

UHON 351/HIST 490
Playing at Revolution
Fall 2024

Course Instructor: Dr. Joe Sramek (sramek@siu.edu)

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What Is Reacting to the Past?"

The course mainly uses an innovative, award-winning, and experiential learning method called "Reacting to the Past," used by professors at over 500 colleges and universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and several European countries. It is highly likely that most college courses you have taken adopt – whether consciously or not – a Socratic approach: professors guide students through difficult texts by either lecturing about them or by posing questions for discussion. This course is different. In this course, you will learn and practice skills – speaking, writing, rigorous analysis of difficult texts, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and teamwork – to prevail in difficult and complicated situations. Our course focuses on two important revolutions in the modern world – the French Revolution (1789-1799) and the Mexican Revolution (1912-1920).

In this Reacting to the Past course, you will be assigned different roles, including some prominent historical figures and some fictional characters typical of their age and social positions, all derived from the historical setting. Each role is defined largely by its game objective, which corresponds to a political position in a country during a time of crisis. During the semester, each student will play three or more roles, so the student who begins the semester as a radical may end it as an archconservative. Reacting roles, unlike those in a play, do not have a fixed script and outcome. Students are obliged to stay true to the philosophical and political beliefs of the historical figure they have been assigned to play and must devise means to express those ideas persuasively, in papers, speeches, or other public presentations.

For the first few sessions of each game, we will explore the philosophical issues and historical context on which the game will turn. After these introductory sessions, the

class will break into factions, as students with similar roles join forces to accomplish their common objectives. Then, as debates begin, the class will again meet as one. Students in their roles run the meetings. The instructor, now a Gamemaster (or GM), will now sit in the back of the room, intruding only to resolve technical issues concerning the operation of the game or in other rare circumstances. He will also meet frequently outside of class with players and groups of players to give them intellectual guidance. At the conclusion of a game comes a “post-mortem” phase, when students relinquish their roles, discuss the role of historical contingency, and discuss the game and its attendant issues from (their own) contemporary perspective.

The heart of each game is persuasion. For nearly every role to which you will be assigned, you must persuade others that your views make more sense than those of your opponents. Your views will be informed by the texts cited in your game objectives: the more you draw upon these texts and the more cleverly you draw upon them, the better. You have two ways of expressing your views: orally and in writing. Both will be graded in this course.

This pedagogy rewards and encourages several aspects of education that I value most highly:

- **INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY:** College is an opportunity to explore interesting questions simply for the sake of learning something new. I value this process of learning for the sake of learning (rather than learning for the sake of getting a good job or getting a good grade on an exam). This involves being able to ask and wrestle with questions that go beyond what might be on a test. It also involves taking the initiative to pursue ideas and concepts that are particularly interesting to you.
- **TEAMWORK:** I believe that learning how to work as part of a team is one of the most important life skills a person can learn. This means learning how to play a healthy role in the group, being neither “the person who does everything” nor “the person who is a dead weight.” This requires some self-reflection on your part.
- **CREATIVITY AND RISK TAKING:** I appreciate creative approaches to thought, research, and presentation. This involves creative problem-solving to research challenges and the willingness to take risks in your thinking.

Our two games include a game I have written entitled “Reform or Revolution: Britain in the 1840s” that is currently being workshopped as a game eventually to be published by W.W. Norton and used in the university classroom, and a game to be written by Ryan Jurich as his honors thesis project on the era of the 1860s and 1870s. We intend to play both games in the course as a “campaign” with various scholarly readings, podcasts, documentaries, and other materials at the beginning and end of the two games as augmentations.

Course Requirements

Class Preparation: This course is time intensive. You should plan on spending around 3 hours outside of class per hour of class. That means you should budget at least 9 hours per week outside of class for reading, writing, meeting in small groups, and preparing for the simulations. If you do not feel that your schedule or interest will support such a heavy reading load and time commitment, please do not take this class.

Attendance: Consistent attendance in class is a minimum condition of class membership. Students do not receive credit for attending, but failure to attend class will negatively affect grades. Missing more than six classes, regardless of performance on other assignments, is grounds for failure of the course.

Participation: Come to class ready to participate in simulations and engage in debate. Since this class requires a variety of voices, I expect all participants to be present both physically and mentally. Regular and active participation may nudge your grade upwards (at my discretion) while repeated absences or lack of initiative or effort will propel your grade downwards. Students wishing for a more somnolent 400-level classroom experience are strongly advised not to take this course!

Approach all your work with thoughtfulness, especially your oral and written presentations. Thoughtfulness in this course involves both care and creativity. Your work should exhibit a clear and coherent argument, adequate textual support, impeccable grammar, and precise sentence structure. Yet it should also exhibit intellectual daring.

