Between 1780 and 1804, every one of the United States from Pennsylvania northward either abolished chattel slavery outright or put it on a gradual path toward elimination. This colloquium will focus closely on the political dynamics of that first emancipation movement as well as search more broadly for its root causes, international contexts, and longer-term legacies. Some additional questions that the class will investigate include:

- What was the role of the American Revolution in the first emancipation?
- To what extent was there a coherent emancipation “movement”?
- What was achieved by the first emancipation and how? Were its results anything more than a series of half-measures and compromises?
- Why did the first emancipation stop at the Mason-Dixon Line, and what were the consequences for politics in the new nation?
- What was the legacy of the first emancipation for the social construction of “race”?

Students will be expected to write a brief paper of approximately 500 words in response to the assigned readings each week. By the end of the semester, students should have a grasp of the current state of scholarship on the first emancipation and command of a reading list that will be of use either for exams or their own further research.

As is typical for colloquia, assigned readings will be about a book per week. I will also assign journal articles and short, illustrative primary sources. The syllabus will likely include the following texts, or portions thereof. This list is subject to change before the start of the semester.

Davis, David Brion. The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (1975).