

Georgetown University  
Masters and Doctoral Liberal Studies Program

**The Founding Era: The Great Debates**  
LSHV-704-01

Spring, 2010  
Charles E. Yonkers

Wednesdays, 6:15-8:30 PM  
Classroom: To be determined

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**Course Description & Objectives:**

This course examines the events and issues of the American Founding Era, how history has interpreted it, and why our interest in the period remains so vital. The objective of the course is to develop our historical sense of the founding, a sense of where we have come from and how we Americans have become what we are. As Americans, we all carry a simplified version of “the founding story,” but the more we learn about that era, the more complex it becomes. Even today, there is a resurgence of “Founder Studies” that raise new questions of interpretation. Our goal is to develop knowledge about and insight into the Era’s issues and, in particular, the Constitution’s formation. To do that, we will examine the historical and ideological roots of the Revolution, the experiences of the Articles Government, and then concentrate on the Philadelphia Convention and the Ratification Debates of 1787-88, including the adoption of the Bill of Rights. There were many great debates during the founding period, not just over the proposed new constitution and the allocation of power between the states and a national government. Our goal is to understand better these debates and the debaters.

Some key questions include: Just who were *the Founders*: only the so-called “demigods?” Was the Revolution about home rule, or who should rule at home? Just what were the real origins of Revolution? Why have generations of historians differed so in interpreting the Founding? What did the Constitutional Convention seek to do and why? Why was the ratification debate so hotly contested? Who among the proponents and opponents remained the most faithful to the spirit of the Revolution? Why is our interest in the founding period so intense today? Why do biographies and analyses of the founders and framers remain so popular? Was the Founding Era the source of our so-called national uniqueness and American exceptionalism? And why does today’s U.S. Supreme Court cite with increasing frequency the Federalist or Anti-Federalist arguments from the Ratification Debate? Why do politicians and pundits invoke our Founders ceaselessly to persuade us one way or another?

This course covers a far broader scope of time and events than The Federalist Papers: Creating a New Nation course (LSHV 353). In particular, it allows students a wide range of subjects relating to the whole Revolutionary Era (e.g., we start with England's Glorious Revolution and treat the American colonial experience) and we read a wider range of books. In addition, students may pursue a wider array of particular interests that relate to the course's subject matter. Neither course is a prerequisite for the other.

### **Approach & Requirements:**

The course will be seminar style with discussion of issues and course readings. To accomplish the course objectives, students will (1) read assigned books and discuss them in class, (2) read and write a 3-5 page review of an additional book of the student's choosing and make a class presentation on it, and (3) write a research paper and make a class presentation on it. The course makes use of Blackboard and a Class Blog.

**Required Books:** *Books are available for purchase at the Leavey Center Book Store, but check the web for cheaper prices.*

Michael Barone: *Our First Revolution* (2007).

Gordon Woods, *The American Revolution* (2002).

Alan Gibson, *Interpreting The Founding* (2006).

Bernard Bailyn, *Faces of Revolution* (1992); selected essays.

Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation* (1940).

Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia* (1966) **or** [your choice]

Max Ferrand, *The Framing of the Constitution* (1913).

Jack N. Rakove, editor. *The Federalist: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay* (2003); selected essays.

Ralph Ketcham, editor. *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Debates* (2003); selected essays.

**Book Review:** In addition to the assigned general readings, each class member will select a book (or a state ratification debate) to review from the list below, prepare a three-to-five page written analysis of it, and make a class presentation on their selection. The paper and the presentation are not a *report* on the book; they should be an analysis of it. The assignment is to synthesize the book with the course, other readings, and our bigger-picture study of the Founding Era. It is an opportunity to provide insights beyond the book itself. [I will provide an expanded list of recent books published in the first class, and students may propose an alternative with my approval.] The sequence of the presentations will be dictated by the chronological nature of the books' subjects and the number of students.

Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967).  
Wood, Gordon, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (2004).  
Gross, Robert. *The Minutemen and Their World* (1976).  
Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*.  
Maier, Pauline. *American Scripture* (1998).  
Fischer, David Hackett. *Washington's Crossing* (2004).  
Ratification Convention Debates of Massachusetts or Virginia.  
Main, Jackson T. *The Anti-Federalists: Critics of the Constitution* (1961).  
Elding, Max. *A Revolution in Favor of Government* (2003).  
Lubunski, Richard. *James Madison and The Struggle for the Bill of Rights* (2006).  
Ferling, John. *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800*.

