

Fighting the American Revolution Syllabus

Course Description

In this Series we will be covering the divisive and at times vicious nature of the American Revolution. In popular portrayals of the conflict, it is shown as a fight between patriots and an occupying British Army. However, this portrayal belies the extremely personal struggle between those fighting to fulfill the American Revolution and their loyalist neighbors fighting for King and Country. We will also look at the reasoning for foreign intervention in the Revolution and controversial figures such as William Franklin and Benedict Arnold who were branded traitors.

Discussion

There is a lot of ground to cover during the time we have for our course. For the enjoyment of all registered students, I would prefer to hold off discussion until the last fifteen minutes of class. I will also be available after the class has ended each week.

Course Outline

Lecture 1: In this lecture we will study the first true world war. A cataclysm that stretched across continents and decided the fate of nations. This war was known by several names: The Seven Years War or the French and Indian War. The start of the conflict occurred when a young officer in the colonial militia took command of an English force on a dangerous mission in the Ohio River Valley. The young officer was named George Washington, and his actions would precipitate a war that set the stage for the American Revolution. We will assess both the French and Indian War as well as its effects and how they broke down support for English rule.

Lecture 2: Why did so many Americans decide to fight for the English during the conflict? That is the question that we will be working to answer in this lecture on American Loyalists. This wildly diverse group included freed slaves, Quakers, merchants, and farmers. We will be looking into who these individuals were and what motivated them by way of some of the most prominent examples of Loyalists. A particular focus will be put on Benjamin Franklin's son William who as Royal Governor of New Jersey fought against his famous father and exemplified the split between America and England.

Lecture 3: Without French support during the conflict the revolution could never have succeeded in throwing off English rule. However, at the time France was still an absolutist monarchy that crushed dissent. Why did France and other European countries take part in the war for American

Independence? We will also briefly look at the ways in which French financial support for the American Cause destabilized their monarchy and laid the groundwork for their own bloody revolution.

Lecture 4: Benedict Arnold was known for his tenacity in battle against the English. In fight after fight at battles like Valcour Island and Saratoga he managed to secure hard fought victories at great personal cost. Today he is known as a traitor. What caused one of the best generals in the Patriot ranks to secretly plot with the British to seize a crucial fort? How did instability in the colonial government play a role? In this lecture we will look at the life of a controversial figure and what his life says about conflicted loyalties in the early American attempt at self-government.

Instructor Biography

Connor Monson is a grad student at the University of Illinois pursuing library science and public history. His undergraduate major was in American History with a focus on the mid-19th century. He has published a senior honors thesis as well as two peer-reviewed articles with the digital history organization 'Sourcelab'. All three articles concern American political movements and parties. He served as Sourcelab's Vice-Chairman. Connor is currently a graduate librarian at the UIUC History Philosophy and Newspaper Library. He has taught history courses at Parkland College community education for nearly two years. He hopes to one day work professionally as a museum curator and public history educator.

Suggested Further Reading

If you enjoy my lectures and would like to know more about the culture and conflicts of colonial America than I would strongly suggest reading these books.

- "American Revolutions" by Alan Taylor
- "The Marquis" by Laura Auricchio
- "Liberty's Exiles" by Maya Jasanoff
- "Tories" by Thomas B. Allen
- "Valiant Ambition" by Nathaniel Philbrick
- "The Tragedy of Benedict Arnold" by Joyce Lee Malcolm
- "Benjamin Franklin" by Walter Isaacson

- “Crucible of War” by Fred Anderson
- “Radicalism of the American Revolution” by Gordon Wood
- “The Great Cat Massacre” by Robert Darnton
- “Washington” by Ron Chernow
- “The Long Fuse” by Don Cook
- “The Glorious Cause” by Robert Middlekauf
- “Book of Ages” by Jill Lepore
- “Founding Brothers” by Joseph J. Ellis