

The Declaration of Independence

Professor Eric Slauter

Fall 2022

Course Description

This course investigates the origins, meanings, and contested legacies of one of the most consequential political documents in world history. What does the Declaration of Independence declare? What did the Declaration's language of equality, liberty, and rights mean to its authors and earliest readers? How and why have understandings of the document changed over time? And what place do the words and ideals of the Declaration hold now, nearly 250 years later? Lectures and primary and secondary readings provide a series of philosophical, political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and legal perspectives on the document's sources, meanings, and legacies. Early sessions focus on the origin and dissemination of key ideas about equality and rights across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the imperial debates of the 1760s and 1770s; the drafting and editing of the text in Congress; the circulation, reception, and re-deployment of the Declaration among domestic and international audiences in the age of the American Revolution; and the relation of the Declaration to the Constitution. The final sessions explore key turning points in the life of the document, including the place of the Declaration in arguments about the rights of enslaved peoples and women in antebellum America and changing meanings of the Declaration in the era of Southern secession and the Civil War.

Course Primary Source Readings

1. "The Declaration of Independence: Primary Source Documents, 1689–1865" (PDF). Documents listed by number below; documents marked GLC are included in the Gilder Lehrman Collection.

Course Secondary Source Readings (Suggested)

1. Allen, Danielle. *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*. New York: Liveright, 2014.
2. Armitage, David. *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
3. Maier, Pauline. *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Vintage, 1997.
4. Pincus, Steve. *The Heart of the Declaration: The Founders' Case for an Activist Government*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards

- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page paper or project of appropriate rigor

Class Schedule

Week 1: September 22: Introduction

Readings

- [39] "Resolutions of Richard Henry Lee," June 7, 1776.
- [43] "First Newspaper Report of Independence," *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, July 2, 1776.
- [44] Declaration of Independence: Dunlap Broadside, July 4–5, 1776.
- [48] Declaration of Independence: Engrossed and Signed Copy, 1776 [1823 Stone facsimile].
- [49] Declaration of Independence: Transcript of engrossed copy, 1776.
- [50] Lemuel Haynes, manuscript title page for "Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping," 1776.

Assignments

- Discussion Board One

Week 2: September 29: Declaring Rights

Readings

- [1] English Declaration of Rights, 1689.
- [2] Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. London: Awnsham Churchill, 1690.
- [3] James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, Pamphlet, July 30, 1764.
- [4] Virginia House of Burgesses, "Stamp Act Resolutions," 1765.
- [5] George Grenville, letter to George III, July 4, 1765.
- [6] Stamp Act Congress, "Declaration of Rights and Grievances," 1765.
- [8] "Toasts on the Second Anniversary of the Stamp Act Riots," 1767.
- [10] Letters between "Sophronia" (Sarah Prince Gill) and Catharine Macaulay, 1769–1770.
- [13] John Adams, letter to Catharine Macaulay, July 9, 1770.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two

- Short Paper One due October 5
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session One: Wednesday, October 5 - 8:00-9:30 PM ET

Week 3: October 6: Self-Evidence: Benjamin Franklin

Readings

- [7] *Examination of Doctor Benjamin Franklin*, Pamphlet, 1766.
- [14] Benjamin Franklin, letter to Jane Mecom, December 30, 1770.
- [15] Benjamin Franklin. *Autobiography*, London, 1793, Parts 1 (1771) and 2 (1784).
- [17] Boston Town Meeting, "Votes and Proceedings," 1772.
- [21] Continental Congress, "The Association," 1774.
- [22] Continental Congress, "Petition to the King," 1774.
- [23] Continental Congress, "Bill of Rights and List of Grievances," 1774.
- [24] Edmund Burke, "Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies," March 22, 1775.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
- Final Paper/Project Question due October 12
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.

