

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
SUMMER SEMINARS FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY TEACHERS**

Seminar: **The Early American Republic and the Problem of Governance**

Directors: [John L. Larson](#) and [Michael A. Morrison](#)
Professors of History
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

Dates: June 19 to July 14, 2011

Location: Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for inquiring about this NEH seminar, which we will be directing next summer. Taking advantage of the institutional residence of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR) in Philadelphia, we are excited to bring together the excellent facilities and rich resources of the Library Company of Philadelphia, the generous sponsorship of the NEH, and the good offices and scholarly talent of SHEAR itself in this great opportunity for college and university teachers to study and learn together. Our topic is the problem of governance in the new United States. Looking back over more than 200 years, the so-called “Miracle at Philadelphia” may seem like a foregone conclusion, but for Americans who have tried to implement that Constitution the problem of governance refused (and still refuses) to be solved. When you approach the early American republic as a grand, even improbable experiment in republican self-government—one as likely to collapse as to succeed—then suddenly the story of the first two generations takes on an urgency and drama few people ever suspected.

Objective

Our objective in this seminar is to suggest coherent approaches to the continuing and rich outpouring of scholarship by exploring the problem of governance in the early republic as an experiment in self-government. Each of us is the author of a monographic study on the subject of our seminar: Larson of *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (2001), and Morrison of *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (1997). Our own scholarship serves to pose two framing questions that will guide our reading and discussion: in the first case, “Why create the American republic?” and in the second, “Why tear it apart?” Between the two framing questions lies “Tocqueville’s America”—the broad field of antebellum American history and culture. We will explore this large field topically, looking at the problem of governance from the perspective of leadership (top down) and from the perspective of popular demands for participation and reform (bottom up). Scholars have filled many shelves with excellent literature addressing these issues, a critical sample of which we will try to engage.

The seminar is designed for college and university teachers in history, law, government, American Studies, philosophy, and related disciplines whose research interests lie in the early republic and whose writing and teaching agenda will be furthered by a month of directed study in Philadelphia. This city is home to what is arguably the richest single congeries of early American research collections in the country. For seminar participants a primary objective will be to make progress on an article, chapter, or new teaching project. Your project may be part of research in progress or the beginning of a new project that somehow relates to the problem of governance and the experiment in republicanism. Topics may range from government policy and economic development to agriculture, science, technology, law, literature, race, slavery, antislavery, religion, social reform, family life, immigration, education, labor, and politics. Participants will be asked to report twice on their works in progress and deliver short oral presentations at the appropriate times during the seminar.

Selection

The selection committee will be looking to bring together sixteen eager scholar-teachers from a diversity of backgrounds who are committed to trying to understand and teach about this American experiment in self-government. Up to two of the selections will be reserved for graduate students. Your own research is an essential aspect of the program, and projects that make appropriate use of Philadelphia's unique resources will obviously stand out. At the same time, the Library Company and other local institutions have first class research collections for all aspects of early American history, so projects need not be focused on Philadelphia exclusively. **A stipend of \$3300** for each NEH Summer Scholar should defray any direct expenses associated with the seminar and make it possible for a wide variety of scholars to apply. This NEH seminar promises to be a wonderful opportunity to advance your own research while sharing the kind of intellectual stimulation that caught your attention in the first place back in graduate school. The setting is genteel and delightful, the accommodations comfortable, the city vibrant and full of fun, and the stipend makes it affordable. We hope you will find the package irresistible.

Intellectual Content

We will meet three mornings per week (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) to discuss common readings (see attached [calendar](#) for details) and to share ideas growing out of our research topics and works in progress. Our discussions will begin around the core readings selected for each day and then expand to address supplementary selections on which individual NEH Summer Scholars will report to the group. Some afternoons will be given over to field trips to Independence Park, the National Constitution Center, the American Philosophical Society, and other Philadelphia sites. Each week we will bring in a visiting scholar who will help lead discussion and confer with seminar participants. On these days informal socializing will be encouraged as well as individual conferences for those whose research seems most appropriate. All other time is free for participants to pursue their own research projects. The seminar directors will be in residence and available for weekly conferences with each participant and at other times for consultation.

To give shape to the seminar we plan to focus in the first week on the founding of the republic and introduce the problem of governance, using as a point of departure the opening chapters of Larson's *Internal Improvement*. Participants also will read *What Did the Constitution Mean to Early Americans?*, ed. Edward Countryman. Here essays by Isaac Kramnick, Gordon Wood, Jan Lewis, and Jack N. Rakove explore the theoretical and rhetorical background of the framers' work and offer some opening statements about their achievement. On the second day we will begin discussing rights, governance, and representation as they were understood at the beginning of the experiment. Our visiting scholar will be **Rosemarie Zagarri**, George Mason University, whose "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America" (1998) will be among our readings. At the heart of this week's inquiry is the question, "What did Americans really expect from their new constitutional order?"

In week two we take up the implementation of these theoretical ideals during first sixty years under the Constitution. How did ambitious individuals pursue their private agenda in this new environment of liberation? How did governments deal with the unfinished business of the founding as well as new problems thrown up by rapid growth and economic development? Readings will include essays by Gordon Wood, Alan Taylor, Tamara Thornton, Daniel Feller, and Christopher Clark. **Professor Clark** will join us as guest expert on social, economic, and political developments in this period.

Week three expands the conversation to encompass popular movements and pressure from below the governing structures. We start with the general theme of liberation and disorder, both social and economic, with readings from Paul Johnson, Paul Gilje, Tyler Anbinder, and Timothy Gilfoyle. On day two we focus in on the grassroots movement against slavery, reading Joanne Pope Melish, James Brewer Stewart, Lois E. Horton, and Walter Johnson. With **Julie Roy Jeffrey** present as our guest we will further consider the intersections of gender and abolitionism.

