

The American Enlightenment: Intellectual History to 1787

Professor Caroline Winterer

Fall 2023

Course Description

The Enlightenment is often associated with Europe, but in this course, we will explore how the specific conditions of eighteenth-century North America—slavery, the presence of large numbers of Indigenous peoples, a colonial political context, and even local animals, rocks, and plants—also shaped the major questions and conversations of the time. We will examine how Enlightenment ideas directly influenced the American Revolution’s commitment to liberty, natural rights, separation of powers, and the pursuit of happiness—and how those ideas crept into almost every other area of American life as well.

Course Readings

1. Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Edited by Frank Shuffelton. New York: Penguin Books, 1999.
2. Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. Edited by Richard Beeman. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
3. Winterer, Caroline. *American Enlightenments: Pursuing Happiness in the Age of Reason*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
4. Winterer, Caroline. *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

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

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the source and impact of the major ideas that constituted the American Enlightenment and some of the founding documents: rights, nature,

reason, slavery, progress, happiness, society, separation of powers, and common sense

2. To understand how those ideas contributed to the American Revolution's emphasis on anti-monarchism, separation of powers, representative government, and consent

Class Schedule

Week One: September 21: What Is "Enlightenment" and What Is "American" about It?

Readings

- Winterer, *American Enlightenments*: Introduction, Chapter 1, and Epilogue.

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
 - First post due: Sunday, September 24
 - Second post due: Wednesday, September 27
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Week Two: September 28: Three Big Ideas: Nature, Society, and Rights

Readings

- John Locke, *Second Treatise*: Chapters 1–5, 11, 14, 18 ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))
- Declaration of Independence ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
 - First post due: Sunday, October 1
 - Second post due: Wednesday, October 4
 - Short Paper One due: Wednesday, October 4
 - 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 Three: October 5: New World Nature: Better or Worse than Nature in the Old World?

Readings

- Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, Chapter 2.
- Thomas Jefferson, "Query VI" in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, pp. 28–61.
- Thomas Jefferson to Comte de Buffon, "A Moose from New Hampshire." ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Three module.](#))
- Comte de Buffon, "Of the Animals Common to Both Continents." ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Three module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
 - First post due: Sunday, October 8
 - Second post due: Wednesday, October 11
- Final Project/Paper Question due: Wednesday, October 11
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final project or paper will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the project or paper 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 project or paper is worth pursuing.

Q&A Session One: Tuesday, October 10 - 8:00–9:30 p.m. ET

Week Four: October 12: Where Did Native Americans Come From? Where Are They Going?

Readings

- Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, Chapters 3 and 4.
- Jefferson, "Query VI" in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, pp. 61–71.
- Jefferson, "Query XI" in *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
 - First post due: Sunday, October 15
 - Second post due: Wednesday, October 18
- Short Paper Two due: Wednesday, October 18

- 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 Five: October 19: Race, Slavery, and Enlightenment

Readings

- Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, Chapter 5.
- Jefferson, "Query XIV" in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, pp. 144–151 (begin with the section that says, "To emancipate all slaves..." and end with "When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.")
- Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), p. 18, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06154. ([This reading can be found in the American History, 1493-1945 collection on the Adam Matthew digital database with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
 - First post due: Sunday, October 22
 - Second post due: Wednesday, October 25
- Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due: Wednesday, October 25
 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 project/paper.

Q&A Session Two: Wednesday, October 25 - 8:00–9:30 p.m. ET

Week Six: October 26: Benjamin Franklin: Man of Enlightenment?

Readings

- Franklin's Description of the Lightning Rod ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Six module.](#))
- Franklin's Anti-Slavery Petition, 9 November 1789 ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Six module.](#))
- Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind" ([A link to this](#)

[reading can be found in the Week Six module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
 - First post due: Sunday, October 29
 - Second post due: Wednesday, November 1
 - Short Paper Three due: Wednesday, November 1
 - 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 Seven: November 2: Maps, Empire, and Enlightenment

Readings

- Denis Wood, "Unleashing the Power of the Map," in *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.)
- "Enlightenment and Empire" ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.](#))
- "A Statistical Representation of the United States," in *American Enlightenments*, p. 138.
- View the maps and images linked in the Week Seven module:
 - ["Celebrating Native American Cartography: The Catawba Deerskin Map," Library of Congress.](#)
 - ["A View of Savannah, Georgia" \(1734\), The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.](#)
 - [Edward Savage, *The Washington Family* \(1789–1796\), National Gallery of Art.](#)
 - [Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Nicholas Biddle, and Paul Allen, "Map of Lewis and Clark's Track, Across the Western Portion of North America" \(1814\), David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.](#)
 - [Samuel Lewis, "A Correct Map of the United States" \(1817\), David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.](#)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - First post due: Sunday, November 5

- Second post due: Wednesday, November 8
- Short Paper Four due: Wednesday, November 8
 - 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: Tuesday, November 7 - 8:00–9:30 p.m. ET

Week Eight: November 9: Religion in the Age of Reason

Readings

- Winterer, *American Enlightenments* Ch. 6
- Franklin, excerpt from autobiography ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Eight module.](#))