Week 4: October 13: Pamphlets, Parchments, Petitions, Propaganda, and Thomas Paine

Readings

- [9] John Dickinson, "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania," 1767–1768.
- [11] Paul Revere, "Bloody Massacre," Engraving, 1770.
- [12] [Alexander McDougal], "Defense of Non-Importation Agreements," May 16, 1770.
- [18] Phillis Wheatley, "Poems to the King and the Earl of Dartmouth," 1773.
- [19] Phillis Wheatley, letter to Samson Occom, 1774.
- [27] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, Pamphlet, January 10, 1776.
- [28] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, London, 1776.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
- Short Paper Two due October 19
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Two: Wednesday, October 19 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 5: October 20: Debating the Declaration: Abigail Adams and John Adams

Readings

- [26] John Adams, letter to Richard Henry Lee, November 15, 1775.
- [29] Abigail Adams, letter to John Adams, March 31, 1776.
- [30] John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776.
- [31] John Adams, "Thoughts on Government," 1776.
- [32] John Adams, letter to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776.
- [33] Continental Congress, "Resolution of May 15," 1776.
- [34] Virginia Convention, "Resolutions of May 15," 1776.
- [35] Presentments by the Grand Jury, Cheraws District, SC, 1776.
- [38] Richard Henry Lee, letter to Landon Carter, June 2, 1776.
- [39] "Resolution of Richard Henry Lee," June 7, 1776.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
 - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due October 26
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
 2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.
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Week 6: October 27: Drafting the Declaration: Thomas Jefferson

Readings

- [16] Thomas Jefferson, letter to Robert Skipwith with Book List, August 3, 1771.
- [20] Thomas Jefferson, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, Pamphlet, 1774.
- [25] Continental Congress, "Declaration of the Causes for Taking Up Arms," July 6, 1775.

- [36–37] Virginia Convention, “Declaration of Rights,” 1776, Committee Draft and Final.
- [40] Thomas Jefferson, “Preamble to the Virginia Constitution,” 1776.
- [41] Thomas Jefferson, “Original rough draft,” 1776.
- [42] Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on Proceedings in Congress,” 1776.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three due November 2
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Three: Wednesday, November 2- 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 7: November 3: Printing and Proclaiming the Declaration

Readings

- [44] John Dunlap Broadside, 1776.
- [45] Steiner and Cist Broadside, 1776.
- [47] Peter Timothy Broadside, 1776.
- [48] Engrossed and Signed Copy, 1776 [1823 Stone facsimile].
- [51] Constitution of Pennsylvania (Sec. 13–15), 1776.
- [55] Mary Katherine Goddard Broadside, 1777.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - Short Paper Four due November 9
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 8: November 10: Signing and Answering the Declaration

Readings

- [50] Lemuel Haynes, “Liberty Further Extended,” 1776.
- [52] [Jeremy Bentham], “Short Review of the Declaration,” 1776.
- [53] Thomas Hutchinson, “Strictures upon the Declaration,” October 15, 1776.
- [54] Petition of Lancaster Hill et al. to the Massachusetts Assembly, 1777.
- [56] Articles of Confederation, 1777/1781.
- [57] “Treaty of Alliance with France,” February 6, 1778.

- [58] "Virginia Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom," 1777/1785.
- [59] Judith Sargent Murray, "On the Equality of the Sexes," 1779/1790.
- [60] Massachusetts Constitution, "Declaration of Rights," 1780.
- [61] "Treaty of Paris," September 3, 1783.