In week four we try to recover a narrative focus by taking up the sectional crisis and the coming of the Civil War, using Morrison, *Slavery and the American West* as the central text. The main issue will turn on the question of whether the sectional crisis that culminated in Lincoln's election and the secession of the Lower South represented a breakdown of the national political system or whether it was functioning exactly as it was supposed to: representing the will of the people. On day one we will assess the conflicting and conflicted historiography on the war's causation. On day two, we will parse the essence of this crisis in governance and the essence of Union from the perspectives of southern fire-eaters and moderates in the works of William Freehling and Mills Thornton as well as that of northern free-soilers in the readings of William Gienapp, Eric Foner, Jonathan Earle, Elizabeth Varon, and David Donald. **Jonathan Earle** joins the seminar to help us navigate the treacherous waters of the final decades of the antebellum period.

Facilities and Accommodations

The seminar will meet at the Library Company's recently renovated Cassatt House (right next door) for morning discussions. During morning and afternoon hours, you will have

access to high-speed internet connections to both the Library Company's collections and personal email accounts. Once the Library Company closes at 4:45 Monday through Friday, NEH Summer Scholars will be able to use the collections at Drexel University. You may be interested to know that there are over 500,000 printed volumes, 75,000 graphics, and 160,000 manuscripts at the Library Company, so there will be no shortage of sources to engage your interests! Most of the printed sources are accessible via the online catalogue, Wolfpac, which is accessible at www.librarycompany.org. In addition, you may wish to use the collections of the American Philosophical Society (www.amphilsoc.org), the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (www.hsp.org), the Athenaeum (www.philaathenaeum.org), or The College of Physicians (www.collphyphil.org), all of which are within walking distance of the Library Company.

We are offering shared housing at Drexel University, just across the Schuylkill in West Philadelphia, a walkable distance but also easily reached by bus or subway. The Library Company has canvassed and researched available housing in the immediate area, and it has determined that for cost, comfort, convenience, cleanliness, and access to research facilities, Drexel University is far and away the best option. Rooms will be available from June 19 through July 14, at a cost of \$300 per week to each participant. Parking is available for an additional fee. The layout of the rooms is in suite fashion, with separate private sleeping rooms conjoined with one main living area. Linen service can be purchased if you like. Participants chosen for this seminar will be asked to stipulate any additional days of dorm room rental at the time they are contacted.

You are not required to stay in the Drexel dorms, but we strongly urge you to do so because of the numerous benefits—intellectual and social—that you will enjoy by living together. Alternative housing in either Center City Philadelphia or the Penn Campus area is likely to be very expensive, while more economical housing farther out of the city introduces enormous problems of parking and commuting. If persons want alternative housing we will make every effort to help them find something suitable, but we recommend the dorms as offering the best combination of comfort, economy, and community.

NEH Summer Scholars may use the Drexel food services, which remain open during the summer. In addition, participants who wish to eat out will find in Philadelphia hundreds of places to test their palates (including WXPB's World Café just around the corner). We will supply everyone with lists of area grocery stores, convenience shops, and inexpensive lunch and dinner restaurants near both the Library Company and the Drexel campus; of course, while in the rich environment of the city you may wish to sample its swankier and more exotic offerings as well. A quick perusal of the city and state websites will turn up a host of museums, theaters, self-guided walking tours, and much more to explore during the evening and on weekends.

Getting around Philadelphia is easy. Parking is extremely problematic, but SEPTA (the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority) provides excellent bus, trolley, and high-speed subway service. Public transit between the Drexel dorms and the Library Company takes an easy 15 minutes (you can walk it on good days in 30). Many of Philadelphia's cultural and recreational opportunities lie between these two points or within an easy transit ride north or

south of Walnut Street. A good, all-purpose website for information on Philadelphia tourism and travel is: www.gophila.com.

Program Directors

A few words about your seminar leaders are in order. Having served together for over a decade as coeditors of the *Journal of the Early Republic*, we have been working closely together for years trying to make sense of this period and its historical scholarship. We tend to disagree on many (if not most) of the central issues, so participants can expect lively conversations and plenty of opportunities to get their own ideas on the table. We each have taught both undergraduates and graduate students in different kinds of institutions. Morrison studied at the University of Michigan and taught at the joint Indianapolis campus of Indiana University and Purdue University before joining the Purdue faculty at West Lafayette in 1991. Larson graduated from Luther College and Brown University, taught at Earlham College, and worked at Conner Prairie Museum before moving to Purdue in 1983. Larson yearns for the good old days, when men of integrity such as John Quincy Adams took unpopular stands on unpopular political issues. Morrison scoffs at his naïveté. Morrison hangs a huge portrait of Andrew Jackson on his office wall, solely to annoy Larson. And so it goes. . . .

To Apply

You will find enclosed with ([or linked to](#)) this letter a form called “Application Information and Instructions.” Please read it carefully, because it explains your stipend, how to apply, and the guidelines set down by NEH that you must follow. Your individual essay is a very important part of the application; it need not be long, but it is a premier opportunity for you to set forth your research and teaching goals, as well as the distinctive qualities that you will bring to the seminar.

All application materials will be available to you on the web site for the seminar. Please go to www.librarycompany.org/neh and follow the links. When you have completed the application by March 1, 2011, please send it to John L. Larson, c/o Library Company of Philadelphia, 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-5698. All materials must be submitted in triplicate, as the NEH instructions inform you. We cannot accept electronic applications. And if you have any questions, please call: 215-546-3181, and ask for Lauren Propst or contact lpropst@librarycompany.org. Invitations to join the seminar will be sent shortly after April 1, 2005.

Sincerely yours,

John L. Larson

Michael A. Morrison