

Fall 2011
HIS 350R: Debating the American Revolution
Thursdays, 3:30-6
Mezes 1.212
Unique Number: 39404



Johannes Adam Simon Oertel, *Pulling Down the Statue of King George III*, 1859

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Prospectus

In this course students will immerse themselves in the social and ideological background of the American Revolution. After reading and discussing the major political writings that informed 18th-century colonial American political thought, as well as examining the local context of New York city at the end of the colonial era, each student will be assigned a historic character (who lived in New York in 1775) and will spend the second half of the semester representing their character in an extended role-playing game that follows the “course of human events” in New York city from the spring of 1775 to the summer of 1776. Will New Yorkers declare independence and join the revolution or choose to remain loyal to King George III? It will be up to you and your classmates to decide.

Required Books (available for purchase at the University Co-op):

Bill Offutt, Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution in New York City, 1775-1776, (Boston, 2011); [hereafter PLR].

Richard Ketchum, Divided Loyalties: How the American Revolution Came to New York, (New York, 2002); [hereafter DL].

Other readings will be made available on-line (via Blackboard) or in a course packet.

Writing Assignments:

There will be seven brief writing assignments for the course.

1.) An analytical essay comparing and contrasting the main tenets of 18th-century Republicanism and Lockean Liberalism with ideas about the merits and flaws in the 18th-century British political system. (c. 1000 words)

2.) A short synopsis of a single issue of a colonial newspaper (c. 1000 words)

3.) A background story/personal Narrative of your Assigned Character. (c. 1000 words)

4.) Two speeches written and presented in character (these must be presented to the class – in character - as well as written and turned in to me) (c. 1000 words each)

5.) Two pseudonymous letters submitted to the class on-line newspaper, speaking to the issues being debated in class (these will be circulated anonymously to the rest of the class, after first being submitted to me with your name). (c. 500 words each).

Grades:

Writing assignments will account for sixty percent of your grade.

Each of the writing assignments will be worth ten percent of your grade (except the letters which will be worth five percent each)

Attendance/Participation/Achievement

Forty percent of your grade will be based on the quality and quantity of your participation in class and how persuasively you portray your assigned character. In addition, I will give “extra-credit” points according to how successful students are in achieving the goals for their character at the start of the game.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement: Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. Upon receipt of a letter from the SSD office, I will make every reasonable accommodation to meet individual student’s needs.

Tentative Course Schedule:

25 August – Introductions, Requirements and Themes;, watch: PBS American Experience: “Patriots Day,” Brunzl, “Counterfactual History: A User’s Guide.”

1 September – Setting the Stage; Historical and Ideological Background, Part I; read: PLR pp. 4-125.

8 September – Historical and Ideological Background, Part II; Republicanism & Virtue read: Cato’s Letters, Bolingbroke “Idea of a Patriot King.”

15 September – The Local and Imperial Context; read Greene: (Republicanism and Liberalism papers due)

22 September – Social Context, Part I; DL (5-175), Wood, Radicalism (“Monarchy”).

29 September – The Social Context, Part II – DL (176-305), Newspaper reports due, game characters assigned.

6 October – Game 1st Session (April 1775)

14 October - Game 2nd Session (July 1775)

20 October – Game 3rd Session (October 1775)

27 October – Game 4th Session (January 1776)

3 November – Film: “Revolution!”

10 November – Game 5th Session (April 1776)

17 November – Game 6th Session (July 1776)

24 November – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

1 December – Course conclusion, game post-mortem.