### Research Paper:

Each student will submit a research/analysis paper (minimum twenty-five pages) on a topic of their own choosing at the conclusion of the term. The paper must rely principally upon primary sources (manuscripts, printed documents, letters, diaries, contemporary newspapers, memoirs, and other such material, including period art). Topics may range from economic, cultural, and social to political and military issues, according to your particular interest. Examples might include events, localities, personalities, the development of government institutions at all levels, the arts, economics, processes of change, historiographical interpretations, etc. Topics must relate specifically to the “founding,” and they should provide insight into some particular dimension of era. The teacher must approve the topics, so plan early. Citations should be in footnotes, according to the guidelines in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Students will make a presentation on their papers during the last classes. A three-page abstract of the paper will be due when the presentation is made. Please bring enough copies so that each student may have a copy. The final paper is due in the Dean’s Office or postmarked by 5 PM on April 23.

**The Blog:** The class operates a blog called *The Founders’ Watch*. It is a current, real-time opportunity for class members to see how current the Founding remains in our everyday life. Course members identify and comment informally upon the constant references in the media, press, book world, and everyday conversation to “our founding,” “our founding fathers,” “the Founders,” “the framers,” “original intent,” and to members of the founding generation. What is going on here? Why is the Founding still so vital in our culture? Students are required to participate on the blog at least once weekly.

### **Course Due Dates:**

- January 27** - Select book for report and schedule date.
- February 24** - Submit research paper proposal and potential sources.
- March 31** - Submit Progress Report on research paper with outline and proposed bibliography.
- April 7 & 14** - Class presentations on research papers.
- April 30** - Submit research papers (hard copy at Liberal Studies Office or in mail by 5 PM).

**Grades:** The final grade will be based upon attendance and class participation in the weekly discussions, including the blog (40%), the book or convention reviews and presentations (20%), and the final paper and presentation (40%).

### **Schedule of Topics and Readings:**

January 20: Introduction & The English Background

Discussion of course requirements, deadlines, assignments, themes, and approach.

Reading: Michael Barone, *Our First Revolution*

January 27: The Road Toward American Revolution

Reading: Bailyn, *Faces of Revolution*, Chapter 8, pp. 185-199.

Wood, *The American Revolution*, Preface and Chapter I [Origins], pp. 1-24.

Gibson, *Interpreting the Founding*, Preface, vii-xiv.

February 3: Resistance and Revolution

Reading: Bailyn, *Faces*, Chapter 9, pp. 200-224.

Wood, Chapters II & III, pp. 25-62.

Gibson, Chapter 1

February 10: The Year 1776

Reading: Bailyn, *Faces*, Chapter 7, pp. 153-184.

Wood, Chapter IV [Constitution-Making], pp. 65-88.

February 17: Historiography of the Founding Era.

Reading: Wood, Chapter V [Republicanism], pp 91-109.

Gibson, Chapters 2-7, and Epilogue.

February 24: The Articles of Confederation and the Continental Congress.

Reading: Wood, Chapter VI [Republican Society], pp. 113-135.  
Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation*, Chapters 1-3, pp 3-103.

March 3: The Critical Period

Reading: Wood, Chapter VII [The Critical Period], pp 139-150.  
Jensen, Chapters 4-13, pp. 107-245.

[March 10: No class for Spring Break]

March 17: The Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia

Reading: Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia* OR  
Ferrand, *The Framing of the Constitution*.  
RESEARCH TOPIC DUE with proposed sources

March 24: The Ratification Debate

Reading: Selected Anti-Federalist essays from Ralph Ketchum's *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Debates* and  
Selected *Federalist* Papers from *The Federalist: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay: The Essential Essays*, Jack N. Rakove. Read  
Introductions to both books.

Centinel 1,	Oct. 5, 1787	Ketcham, 227-237
James Wilson Speech,	Oct. 6,	Ketcham, 183-188
Federal Farmer 1 & 2,	Oct. 8 & 9	Ketcham, 256-269
Brutus I,	Oct. 18	Ketcham, 269-280
John DeWitt 1 & 2	Oct. 22/Nov 5	Ketcham, 189-198
Brutus IV	Nov. 29	Ketcham, 324-331

March 31: Hamilton, Madison, & Jay and the *Federalist* papers

Reading: Bailyn, *Faces*, Chapter 10  
Federalist 1, 10, 14, 39 Oct. to Jan., 1787-8  
Brutus VI, X-XII and XV Dec 27 - Feb Ketcham 280-302  
RESEARCH PAPER PROGRESS REPORT DUE

April 7: The *Federalist* Papers

Reading: More Selected *Federalist* Papers  
Federalist 45, 51, 70, 78, 84 Jan – May, 1788  
Patrick Henry Speeches, June, 1788 – Ketcham 199-216

April 14: The State Ratification Conventions & The Bill of Rights

Reading: Selections from the Massachusetts and Virginia Conventions  
Paper Presentations

April 30 RESEARCH PAPERS DUE by 5 PM