

HISTORY 117

Dickinson College / Spring 2026

Tue / Thu 9am

Classroom: Denny 211

URL: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-117pinsker>

US History To 1877

Matthew Pinsker

Office: 61 N. West St

Hours: Wed, 10am to 1pm

Email: pinskerm@dickinson.edu

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

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