

For the past few years, especially since the 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, many Americans have called for a “reckoning” with a long history of systemic racism. But while millions marched in support of Black Lives Matter and applauded the removal of monuments to enslavers and genocidists, a backlash was brewing. This backlash began to emerge in the last days of the Trump administration in the form of a 1776 Commission and attacks on the *New York Times* 1619 Project. In the past year, backlash has escalated through attacks on teachers and school boards and legislation against “Critical Race Theory,” all in the name of a return to a “patriotic history.”

This course will focus on the US History Wars. In doing so, we will take a unique approach. Rather than a fixed syllabus, we will collectively develop an agenda for inquiry. I will prepare some introductory material to get us oriented during the first two or three weeks, but after that, students will decide what topics to focus on. I will provide guidance and resources, but students will set the agenda. There are many directions we might take. We will undoubtedly want to focus on some of the key historical controversies in the History Wars (e.g., the importance of slavery in the coming of the American Revolution and the creation of the Constitution; genocide and settler colonialism, interpretations of the Civil Rights movement), but we may also want to explore the history of the History Wars themselves and how the current History Wars are playing themselves out. We might also want to ask: why so much fighting about history? What is at stake?