

Professor David W. Blight
Yale University

History 119b/ Af-Am 172 | Spring, 2015

The Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1845-1877

"The Civil War uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations."

- Mark Twain, 1873

"The Civil War draws us as an oracle, darkly unriddled and portentous, of personal, as well as national fate."

- Robert Penn Warren, 1961

"The mission of this war is national regeneration."

- Frederick Douglass, 1863

"Only fools forget the causes of war."

- Albion Tourgee, 1884

"Thank God men have done learned how to forget quick what they ain't brave enough to try to cure."

- William Faulkner, *The Hamlet*, 1940

This course will explore the causes, course, and consequences of the American Civil War, from the 1840s to 1877. The primary goal of the course is to understand the multiple meanings of a transforming event in American history. Those meanings may be defined in many ways: national, sectional, racial, constitutional, individual, social, intellectual, or moral. We will especially examine four broad themes: the crisis of union and disunion in an expanding republic; slavery, race, and emancipation as national problem, personal experience, and social process; the experience of modern, total war for individuals and society; and the political and social challenges of Reconstruction. The course attempts in several ways to understand the interrelationships between regional,

national, and African-American history. And finally, we hope to probe the depths of why the Civil War era has a unique hold on American historical memory.

There will be two lectures per week, Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30-11:20, and a discussion section taught by a Teaching Fellow. Attendance in sections is REQUIRED. This course is fortunate to have an experienced and talented group of TFs, including Danielle Bainbridge, Michael Blaakman, Sarah Bowman, Lisa Furchtgott, Tiffany Hale, Michael Hattem, and James Shinn.

Required Reading

(all books are at the Yale-Barnes & Noble Bookstore)

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, ed. by David W. Blight. Bedford Books

William Gienapp, ed., *Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection*, Norton.

Charles R. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War*. University of Virginia Press.

Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War*. Bedford Books.

James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat*. Harvard University Press.

E. L. Doctorow, *The March*. Random House.

Drew G. Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. University of North Carolina Press.

David W. Blight, *A Slave No More: Two Men Who Escaped from Slavery, Including Their Narratives of Emancipation*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877*. Harper & Row.

Shawn Alexander, ed., *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, Bedford Books.

We are using two anthologies of documents (Gienapp and Johnson). Teaching Fellows will have discretion in assigning particular documents for each week's sections, and many such documents will be especially important for use in paper assignments. James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* is provided largely as background reading for the first two thirds of the course. For further background reading on the post-war period you may want to consult David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War In American Memory*.

Occasional readings and assignments will be posted on the Yale Classes Server. Check each week.

* A packet of additional required readings is available at Tyco Print Shop on Broadway (includes documents and articles). * indicates a reading from the packet or a piece posted on the Classes Server.

Films will be scheduled during the course: especially several episodes of the PBS series, "The Civil War." The film, "Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Civil War," will also be assigned. Selections of Civil War era poetry may also be provided at times during the course. There are also many web sites and blogs devoted to the Civil War Sesquicentennial. You may wish to especially follow the entries on the *New York Times* "Disunion" site (see www.opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com); and the very useful www.nps.gov.civilwar150.

Outline of Weekly Classes and Assignments

Week 1, Jan. 13, 15:

1. Introductions: Why Does the Civil War era have a hold on American Historical Imagination?
2. A Southern World View: the Old South, the "peculiar" Region, and King Cotton.
Reading: McPherson, intro., prologue, and ch. 1; * Stephanie McCurry, "Why Do We Love Our Civil War."

Week 2, Jan. 20, 22:

1. A Northern World View: Yankee Society, Antislavery Ideology vs. Proslavery Ideology
2. Telling a Free Story: Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in Myth and Reality.
Reading: begin reading Douglass, *Narrative*; Gienapp, part 1, p. 9-40; McPherson, chs. 2-3;

Week 3, Jan. 27, 29:

1. "Mexico Will Poison Us": Legacies of the Mexican War and the Compromise of 1850.
2. "A Hell of a Storm": The Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Birth of the Republican Party, 1854-55.
Reading: Douglass, *Narrative*, and July 4th speech;

Week 4, Feb. 3, 5:

1. “No Rights”: Dred Scott, Bleeding Kansas, and the Impending Crisis of the Union, 1855-58.
2. John Brown's Holy War: Terrorist or Heroic Revolutionary?
Reading: McPherson, chs. 4-6; Gienapp, part. 1, p. 40-55; Lincoln documents in Johnson.