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview due November 16
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Q&A Session Four: Wednesday, November 16 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 9: November 17: The Declaration and the Constitution

Readings

- [62] James Madison, "Vices of the Political System," April 1787.
- [63] "Records of the Federal Convention," June 6, 1787.
- [64] Benjamin Franklin, "Speech at the Federal Convention," September 17, 1787.
- [65] Constitution of the United States (1787) and "Bill of Rights" (1789).
- [66] Richard Henry Lee, "Amendments Proposed," September 27, 1787.
- [67] James Madison, letter to Thomas Jefferson, October 24, 1787.
- [68] "Brutus No. 2," *New York Journal*, November 1, 1787.
- [69] James Madison, "Federalist No. 10," November 22, 1787.
- [70] Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Madison, December 20, 1787.
- [71] James Madison, "Federalist No. 40," January 18, 1788.
- [72] [Melancton Smith], "The Federal Farmer No. 16," 1788.
- [73] Amos Singletary, "Speech at the Massachusetts Convention," 1788.
- [74] Patrick Henry, "Speeches at the Virginia Ratifying Convention," 1788.
- [75] Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 84," May 28, 1788.
- [76] James Madison, letter to Thomas Jefferson, October 17, 1788.
- [77] Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Madison, March 15, 1789.
- [78] James Madison, "Amendments Proposed," June 8, 1789.
- [79] National Constituent Assembly, "French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen," August 26, 1789.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
- Short Paper Five due November 23

- Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 10: November 24: The Anti-Slavery Declaration

Readings

- [80] Benjamin Banneker, letter to Thomas Jefferson, August 19, 1791.
- [81] Haitian Declaration of Independence, 1804.
- [82] David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, 1830.
- [86] John Quincy Adams, "Argument in the Amistad Case," 1841.
- [87] Liberian Declaration of Independence, 1847.
- [88] John C. Calhoun, "Speech on the Oregon Bill," June 27, 1848.
- [90] Charles Sumner, "Argument in *Roberts v. Boston*," 1849.
- [92] Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Oration, July 5, 1852.

Assignments

- Rough Draft due November 30
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
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Week 11: December 1: Women's Rights and the Inclusive Declaration

Readings

- [83] George Henry Evans, "Workingman's Declaration of Independence," December 1829.
- [84] William Lloyd Garrison, "Declaration of Sentiments," December 6, 1833.
- [85] Sarah Grimké, "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes," 1838, Letter 8.
- [89] Seneca Falls, "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions," 1848.
- [91] Selections from Women's Rights Conventions, 1850–1854.
- [94] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Address to the Legislature of New York," February 1854.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine

Q&A Session Five: Wednesday, December 7 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 12: December 8: The Declaration Divided: The Civil War

Readings

- [93] George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South: Or, The Failure of Free Society*, 1854.
- [95] *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 1857, selections.
- [97] South Carolina, "Secession Ordinance and Declaration," Pamphlet, 1860.
- [98] Abraham Lincoln, "Emancipation Proclamation," printed by Rufus Blanchard (c. 1863–1864).
- [99] Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address," November 19, 1863.
- [100] "Thirteenth Amendment," December 6, 1865.
- [101] South Carolina Secession Ordinance captured by the 102nd US Colored Troops, 1865.

Assignments

- Final Paper/Project due December 14

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers

Throughout each term students will complete five short papers. Each of these assignments should be 1–2 pages in length, in 12 pt. font, and double-spaced. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings.

Discussion Board Posts

Students will respond to nine virtual discussion board posts for each course. Discussion boards are led by your section professor, who will provide an analytical prompt related to course material and instructions for participation. These prompts will give you the opportunity to interact with your fellow students and share your interpretation of course themes.

Question-and-Answer Sessions

Throughout the semester the lead scholar of each course will lead five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1–2 paragraph evaluation within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&A sessions, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 1–2 page review of topics covered for each missed Q&A.

Final Paper/Project

For the final assignment of each term, you will choose to complete either a 15-page research paper or a research project. The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts, documentary editing and transcription, podcasts, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a paper or project, all finals are broken down into smaller assignments, or scaffolded, throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows students time to incorporate instructor feedback into their assignment.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Paper/Project Proposal (2%):

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final paper or project. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information on and historical context for your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be very specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing), and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (What is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%):

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan to use in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Paper or Project Preview (5%):

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiographical essays.

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.