The American Civil War and Reconstruction

For the official, up-to-date version of this syllabus, go to http://www.oberlin.edu/faculty/gkornbl/H300F11.

Less than a century after fighting for independence from Great Britain and establishing a federal republic, Americans turned their firearms on each other in the bloodiest war in the nation's history. At the end of hostilities, over six hundred thousand soldiers lay dead while approximately four million former slaves enjoyed legal freedom for the first time. Thereafter Americans struggled to reorganize their society and redefine their polity in response to the changes wrought by the Civil War's violence and to the conflicts that endured in peace.

This course focuses on three interrelated subjects: the causes of the Civil War; the dynamics of the war and emancipation; and the outcomes of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Beyond coverage of this subject matter, the course is designed to promote three major learning objectives:

- A grasp of important issues, trends, and controversies in recent scholarship on the Civil War and Reconstruction.
- An understanding of how historians develop interpretations based on research in primary sources and the application of analytic models.
- A capacity to make independent judgments after careful consideration of available evidence, alternative scholarly interpretations, and an honest reexamination of one's preconceptions and biases.

Throughout the semester, students are expected to draw their own conclusions about the meaning and significance of events that continue to provoke popular passions and intellectual argument more than a century after they occurred.

Format: The class meets regularly on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-2:50 pm. Most class sessions will be devoted to group discussion, and attendance at discussion sessions is mandatory. Students are also required to post a question for class consideration on Blackboard by 9 am before each discussion session.

Evaluation: Students will be graded on the basis of one position paper (5-6 pp.), a research project prospectus (2-3 pp.), a research project progress report (2-3 pp.), an oral presentation of research findings (12-15 minutes), a polished research paper (18-
20 pp.), and class participation, including Blackboard postings. The standard formula for determining final grades will be 15% for the position paper, 5% for the prospectus, 5% for the progress report, 5% for the oral presentation, 50% for the research paper, and 20% for class participation. The instructor reserves the right to exercise some discretion in assigning final grades.

Honor Code: All course work is governed by Oberlin's Honor Code. If you have a question about how the Honor Code applies to a particular assignment, you should ask the professor in advance of the due date.

Accommodation for students with special needs: With the assistance of the Office of Disability Services, the instructor will provide appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and special needs. Students should notify the instructor at the start of the semester if they desire such accommodation.

Purchases: The following books should be purchased. They are available at the Oberlin Bookstore and elsewhere:


Tues., Sept. 6  

**Introduction**

Thurs., Sept. 8  

**Discussion: A Quick Overview of the Civil War and Reconstruction**

- Masur, *The Civil War*, entire [purchase]
Coming of the Civil War

Tues., Sept. 13

Discussion: Democracy, Slavery, and American Exceptionalism

- Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 1-38 [purchase]

Thurs., Sept. 15

Discussion: Social Dynamics of the "Slave South"

Tues., Sept. 20

Discussion: Social Dynamics of the "Free North"


Note: Weather permitting, the prof will lead a walking tour of Oberlin’s Civil War monuments after this class.

Thurs., Sept. 22

Discussion: The Political Crisis of the 1850s (I)

- Primary Document: "Appeal of the Independent Democrats" (1854) [under "Course Documents" on Blackboard]

Tues., Sept. 27

Introduction to Research Project (Meet in Mudd 456)

Thurs., Sept. 29

Discussion: The Political Crisis of the 1850s (II)

- Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 139-217 [purchase]
Fri., Sept. 30

Dinner and video at Prof’s house

Tues., Oct. 4

African-American Agency in the Coming of the Civil War

- Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 1-61 [purchase]
- Primary Document: Frederick Douglass, “What to the American Slave Is Your Fourth of July?” (1852) [on WWW]

Thurs., Oct. 6

Discussion: The Secession Crisis

- Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s, 219-259 [purchase]
- McCurry, Confederate Reckoning, 1-84 [purchase]
Mon., Oct. 10
Prospectuses due by 9 pm (post on Blackboard)

Tues., Oct. 11
Discussion: Research Prospectuses

Thur., Oct. 13
Discussion: Why Men Fought
- Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 3-51, 81-111, 147-221 [purchase]

Tues., Oct. 18
Discussion: Abraham Lincoln in His Own Words

Thurs., Oct. 20
No class

Sat., Oct. 22
Position papers due by noon

Fall Break
Discussions:

**Nov. 1**
- Discussion: Emancipation
  - Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 62-159 [purchase]
  - McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 218-262 [purchase]

**Nov. 3**
- Presentation: Citing Sources in History Papers

**Nov. 6**
- Civil War Film Festival

**Nov. 8**
- Discussion: The Confederate Social (Dis)order
  - McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 85-217, 263-361 [purchase]

**Nov. 10 and Nov. 11**
- Meetings with professor to discuss research projects
Tues., Nov. 15

Discussion: Origins of Radical Reconstruction

- Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, xi-xvi, 1-147 [purchase]
- Primary Document: *Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution* [on WWW]

Wed., Nov. 16

Progress reports due on Blackboard by 9 pm

Thurs., Nov. 17

Discussion: Progress reports

Tues., Nov. 22

Discussion: Successes and Failures of Radical Reconstruction

- Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 163-264 [purchase]

Thurs., Nov. 24

No class: Thanksgiving
Discussion: The Collapse of Reconstruction

- Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 180-260 [purchase]
- Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 265-313 [purchase]
- Primary Document: Rutherford B. Hayes, "Inaugural Address" (1877)

**Thurs., Dec. 1**

**Student Presentations**

**Tues., Dec. 6**

**Student Presentations**

**Thurs., Dec. 8**

**Student Presentations**

**Tues., Dec. 13**

Discussion: History and Memory of the Civil War Era

Sun., Dec. 18

Final Project (research paper) due by 4 pm