Week 5, Feb. 10, 12:

1. A “Revolution?” The Election of 1860 and the Secession Crisis.
2. Irrepressible or Needless/Slavery or State Rights: What Caused the Civil War?
Reading: Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*; *Blight, "They Knew What Time It Was: African-Americans and the Coming of the Civil War"; McPherson, ch. 7.

Week 6, Feb. 17, 19:

1. “And the War Came, “1861: The Fort Sumter Crisis, Comparative Strategies.
2. Terrible Swift Sword: the Period of Confederate Ascendancy, 1861-1862
Reading: McPherson, chs. 8-11; * Ayers, “Worrying About the Civil War”; *Ayers, “What Caused the Civil War?”; Gienapp, part. 1, p. 57-70; Lincoln documents.

Week 7, Feb.24, 26:

1. Never Call Retreat: Military and Political Turning Points in 1863.
2. What Will the British Do? The Civil War as International Crisis.
Reading: Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, chs. 1-10; Gienapp, part 2, p. 71-106 selectively; McPherson, chs. 12-21.

Week 8, March 3, 5:

1. Lincoln, Leadership, and Race: Emancipation as Policy.
2. Days of Jubilee: The Process of Emancipation and Meaning of Total War.
Reading: Blight, *A Slave No More*; Gienapp, part 2, p. 165-178 and 261-280; selectively; * excerpts from Berlin, et. al., *Free At Last*; Lincoln documents.

* Spring break, March 7-22.

Week 9, March 24, 26:

1. Homefronts and Battlefronts: “Hard War” and the Social Impact of the Civil War.
2. “War So Terrible”: Why the Union Won and the Confederacy Lost.
Reading: Gallagher, *Confederate War*; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, ch. 11, epilogue and afterword. And begin reading Doctorow, *The March*.

Week 10, March 31, April 2:

1. A Stillness at Appomattox: The End of the War and a Search for Meanings.
2. Wartime Reconstruction: Imagining the Aftermath and a Second American Republic.
Reading: Lincoln documents; McPherson, chs. 22-28; Doctorow, *The March*.

Week 11, April 7, 9:

1. Andrew Johnson and the Radicals: A Contest Over the Meaning of Reconstruction.
2. Constitutional Crisis and Impeachment of a President.
Reading: Foner, *Reconstruction*, chs. 1-4, p. 1-81; Gienapp, part 2, 293-316.

Week 12, April 14, 16:

1. Black Reconstruction in the South: The Freedpeople and the Economics of Land and Labor.
2. Retreat from Reconstruction: the Grant Era and Paths to "Southern Redemption."
Reading: Foner, *Reconstruction*, chs. 5-10, p. 82-216; Gienapp, part 3, p. 317-376.

Week 13, April 21, 23:

1. The "End" of Reconstruction: Disputed Election of 1876, and the "Compromise of 1877."
2. Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory.
Reading: : Alexander, ed., *Reconstruction Violence and KKK Hearings*; Foner, *Reconstruction*, ch. 11-Epilogue, p. 217-60; Gienapp, part 3, p. 377-418; *Blight, "Quarrel Forgotten or a Revolution Remembered?"

** Week 14, Reading week: So What is the Sesquicentennial all about as it comes to an end in spring, 2015? We will meet one extra lecture during reading week. That session will also be an extended look at Civil War memory down through the 100th and 150th anniversaries of the event, as well as a review session for the final exam.

Grades and Requirements:

1. There will be two required papers of 5-6 pages each. Choices of topics and readings will be provided in each of two broad categories or sections of the course: 1- antebellum society and Civil War causation; and, 2- the military, political, and social meanings of the Civil War itself. The challenges, accomplishments, and failures of the Reconstruction era will be a significant part of an in-class, scheduled final exam during finals week. The two papers are each 25% of the final grade and the final exam is 40% of the Final grade. Class participation (10% of grade) is strongly encouraged in sections.