps would have been useful, or you would have preferred footnotes to endnotes). These papers are due in class on the day we discuss the reading.

Book Review Essay:
On a week of your own choosing, you must write a five- to six-page (5-6) analysis of the reading for that week. This should not be a chapter-by-chapter summary of the main book’s contents, but rather a higher-level analysis of the book’s argument and method, exploring the key evidence and themes that support and develop that argument. Where applicable, you should also consider the contrast or complement offered to the main book’s argument and themes by the supplementary readings for that week. This paper is due in class on the day we discuss the reading.

Final Paper:
There are four options for the longer final paper topic:

Option One: Set questions on course readings. I will lay out two or three questions about major themes in the course, and you can write an extended (12-15 page) essay in response to one of them, drawing on the course readings.

Option Two: Your own thematic analysis of course readings. You may select a particular theme from the course that interests you, and write a 12-15 page essay on that theme, drawing on at least four of the books we read and at least four of the supplementary readings. Check with me to make sure your topic is workable if you wish to pursue this option—I may suggest addition readings that are essential to the topic.

Option Three: Historiography paper. If you have a specific interest in a particular topic situated in the early republican era (broadly construed), you may elect to write a paper exploring the existing literature on that topic, laying out the major works and interpretations, existing debates, underexplored or neglected areas, and possible future directions for research. This option requires substantial extra reading, so it is most appropriate for those who would particularly benefit from building this kind of deep background—those intending to do research on the topic, or those for whom specific historiographical and bibliographic knowledge is important (for museum exhibits or other public history projects, for instance). The ideal length of these papers will vary depending on the nature of the topic explored, but 15 pages should be considered a realistic minimum. Consult with me if you wish to pursue this option.

Option Four: Primary source research paper. Students with a research agenda related to the history of the early American republic may do a medium-length, focused primary source research paper as the final paper for this course. Consult with me if you want to pursue
The final paper is due during exam week, on **Monday, May 9**.

**Grading:**
- Reaction Papers: 20%
- Book Review: 20%
- Final Paper: 30%
- Class Participation: 30%

**REQUIRED READINGS**

**Structure of Weekly Readings:**
Each week, one book will serve as the core reading that we all will read. There will also usually be a selection of supplementary readings of chapter or article length that relate to some aspect of the core reading. You will be required to read one (1) of these supplementary readings each week they are assigned in addition to the core reading, and, along with others who have read the same supplementary material, to explain it to the rest of the class and bring it into the discussion when relevant.

**Required:**

**Required Supplementary Readings:**
Except where noted, the supplementary readings are journal articles available online. The easiest way to access journal articles is through the GMU Library’s homepage (library.gmu.edu). I recommend that you bring a paper copy of the reading to refer to in this option.
class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All work in this course is governed by the George Mason University honor code:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

For details on how the honor system at GMU works, consult the university catalog (http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=15&navoid=1039 - Honor). More information can also be found at the GMU Office of Academic Integrity.

OTHER POLICIES AND IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Administrative Dates
Last day to add & to drop with no tuition penalty: Tuesday, January 26
Last day to drop, with 33% tuition penalty: Tuesday, February 2
Final drop deadline, (67% tuition penalty): Friday, February 19

Disabilities
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ods.gmu.edu) at (703) 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

GMU Email Accounts
Students must use their MasonLive email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See masonlive.gmu.edu for more information.

Useful Resources
Writing Center (writingcenter.gmu.edu): A114 Robinson Hall, (703) 993-1200.
Counseling and Psychological Services (caps.gmu.edu): SUB I, Room 3129, (703) 993-2380.
University Catalog: catalog.gmu.edu.
Other university policies: universitypolicy.gmu.edu.
**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES**

January 21: Introduction

January 28: Heirs to an Empire?

**Supplementary Reading**

February 4: Out of Town—No Class

February 11: Defining the Boundaries of Post-Revolutionary Politics in the 1790s
Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine’s America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic*.

**Supplementary Reading**

February 18: Gender and the Limits of Political Participation

**Supplementary Reading**

**February 25: Africa, America, and the Early National Atlantic World**


**Supplementary Reading**


**March 3: Slavery and Family in Jefferson’s Virginia … Literally**

Annette Gordon Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*

**March 10: No Class—Spring Break**

**March 17: An Empire for Slavery?**


**Supplementary Reading**


**March 24: Continental Perspectives**


**Supplementary Reading**


March 31: A Second War for Independence?

April 7: Struggling to Get By in Urbanizing America

**Supplementary Reading**

April 14: Gender and Labor in an Expanding Market Economy

**Supplementary Reading**

April 21: Republican Religion
Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity.*

**Supplementary Reading**

April 28: TBA—Class Choice
We will discuss options over the course of the semester

FINAL PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL ON **MONDAY, MAY 9** BY 9 PM