Late arrivals are distracting and disrespectful. Persistent tardiness will lower your participation grade.

Lastly, have fun!

Late Assignments: In general, it is important to learn how to meet deadlines and manage your time well while in college, for better success in life afterwards. This is even more imperative in a course such as this where other students are relying on and expecting you to complete assignments as agreed. If assignments are late, they will be penalized one letter grade for each class session they are late. Game consequences – such as inability to vote, loss of influence, etc. – will likely occur in addition to your grade penalty.

Assignments and Grading:

This is a “**portfolio course.**” At the conclusion of each Reacting game we are playing in the course, you will submit a complete portfolio consisting of 1) all of the writing assignments written in character by you over the course of the game; 2) evidence of substantial game participation such as an in-game log or screenshots of important Slack messages sent by your character; and 3) a roughly 2 page reflection essay on your learning outcomes as a result of playing the game. ***Each of these two game portfolios are worth one-third of the course grade*** with roughly 75% of that being assessed based on your written work and 25% on your participation, speeches, and overall gameplay.

The remaining one-third of the course grade will be comprised of short synopses of alternative readings, podcasts, documentaries, or other materials that augment the two games and contribute to a richer understanding of this moment in British and world history. These will be submitted at the end of the semester, along with a final reflective summary of the course, as a “Reading Journal” in lieu of a formal final exam.

Some further particulars:

Regarding public speaking: Each student will be required to give at least two speeches per game, in character. You may find that you give more as you feel compelled to speak your mind and forcefully advance your arguments to achieve your victory objectives. When speaking, you will only be allowed use of a single 4X6 index card. Reading from a prepared text is not allowed. Nothing is more boring than listening to a speaker stumble through his/her prepared text while avoiding making eye contact with his/her audience.

N.B. Speeches do not always have to take the form of a “speech,” but rather can be more creative if appropriate to the character you are playing and the goals you seek to achieve (e.g., satirical songs or charivari performances to mock one’s social superiors if their actions “warrant” such behavior, may be more effective than a more traditional speech). Consult me if you have any questions or would like some advice.

Second N.B. I’ve uploaded onto Desire to Learn (D2L) eight videos by Lily Lamboy, a former Reacting student at another university, on speaking effectiveness for Reacting classes. These videos are provided by the Reacting to the Past Consortium and should be consulted by all to improve their speaking skills.

Regarding written work: Your grade here is based on various written assignments relevant to, and in the voice of, the character(s) you are playing in the three games. These could be memos, poems, songs, or whatever mode of written expression enables you to persuade your fellow students. As this is an advanced elective course, all game writing should generally total 6-8 pages per game, submitted promptly by the assigned due dates listed in the course calendar (and/or your role sheets). It must also reference several relevant sources from the various gamebook and be properly footnoted according to *Chicago Manual of Style*. At the end of each game, you will also submit a game log documenting your various efforts to play your character throughout the simulation, and you will write a brief 2–3-page reflection essay that will help you process your experiences and “come out of role” during the debrief.

Social Media:

We will be making much use of a Slack course page to facilitate discussions between and among players and factions in our three games. Further details about how to join will be provided in class.

Rough sketch of the semester:

First month of the course or so: Broader understandings of revolutions, why they erupt in the first place, what usually arises out of them, etc. I will probably frame this vast topic using *Scripting Revolution* and other short readings.

Second month of the course: *Rousseau, Burke, and Revolution in France, 1791*

The typical progression of a Reacting game is for instructor led discussions for 2-3 class sessions on the key intellectual debates and historical backgrounds for the game. Then there are about 3 weeks devoted to gameplay. *Rousseau, Burke, and Revolution in France, 1791*, situates students in the pivotal third year of the revolution (1791-92) when a variety of possible outcomes were still available from ending the revolution (conservative), to cementing the achievements of the so-called “moderate phase” of constitutional reforms, or extending the revolution further toward more radical possibilities (as happened historically). Students play conservatives, Feuillants (moderates), Jacobins, or members of the Sections of Paris, along with some who play less determined roles, and debate over the direction France should take with its revolution. This will then be followed by a day or two after for “postmortem” debrief where students come out of character and discuss how and why the actual history is different from the gameplay.

Third month of the course: *Mexico in Revolution*.

Same progression as before. A few days of background “set-up” followed by a few weeks of gameplay where students are debating each other from their respective characters’ viewpoints while trying to achieve their goals. The Mexican Revolution is incredibly rich and complex, with multiple issues and personalities and provides a suitable contrast to the French Revolution. It also helps globalize the topic of revolutions from the otherwise western-centric approaches that can tend to dominate discussion.

