

## HISTORY 117

Dickinson College / Spring 2026  
Tue / Thu 9am  
Classroom: Denny 211  
URL: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-117pinsker>

## US History To 1877

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### *America @ 250: Anniversary Edition*

We hold these truths to be ~~sacred and undeniable~~ self-evident,  
that all men are created equal,  
that they are endowed by their Creator  
with certain unalienable Rights,  
that among these are Life, Liberty  
and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights,  
Governments are instituted among Men,  
deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

—Declaration of Independence (1776)

### Books

- Louis P. Masur, *The Civil War* (New York: Oxford, 2011)
- Gordon S. Wood, *American Revolution* (New York: Modern Library, 2002)

### Additional Readings & Resources

- **American Voices texts:** Phillis Wheatley (1773) // Abigail and John Adams (1776) // Thomas Jefferson (1776) // Sojourner Truth (1851) // Frederick Douglass (1852) // Walt Whitman (1860) // Abraham Lincoln (1863) // Frederick Douglass (1864) // Anna Dickinson (1864) // Frances Harper (1866) // Emma Lazarus (1883)
- Saul Cornell, "Aristocracy Assailed: The Ideology of Backcountry Anti-Federalism," *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990): 1148-1172. [JSTOR]
- Dickinson & Slavery, House Divided Project, 2018-21 [WEB]
- Joseph Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *American Yawp*, 2023 ed. [WEB]
- Matthew Pinsker, "Did the End of Civil War Mean the End of Slavery," Smithsonian / Zocalo Public Square (2015) [WEB]
- Jeffrey Rosen, "The Insurrection Problem," *The Atlantic* October 9, 2025 [WEB]

### Course Policies

Attendance is expected and participation will be evaluated. Those who miss class for any reason must email a short reflection (about a paragraph or two) with snippets of quotation from the missed reading assignment within a week of the absence. All students must submit an ungraded reflection on the reading assignment for class on 2/10. For further details on course policies, including those regarding attendance, electronics, accommodations for disabilities, plagiarism, AI use, and general learning objectives, please consult the course website: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-117pinsker/course-policies/>

### First Essay –Revolutionary Era

On **Monday, March 2**, students will submit a 3-5 page typed, double-spaced essay on a Revolutionary Era topic provided to them in class during the previous week. All essays must include quotations from Gordon Wood's *American Revolution* and from material at the course website, properly cited using Chicago-style footnotes. Outside research is allowed but not encouraged. Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Essays will be graded on depth of analysis, use of evidence, and quality of prose. Late essays will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

## Second Essay –Slavery and Sectionalism

On **Monday, April 6**, students will submit a 3-5 page typed, double-spaced essay on a topic connected to the coming of the Civil War provided to them in class during the previous week. All essays must include quotations from Louis Masur's *Civil War* and from material at the course website, properly cited using Chicago-style footnotes. Outside research is allowed but not encouraged. Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Essays will be graded on depth of analysis, use of evidence, and quality of prose. Late essays will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

## Final Close Reading Project

The highlight of this semester will be a multi-media close reading project that students will undertake to analyze an important document from early American history. A list of possible documents will be provided to students by Prof. Pinsker. **By Monday, April 20**, students must choose their text and post their initial brief summary of the document along with a list of at least three leading secondary sources about the document, its author, or the time period. **By Monday, May 4**, students should post a close reading analysis essay at the course site that covers about 4-6 pages double-spaced (800 to 1,200 words) and includes Chicago-style footnotes and a handful of properly captioned and credited images. Students must also embed inside their post a companion short video featuring about 1-2 minutes of a multi-media reading of their assigned text (using their own voice-over with companion images and music). Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Projects will be graded on depth of analysis, research effort, and quality of prose. Late projects will not be accepted without special approval and penalties.

## Grade Distribution

Class Participation	20 percent
First Essay (Revolutionary Era)	25 percent
Second Essay (Civil War)	25 percent
Close Reading project	30 percent

Day	Date	Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
Tuesday	1/20	Methods & Expectations	---
Thursday	1/22	Columbian Exchange	Yawp chap 1
Tuesday	1/27	Founding Myths	Yawp chap 2
Thursday	1/29	Colonial Society	Yawp chap 4
Tuesday	2/3	British Empire	Wood chap 1: Origins
Thursday	2/5	Taxation Without Representation	Wood chap 2: Resistance
Tuesday	2/10	Declaration <b>--Ungraded reflections due</b>	Wood chap 3: Revolution
Thursday	2/12	American Voices: 1770s	Wheatley / Adams / Jefferson
Tuesday	2/17	Revolutionary War	Wood chap 4: War
Thursday	2/19	Revolutionary Ideology	Wood chaps 5-6: Society
Tuesday	2/24	US Constitution	Wood chap 7: Federalism
Thursday	2/26	Carlisle in 1788	Cornell article
<b>Monday</b>	<b>3/2</b>	<b>First essay due</b>	<b>By 5pm via email</b>
Tuesday	3/3	Market Revolution	Yawp chap 8
Thursday	3/5	Second Great Awakening	Yawp chap 10
Tuesday	3/10	NO CLASS (Spring Break)	
Thursday	3/12	NO CLASS (Spring Break)	
Tuesday	3/17	Sectionalism	Masur, chap 1: Origins
Thursday	3/19	American Voices: 1850s	Truth / Douglass
Tuesday	3/24	Outbreak of Civil War	Masur, chap 2: 1861
Thursday	3/26	Terrible Reality	Masur, chap 3: 1862
Thursday	3/26	WERT LECTURE: Michael Vorenberg	Stern, 7pm
Tuesday	3/31	Turning Points	Masur, chap 4: 1863
Thursday	4/2	American Voices: 1860s	Lincoln / Douglass / Dickinson
<b>Monday</b>	<b>4/6</b>	<b>Second essay due</b>	<b>By 5pm via email</b>
Tuesday	4/7	Election of 1864	Masur, chap 5: 1864
Thursday	4/9	Endgame	Masur, chap 6 + epilogue: 1865
Tuesday	4/14	Southern Reconstruction	Yawp chap 15 + Pinsker essay
Thursday	4/16	Northern Reconstruction	Dickinson & Slavery
<b>Monday</b>	<b>4/20</b>	<b>Initial close reading post due</b>	<b>By 5pm via course site</b>
Tuesday	4/21	Western Reconstruction	Yawp chap 17
Thursday	4/23	American Voices: 1860s-80s	Whitman / Harper / Lazarus
Tuesday	4/28	America 250	Rosen article
Thursday	4/30	Lessons & Legacies	
<b>Monday</b>	<b>5/4</b>	<b>Close reading projects due</b>	<b>By 5pm via course site</b>