

## HS 466: Revolutionary Lives: Biography and the New Nation Spring 2017, Tuesdays, 3:05-5:35

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Office Hours: Wed. 2:00-4:00 PM  
Friday: 1:00-2:30 PM, and  
by appointment

*“A bastard brat of a Scotch peddler . . . as ambitious as Bonaparte, though less courageous, and save for me, would have involved us in a foreign war with France & a Civil War with ourselves.” (John Adams on Alexander Hamilton)*

*“His public principles have no other spring or aim than his own aggrandizement . . . If he can he will certainly disturb our institutions to secure himself permanent power and with it wealth. He is truly the Cataline of America.” (Alexander Hamilton on Aaron Burr)*

**Overview:** Biography, the study of individual lives, offers a unique perspective both on the individual and their times. This course explores the era of early republic in the United States (roughly 1787-1820s) by focusing on two particularly important and influential men, Alexander Hamilton and his archrival Aaron Burr. The course will explore the lives of both men as a means of examining some of the larger social, political, economic, and cultural challenges that faced the new United States during this tumultuous period. And it was a tumultuous period, one in which the very survival of the infant United States appeared at stake in battles over issues large and small, from honorific titles to banks to foreign relations. We will investigate those issues and the outsized role that Hamilton and Burr played in creating and resolving them (not always successfully). As it requires extensive reading, writing, research, thinking, and discussion, the seminar serves as the capstone course for history majors and advances Loyola’s basic learning aims: nurturing intellectual excellence, critical understanding, and *eloquentia perfecta*.

**Participation:** There are two main books for the class, Chernow’s biography of Hamilton and Isenberg’s biography of Burr. Both are long, so that you will average 250 pages or so each week. In addition, there will be some short readings posted on Moodle. You will be held responsible for all of these materials and any others that are announced in class. You should come to class having read the materials and prepared to discuss them. I will assign a grade for participation at the end of each class. Attending, but not participating, will result in a grade no higher than a C. Talking pointlessly (i.e. when you have not done the reading thoroughly) will also result in a poor grade. Missing a class will result in an F for that day. I will drop the lowest participation grade at the end of the semester and average the rest for your participation grade. **Discussion will count for 25% of your grade.**

**Response Papers:** Each student will write THREE 1-2 page papers summarizing the major themes in that week’s readings. Each student must write about 2 of the Hamilton weeks (you may choose which weeks), and one of the Burr readings. These papers should not describe the reading, but rather briefly analyze the central issues/arguments raised by the reading. What larger points are addressed by the evidence presented in the book/article? As the semester goes on, you should try to connect to earlier readings. **Response papers will count for 20% of your grade.**

**Research Paper:** The major assignment will be a fifteen to twenty page research paper on a topic/question concerning any aspect of Hamilton and Burr’s lives and times (and that, ideally,

will build off of one of the songs from the musical). The paper should incorporate both primary and secondary sources. We are fortunate that our library holds several excellent collections of primary materials, including the writings of Hamilton and Burr. **A short précis (2-3 pages) that outlines the paper, due February 25, will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. Each student will give a short (no more than 10 minutes) in-class presentation on April 18 or April 25 that will count as 7.5% of your final grade. The final paper will be worth 40%.**

**Academic Honesty:** It should go without saying, but all work handed in must be your own, and must properly cite materials used from primary and secondary sources. Plagiarism and other violations will result in a failing grade for the course. If you have any questions about these matters, consult the history style sheet available on the departmental webpage or ask me.

### **Reading Schedule:**

Jan. 17 – The Perils of the New Republic (Ellis, Intro/"The Duel," Moodle, and Chernow, Hamilton, 1-61)

Jan. 24 – Alexander Hamilton, (Chernow, 62-269)

Jan. 31 – Alexander Hamilton, (Chernow, 270-458)

Feb. 7 – Alexander Hamilton, (Chernow, 459-629)

Feb. 14– Alexander Hamilton, (Chernow, 630-732); Freeman, "Duelling as Politics" (Moodle)

Feb. 21 – No Class: **Research Proposals Due**

Feb. 28 – Aaron Burr (Isenberg, 1-175)

### **Mar. 7 – Spring Break**

Mar. 14 – Aaron Burr (Isenberg, 178-414)

Mar. 21 – Research Meetings (or possible reading TBA)

Mar. 28 – Hamilton and Burr in Life and Art (Wood, "Federalists on Broadway," Moodle; "Historians and *Hamilton*," [www.earlyamericanists.com](http://www.earlyamericanists.com); Essays by Ken Owen, Tom Cutterham, Joseph Aldeman)

Apr. 4 – Research Meetings

Apr. 11 – Research Meetings

Apr. 18 – **Student Presentations**

Apr. 25 – **Student Presentations** and Summing Up

**FINAL PAPERS DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 3 at NOON**