Final weeks of the semester: Students will use the concepts from part 1 of the course and the two historical-immersive “case studies” to write a capstone final project. I hope that students will be able to connect the sometimes very abstract social scientific scholarship on why revolutions happen with their experiences playing revolutionaries from across various national, chronological, and ideological spectrums thus linking philosophical, historical, and social scientific perspectives on the theme.

CURRICULUM VITAE OF DR. JOSEPH M. SRAMEK, PH.D.

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I. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Program Coordinator, History, School of History and Philosophy, 2021-present.
- Member of the SIUC Faculty Senate, 2020-2022. Co-Chair of the Undergraduate Education Policy Committee and member of the SIUC Faculty Senate Executive Committee (the entire time I was on the Senate).
- Director of Undergraduate Studies, History Department, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2018-present.
- Associate Professor, History Department, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2013-present.
- Assistant Professor, History Department, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2007-2013.
- Adjunct Assistant Professor of History, Manhattan College, 2007.
- Adjunct Assistant Professor of History, Lehman College, The City University of New York, 2006-2007.
- Adjunct Assistant Professor of History, The New School, 2006.

II. EDUCATION

- Ph.D., History, The City University of New York, 2007.
- M.Phil., History, The City University of New York, 2002.
- B.A., History, State University of New York at Binghamton, *Magna Cum Laude*, 1998.

III. TEACHING

- Courses taught:
 - *Undergraduate History Major Requirements and Core Curriculum Courses*
 - History 101B: World Civilizations II (Core-Curriculum)
 - History 207: Topics in World History
 - Age of Revolutions, 1688-1789
 - Roots of Anglo-American Political Culture, 1650-1850
 - Eurasian Empires in Global History, 1000-Present
 - Asia in the World
 - Anglo-American Reform Movements, 19th and 20th Centuries

- History 392: Historical Research and Writing (have taught both in-person and asynchronous versions of the course)
- History 499: Senior Seminar: Victorian Culture
- *Undergraduate History Electives*
 - History 330: British History
 - History 333: British Empire
 - History 381: History of Modern India
 - History 406B: Gender and Sexuality in Modern Europe
 - History 410: Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1789-1914
 - History 415: Tudor-Stuart Britain
 - History 420: Early Modern Europe (cross-listed with Philosophy's Early Modern European Political Philosophy)
 - History 425A: Europe, 1914-1945
 - History 442: Victorian Britain
 - History 447: Culture and British Imperialism
 - History 496A: Historical Podcasting Internship
- *Graduate-Level History Courses*
 - European Empires, 1776-1914
 - Britain and the World, 1750-Present
- Teaching Honors and Awards
 - SIU Foundation Teaching Innovation Award, Fall 2019, \$7,500.00 to help establish (with Pinckney Benedict, MFA, in the Department of English) the Digital Humanities Lab.
 - Queen Award for Excellence in History Teaching, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Department of History, 2012.

IV. RESEARCH

- *Publications:*
 - *Gender, Morality, and Race in Company India, 1765-1858* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
 - "Rethinking Britishness: Religion and Debates about the 'Nation' among Britons in Company India, 1813-1857," *Journal of British Studies* 48:4 (Oct. 2015): 822-843.
 - "'Face Him Like a Briton': Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India, ca. 1800-1875," *Victorian Studies* 48 (2006): 659-680.
- *Current Research Projects:*
 - "Being British in Nineteenth-Century Colonial India: Nationalism and Imperialism in a Colonial World" (full-length book project)

- “Politics, Religion, and the Birth of the ‘Public Sphere’: The Glorious Revolution in England, 1685-1688” (A Reacting to the Past simulation, currently at Level 3 (of 5) of development). Consists of nearly 150pp of text, including a source reader applicable to the game, a ~60pp instructor’s manual, and 46 historical character role sheets for use in the undergraduate classroom.
- “Reform or Revolution? Britain in the 1840s” (A Reacting to the Past simulation, currently at Level 3 (of 5) of development). Consists of nearly 200pp of text, including a source reader applicable to the game, an instructor’s manual, and nearly 60 distinct historical character role sheets for use in the undergraduate classroom. The game has two modules for use in the classroom. “The Condition of England? Debates at the Society of Cogers” examines the highly-charged ideological debates between paternalists, free-trade radicals, Utilitarians, and various democratic radicals, among other activists, all responding to the early industrial revolution in Britain. The second module, “Reform or Revolution? Parliament and Britain, 1841-1848” simulates the British Houses of Parliament as it grapples with the various humanitarian crises of the era.