

HISTORY 211

Dickinson College // Fall 2026
Tue / Thu 1030am
Classroom: Denny 211
URL: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-1776>

Remembering 1776

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Hours: Wed. 9am to 12pm
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We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable self-evident...
—Declaration of Independence (1776)

Required Texts (B&N or library reserves)

- Joseph Plumb Martin, *Ordinary Courage* edited by James Kirby Martin, 4th Edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013)
- Ted Widmer, *The Living Declaration* (Library of America, 2026)

Additional Readings

- Abigail and John Adams, Letters (excerpts) (March-April 1776) [WEB]
- Fergus M. Bordewich, "What Can We Learn from America's Centennial," *TIME*, April 30, 2026 [WEB]
- Jelani Cobb, "Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Complicated Commemorations," *New Yorker*, May 4, 2026 [PDF]
- Marc Egnall, "Witness to a Revolution," *HNN*, May 21, 2026 [WEB]
- Joseph J. Ellis, "Friends at Twilight," *American Heritage* (May-June 1993) [WEB]
- Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (July 1776) [WEB]
- Jane Kamensky, "The Many Founders of the United States," *New York Times Magazine*, June 22, 2026 [WEB]
- Emanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) [WEB]
- Abraham Lincoln, "Lincoln on Declaration," *Knowledge for Freedom Seminar* [WEB]
- Sarah Lyall, "The Founding Father Who Sought a Last-Minute Deal to Avert the Revolution," *New York Times*, June 30, 2026 [PDF]
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (January 1776) [WEB]
- Pennsylvania Constitution (1776) [WEB]
- President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report* (January 2021) [WEB]
- Marc Stein, "The Bicentennial Made American History Look Ridiculous," *HNN*, June 5, 2026 [WEB]
- Phillis Wheatley, POEMS: "On Being Brought From Africa" (1773) and "His Excellency General Washington (1776) [WEB]

Course Policies

For details on course policies, especially those regarding attendance, participation, accommodations for disabilities, plagiarism, artificial intelligence (AI), and learning objectives, please consult the course website: <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-1776/>

First Essay – Close Reading

By **Monday, October 5**, students will submit a 4- to 6-page essay by email attachment (typed, double-spaced) that offers a close reading analysis of one of the six primary source sets from the syllabus readings (Adams's letters, Jefferson's Declaration, Leutze's painting, Paine's pamphlet, Pennsylvania's constitution, or Wheatley's poems). Students must analyze text, context, and subtext within the framework of an interpretive essay that includes at least 2-3 academic secondary sources, properly cited with Chicago-style footnotes. Additional information and guidelines will be available 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 – Teaching Private Martin

By **Monday, October 26**, students will submit a 4- to 6-page essay by email attachment (typed, double spaced) that answers this question: What are the most important insights about the Revolutionary War that teachers and students can find in Pvt. Joseph Martin's memoir of his Continental Army service? Students must explain their arguments for classroom significance within the framework of an interpretive essay that includes at least 2-3 academic secondary sources, properly cited with Chicago-style footnotes. Additional information and guidelines will be available at the course site. Essays will be graded on depth of analysis, evidence, and quality of prose. Late essays will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

Research Journal

By **Monday, November 30**, students will submit an online research journal entry of 2- to 4-pages long (about 500 to 1,000 words), posted PRIVATE at the course website that details their initial research efforts for their final papers. Students should narrate their efforts to identify at least three (3) relevant primary sources and at least three (3) relevant academic secondary sources for their final paper topics. Journal entries do not require footnotes, but they should include Chicago-style bibliographies and 2 to 3 images, properly captioned and credited. Additional information and guidelines will be available at the course site. Entries will be graded on research effort, depth of analysis and quality of prose. Late entries will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

Final Paper

By **Wednesday, December 16**, students will submit a 10- to 12-page interpretive paper that analyzes one of the documents included in Ted Widmer's book, *The Living Declaration* (2026), explaining why it is significant for understanding how the public memory of the Declaration of Independence has evolved over the years. Students should build their papers on a strong foundation of primary and secondary sources, including those outlined in their research journal posts. All papers should be typed and double-spaced as Word or PDF documents with title page and Chicago-style footnotes (no bibliography required). Additional information and guidelines will be available at the course site. Papers will be graded on research effort, depth of analysis, and quality of prose. Late papers will typically not be accepted after December 16.

Grade Distribution

Class Participation	25 percent
Close reading essay	20 percent
Teaching Private Martin essay	20 percent
Research journal	10 percent
Final paper	25 percent

Day	Date	Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
Tuesday	9/1	Methods & Expectations	---
Thursday	9/3	SUMMER 1775: Olive Branches	Lyll article
Tuesday	9/8	JAN 1776: Launching a Revolution	Paine, Common Sense
Thursday	9/10	NO CLASS	
Monday	9/14	Constitution Day: Jane Calvert	ATS, 7pm [REFLECTION DUE]
Tuesday	9/15	FEB 1776: All Men?	Wheatley poems
Thursday	9/17	NO CLASS	
Tuesday	9/22	MARCH 1776: Remember the Ladies	Adams letters
Thursday	9/24	JULY 1776: Self-Evident	Declaration of Independence
Tuesday	9/29	SEP 1776: Framing constitutions	PA Constitution
Thursday	10/1	DEC 1776: Crossing the Delaware	Leutze painting
Monday	10/5	Close reading essays due	By 5pm via email
Tuesday	10/6	Joining the struggle (1776)	Martin, Introduction, chaps 1-2
Thursday	10/8	Toward Valley Forge (1777)	Martin, chaps 3
Tuesday	10/13	From Valley Forge (1778)	Martin, chap 4
Thursday	10/15	Achieving victory (1781)	Martin, chap 7
Tuesday	10/20	NO CLASS (Fall Break)	
Thursday	10/22	Farewell at Newburgh (1783)	Martin, chap 9
Monday	10/26	Pvt. Martin essays due	By 5pm via email
Tuesday	10/27	Writing about the Revolution	Egnal article
Thursday	10/29	Declaration of Independence	Widmer, Introduction
Tuesday	11/3	First Fifty Years	Widmer, Part 2
Thursday	11/5	Jefferson, Adams, and the Jubilee	Ellis article
Tuesday	11/10	Created Equal	Widmer, Part 3
Thursday	11/12	Twelve Score and Ten	Lincoln on Declaration
Tuesday	11/17	American Empire	Widmer, Part 4
Thursday	11/19	Centennial	Bordewich article
Tuesday	11/24	Civil Rights Era	Widmer, Part 5
Thursday	11/26	NO CLASS –Thanksgiving	
Monday	11/30	Research journals due	By 5pm at course site
Tuesday	12/1	Bicentennial	Stein article
Thursday	12/3	Historians and 1776	Kamensky article
Tuesday	12/8	Defining “patriotic” history	1776 Commission report
Thursday	12/10	Lessons & Legacies	Cobb article
Wednesday	12/16	Final paper due	By 5pm