The American Revolution in Unexpected Places

Dr. Sarah Pearsall (smsp100@cam.ac.uk)

“This able doctor, or, America swallowing the bitter draught” (London, May 1774), Courtesy, Library of Congress. This British cartoon appeared the year after the destruction of the tea in the Boston harbor. It shows Lord North, with the “Boston Port Bill” in a pocket, forcing tea (Coercive Acts) down the throat of a Native American woman representing America, restrained by Lord Mansfield. Lord Sandwich, known for his interest in women, holds her feet and peers under her skirt. Britannia covers her eyes, too horrified to watch.

Course Description
The history of the American Revolution used to be a story of the thirteen British colonies choosing to rebel against the might of Great Britain. It’s so much bigger than that now. It spills out into a range of geographical locales (the Caribbean, Europe, Canada, Florida, the West, even India), as historians strive to place this American Revolution in a global context. In so doing, they also interrogate the ways in which colonialism, a legacy of the pre-revolutionary days, continued in new ways once the United States had been established, so that the nation-building of the Revolution endured. If the range of locales has spun out beyond the thirteen colonies, then so too has the cast of characters. The main actors in that traditional narrative were the patriotic revolutionaries, the Founding Fathers, who valiantly threw off the yoke of imperial rule. In the last several decades, the range of actors has widened to include those who were left out of
that tale of heroism, including those, such as working-class white men, white women, Native Americans, African-Americans, and others, for whom the revolution was at best an ambivalent legacy. As the geography has expanded, the involvement of an even greater variety of people has also done so.

Students who choose this Paper will learn the basics of the American Revolution, the classic story of those thirteen colonies. In other words, they will learn what people like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson did, and why it matters. Yet they will also consider how historians have stretched and reconfigured that Revolution, with a range of novel approaches and topics. Students will confront all kinds of people in all kinds of locales: Loyalist families in exile; enslaved women denouncing masters who raped them; sailors stuck in foreign gaols; Native Americans sent flying from their homes. Students will learn about the darker side of Washington and Jefferson, as well as the complicated ways in which such men were immersed in global networks and tides. This Paper privileges not those who chose or engineered revolution—though they appear here—but those who did not, unwitting and sometimes unwilling participants in this transformative Revolution. In other words, our gaze here rests on that native woman, “America,” compelled by violence to swallow that bitter draught. What did the Revolution mean for those women and men—often preoccupied with their own, more personal pursuits of happiness—who found themselves forced into it?

This Specified paper will be taught in weekly 2-hour discussion classes with lectures integrated into that structure, across seven weeks in Michaelmas and Lent. Each week’s discussion will focus around a specific unexpected place, building outward into the broader issues raised by centering that location. The emphasis is on discussion and debate based on readings and student presentations. Each student will also receive 4 supervisions in groups of 2-4 in Lent Term. There will also be a field trip to London in Lent Term, to an unexpected place associated with the American Revolution. There will be a revision session in Easter Term.

The paper is capped at a maximum of 14 students.

If you wish to read ahead over the summer, please start with Alan Taylor, American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804 (New York: Norton, 2016)

Indicative topics (subject to change)

1. A Cliff in Quebec: The Seven Years’ War and Imperial Re-organization
2. A Factory in Derby: Protests and Massacre
3. A Counting House in Bengal: Tea and Boycotts
4. A Church in Meherrin: African-Americans Fight
5. A Bedroom in Long Island: Women, War, and Violence
7. A Gaol in Hampshire: Sailors, Soldiers, and Prisoners of War
9. A Mansion in Pensacola: Other Colonies
10. A Plantation in Jamaica: Loyalist Diaspora
11. A Bawdy House in Philadelphia: Sexual Revolutions
12. A Village on the Missouri: Disease and Reconfigurations
13. A Boiling House in Haiti: Other Revolutions
14. A Warehouse in Michilimackinac: Empires and Networks

Examination
Three-hour unseen; answer 3 questions; undivided paper
There will always be a question set on each of the class topics
Teaching hours: 28-34 hours, to include supervisions
Reading list: 100-150 items
Exam paper: 18-22 questions

Mode of Teaching
- Michaelmas: 7 x 120-min classes
- Lent: 7 x 120-min classes
- Easter: 1 x 120-min class
- Supervisions, 4 per student, in Lent term
- Total contact hours: 34
- Supervision topics are the same as the class topics

Maximum Supervision Capacity: 14 students.

Indicative Reading List

General/Overviews
Joint Special Issues on the American Revolution in *William and Mary Quarterly* and *Journal of the Early Republic*, October 2017

The Seven Years’ War and Imperial Re-organization
Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of British Empire in North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Knopf, 2000)


**Protests and Massacre**


**Tea and Boycotts**


**African-Americans Fight**


**Women, War, and Violence**


**Leadership and European Dimensions**


Barbara Alice Mann, *George Washington’s War on Native America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008)


**Sailors, Soldiers, and Prisoners of War**


Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Campfollowers and Community During the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996)


**Native American Allegiances**


**Loyalist Diaspora**


See also [http://www.blackloyalist.info/sourceimagesdisplaypage/transcript/15](http://www.blackloyalist.info/sourceimagesdisplaypage/transcript/15)

Rebecca Brannon, *From Revolution to Reunion: The Reintegration of the South Carolina Loyalist* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016)


**Other Colonies**


Jennifer Spear, *Race, Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009)

**Disease and Reconfigurations**


Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008),
Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement: Biological Catastrophe in the Native Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007)


**Other Revolutions**


Caitlin Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York; Liveright, 2016)


**Sexual Revolutions**


**Empires and Networks**


**Sample Exam Questions**

1. “Some were born revolutionaries, some achieved revolution, and some had revolution thrust upon them.” Discuss.

2. Did 1776 matter west of the Mississippi?

3. Why did so many colonies not rebel?

4. Why were Americans so angry about cheaper tea?

5. “The American Revolution was fought and won in London and Paris.” Discuss.

6. Who were the biggest losers in the American Revolution?

7. “The greatest blow that could have been dealt us, unless it had been our total destruction.” (Native American chiefs in 1784). Discuss.

8. Did the American Revolution give women new opportunities?


10. How has an expanded sense of what constitutes the American Revolution altered understandings of early national America?

11. Did the American Revolution end in 1783?

12. Did the revolution have more impact in French or Spanish colonies?

13. How did Loyalists pursue happiness?

14. Was there an American Revolution for families?

15. “Smallpox unified Americans more than the Revolution” Discuss.

16. Why did Americans care about other revolutions?