Assignments

- Project/Paper Preview due: Wednesday, November 15
 - 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.
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper
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Week Nine: November 16: Raising Enlightened Children: Independence, Dependence, and Self-Government

Readings

- Christopher Harris, "Mason Locke Weems's Life of Washington: The Making of a Bestseller," *Southern Literary Journal* 19, no. 2 (1987), 92–101. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Nine module.](#))
- John Locke, "Some Thoughts Concerning Education." Read §1, 9, 11, 21, 40, 41, 46, 47, 50. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Nine module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
 - First post due: Sunday, November 19
 - Second post due: Wednesday, November 22

- Short Paper Five due: Wednesday, November 22
 - 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 Four: Tuesday, November 21 - 8:00–9:30 p.m. ET

Week Ten: November 23: Are We Rome? Or Greece? The Allure of Classical Antiquity

Readings

- Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, introduction and chapters 13
- Thomas Jefferson to Madame de Tessé, 20 March 1787 ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Ten module.](#))
- James Madison, "Federalist 18" ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Ten module.](#))

Assignments

- Rough Draft due November 29
 - 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.
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
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Week Eleven: November 30: Republican Government: More Enlightened Than Monarchy?

Readings

- Winterer, *American Enlightenments* ch. 8
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*
- Jefferson, "Query XVI" in *Notes on the State of Virginia*

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine
 - First post due: Sunday, December 3
 - Second post due: Wednesday, December 6

Q&A Session Five: Tuesday, December 5 - 8:00–9:30 p.m. ET

Week Twelve: December 7: What's "Enlightened" About the U.S. Constitution?

Readings

- U.S. Constitution, preamble ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Twelve module.](#))
- "Montesquieu and the *Spirit of the Laws*" ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Twelve module.](#))
- View one of the first paintings that includes the Constitution: Ralph Earl, *Oliver Ellsworth and Abigail Wolcott Ellsworth* (1792). ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Twelve module.](#))
 - Ask yourselves: Who are the Ellsworths and why are they sitting with the Constitution?

Assignments

- Final Project/Paper due: December 13

Course and Program Policies

It is the responsibility of students to know, understand, and abide by course and program policies.

For a full overview of program policies, review the Gettysburg College–Gilder Lehrman Institute Student Handbook.

Course correspondence

Correspondence with faculty and administrators should be formal. Include a subject line, addressee, and closing. Put the name and number of your course in the subject line.

Plagiarism and AI

This program uses Turnitin to check for instances of plagiarism and AI. Plagiarism and papers composed fully or in part by AI will not be tolerated. This includes self-plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing or composing papers with AI for the first time may receive a zero on the assignment. A student caught plagiarizing or composing with AI for a second time may be permanently removed from the program.

Your section professor will set the policies for use of AI for research or purposes other than composing your papers.

Late work

Assignments should be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the due date unless otherwise specified by your section professor. If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact your section professor to ask for an extension before the assignment's due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% if less than a week late, 10% if one week late, and an additional 10% for each subsequent week.

Grading scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Grade Points
A	95%–100%	4
A-	90%–94%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3
B-	80%–83%	2.67
C+	77%–79%	2.33
C	74%–76%	2
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1
D-	60%–63%	.67
F	0%–59%	0

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers (25% of grade – 5% per short paper)

Students will complete five short papers. Each should be approximately 500 words long. The purpose of these papers is not to merely summarize weekly readings but to demonstrate that you have read them analytically and contextually. 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. If you need help getting started, you can complete one of the options listed below.

Complete a thesis identification - Select one of your assigned readings and focus on identifying the thesis as well as the evidence the authors use to support that thesis.

Complete a primary source evaluation - Evaluate a primary source from the Gilder Lehrman Collection or elsewhere. Primary sources must be relevant to that week's readings. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is the author of this document?
- Who was their intended audience?
- How might both author and audience impact the content of the document?
- For what reason was this document created?

Complete a book review - Focus on one of the secondary sources assigned in this course and critique it. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's argument?
- Does the author adequately support their argument?
- Are you convinced of their argument? If not, why not?
- How does this source fit into the larger discussion of its topic?

Discussion Board Posts (18% of grade – 2% per discussion board)

Students will interact in 9 discussion boards in this course. Discussion boards are led by section professors, who will provide specific instructions for participation in their section. You are required to make at least one post to each discussion board and respond to **at least two other students**.

Question-and-Answer Sessions (15% of grade – 5% per reaction)

Throughout the semester the lead professor of each course will conduct 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 Q&A Reaction within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&As, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 500-word review of topics covered for each missed Q&A. **Makeup assignments must be completed within two weeks of the missed Q&A.**

Final Project/Paper (42% of grade)

For the final assignment of each course, you will choose to complete either a research project or 15-page research paper. 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 and podcasts, documentary editing and transcription, 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.

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.

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 project or paper, finals are scaffolded throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows time to incorporate instructor feedback into assignments.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Project/Paper Proposal (2%)

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final project or paper. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be super 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 on utilizing 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.

- Project or Paper 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 project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

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

- Final Product (21%):

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.

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