

**Slavery and the U.S. Civil War:  
History from the Ground Up  
Instructor: Hope McGrath**

The United States Civil War was one of the most influential conflicts in modern history. It transformed the nation, and it brought about the end of one of the largest systems of human chattel slavery. This course examines the history of U.S. Civil War from the perspective of those who experienced it. We will begin by examining American slavery, studying how the practice and institution shaped U.S. politics and the world economy. We will end with the way the war is remembered and imagined in the present day. Whenever possible, we will look beyond the borders of the United States to understand the Civil War in global perspective. Most of all, we will try to understand the conflict from the perspective of those who lived it.

The course is designed to allow students to explore these topics through first-hand readings of original sources. Each seminar includes a selection of relevant sources as well as a background reading from a leading historian on the topic. Some classes are devoted entirely to the hands-on examination of primary sources, including letters, speeches, images, and broadsides. By the end of the course, students will learn how to read, think, and write like a historian.

We will tackle questions such as:

- What were the causes of the U.S. Civil War?
- How did enslaved people experience the Civil War? What role did they play in it?
- Who fought in the Civil War? How did soldiers from all parts of the country experience the conflict?
- What about the home front? How did “noncombatants” experience the war? What did it mean to be a noncombatant in the North, South, and West?
- How did this civil war compare to other civil wars around the world in the nineteenth century?
- Why did the Confederacy lose the war?
- What is the “legacy” of the Civil War today? How do we remember and memorialize the war?

## Readings

Students should complete the assigned reading each week. Students should purchase the following books. All other readings will be posted to Canvas.

Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*

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

## Graded Assignments

Students will complete a one-page primary source analysis for each of the three sections in the course (for a total of 3 one-page analyses). They will present their research findings to the class in a 10-minute presentation. In addition, students will write a final paper drawing on primary and secondary sources.

The grade for this course will be calculated based on the following:

Primary source analyses (10% each)                      30%

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Class participation	30%
In-class presentation	10%
Final paper (12-15 pages)	30%

**Week 1                      The Spectre of St. Domingue: Slavery in the world**

Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution;" David Brion Davis, "He Changed the New World" (on Touissant L'Ouverture)

Primary sources: Thomas Jefferson, *Wolf by the Ear*; Broad­sides, illustrations and other images of slaves and merchandise

**Week 2                      The World That Cotton Made**

Foner, *Forever Free*, chapter 1; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, ch. 1

Primary sources: Letter from Maria Perkins to Richard Perkins; Letter from Sargry Brown to her husband; Vilet Lester letter, 1857, on the domestic slave trade; travelers' accounts of domestic slave trade

**Week 3                      From Sea to Shining Sea**

Don Fehrenbacher, "Expansion and Slavery in a Continental Republic"

Primary sources: John C. Calhoun, "Speech on War with Mexico" [selections]; *Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo*; Norman Asing, "To His Excellency Gov. Bigler"

**Week 4                      A Nation under Pressure**

Don Fehrenbacher, "The Territorial Question, 1848-1854;"

Primary sources: "The Republican Party Platform of 1856;" "Declaration of Sentiments of the Colored Citizens of Boston on the Fugitive Slave Bill!!;" *Debow's Review*, "The South and Her Remedies;" Frederick Douglass, "Henry Clay and Slavery"

**Week 5                      The World Dred Scott Made**

Paul Finkelman, "Introduction: The *Dred Scott* Case, Slavery, and the Politics of Law;" Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights*, ch. 13

Primary Sources: Taney, "Opinion of the Court" [selections]; Lincoln, "A House Divided;" "The Debate at Freeport: Lincoln's Questions and Douglas' Answers," in *Dred Scott v. Sandford: A Brief History with Documents*, John Brown's final speech

**Week 5                      Secession and the Creation of the Confederacy**

Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*, selections

Primary sources: Alexander Stephens, Cornerstone speech; selections, *Secession Debated*

**Week 6                    The Confederate Project**

McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning* (selections); Megan Kate Nelson, “Death in the Distance: Confederate Manifest Destiny and the Campaign for New Mexico, 1861–1862”

**Week 7                    Who Fought the Civil War? Primary Source Day**

McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (selections)  
Primary sources: Soldiers letters and diaries

**Week 8                    The Slaves’ Civil War**

Foner, *Forever Free*, ch. 2  
Hahn, “Did We Miss the Greatest Slave Rebellion in Modern History?”  
McCurry, “War, Gender and Emancipation in the Civil War South”  
Primary sources: document/photographs from contraband camps, Emancipation Proclamation

**Week 9                    The View from the Top: Abraham Lincoln**

Foner, *Fiery Trial*, selections  
Primary documents on Lincoln

**Week 10                  Disruptive Tendencies of War**

Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Bernstein, *New York Draft Riots*  
Primary sources: Gienapp documents

**Week 11                  Reconstruction: Making Freedom Work**

Foner, *Forever Free*, ch. 3-6; Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War”  
Primary sources: *A Documentary History of Emancipation - Land and Labor*, selections

**Week 12                  The Violence of Freedom**

Hahn, “Of Paramilitary Politics”  
Primary sources: “A Klu Klux Klan Threat”; “Laws Fail to Protect Us” petition, “A Black Republican Leader Asks for Protection” (1875)

**Week 13                  Roads Not Taken, or What Made the U.S. Different?**

Foner, “The Politics of Freedom”  
Gaiutra Bahadur, “The Overseer of British Guiana,” in *History Today*  
\*Students present and discuss their primary sources

**Week 14**

**“Remembering” the Civil War**

David W. Blight, “Forgetting Why We Remember”

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

\*Students bring recent news articles on Civil War monuments, the Confederate flag, and or other contemporary “memory” issues to share.