

The Digital Past: Reconstruction and Redemption

[Course description](#) | [Essential information](#) | [Assignments](#) | [Schedule](#) | [Fine Print](#)

HIST 390-002. Fall 2016. Department of History and Art History, George Mason University. 3 credits. Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. in East Building 122.

Instructor: Lincoln Mullen <lmullen@gmu.edu>. Office: Research Hall 457. Office hours on Tuesdays, 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.; Thursdays, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.; and by appointment.

Teaching assistant: Eric Gonzaba <egonzaba@gmu.edu>.

Course description

In this class, you will learn to do history using digital tools. The course—which satisfies the Mason Core IT requirement—teaches the fundamentals of information technology by applying them to practical problems in history. Throughout the semester, you will work individually and with classmates on a series of projects about American history during the period of Reconstruction. You will learn how to do research online, but also how to put those sources in the context of other scholarly work. You will gather data, learn how to question it, analyze it, summarize it, and interpret it. You will create visualizations of datasets, including maps. You will learn how to present visual and textual sources online in web exhibits, and you will learn how to write and publish effectively online. Through learning by doing, you will gain both digital skills and the skills of a historian. This combination will be useful to you throughout your university career and in your future work.

In this course you will

- learn the history of American Reconstruction,
- create historical scholarship using digital tools and resources, and
- publish historical scholarship on the web.

You will also master the IT competencies from the Mason Core:

1. Students will be able to use technology to locate, access, evaluate, and use information, and appropriately cite resources from digital/electronic media.
2. Students will understand the core IT concepts in a range of current and emerging technologies and learn to apply appropriate technologies to a range of tasks.
3. Students will understand many of the key ethical, legal and social issues related to information technology and how to interpret and comply with ethical principles, laws, regulations, and institutional policies.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate, create, and collaborate effectively using state-of-the-art information technologies in multiple modalities.
5. Students will understand the essential issues related to information security, how to take precautions and use techniques and tools to defend against computer crimes.

Essential information

You are always welcome to come to my office hours or to arrange an appointment. All other communication for this course will happen in our Slack group. If you have registered for the course and have not received an invitation, please add yourself to the group using your Mason e-mail address. You are responsible for all announcements posted to the #general channel. Read this getting started guide if you need help.

Please obtain a copy of this book. All other readings are available online or through the GMU libraries.

- Foner, Eric. *A Short History of Reconstruction*. Updated edition. Harper Collins, 2015. ISBN: 978-0062370860.

You will also need to sign up for a year's hosting with Reclaim Hosting. Follow that link, sign up for the student plan with the coupon code HIST390 for a 20% discount. We will go over this in class.

Assignments

Turn in all assignments on Blackboard. In the box for the assignment text, include the URL to your assignment or blog post.

In this class you will create a number of smaller projects on the history of Reconstruction. Each of these projects will demonstrate a specific skill that you learned in class. At the end of the semester, you will combine them into a portfolio of materials. You will also write blog posts on various subjects. **All assignments or blog posts given on Thursday are due ~at 6 p.m. that Saturday~ before the start of class on Tuesday.**

Quizzes (10%). On any day for which reading is assigned, I may give a short in-class quiz. You may use notes you have taken on the reading if they are on paper. If you take notes electronically, print them out.

Midterm exam (15%). There will be an in-class examination on Tuesday, March 21.

Blog (20%). For each assignment, write a well-argued blog post of approximately five hundred words, with correct prose with full sentences and paragraphs with topic sentences. Respond to the questions in the prompt thoroughly, but do not simply enumerate your answers. These posts are graded by completion. Thoughtful posts will receive full credit; others will receive no credit.

Skills assignments (9 @ 5% each = 45%). You will create nine small projects over the course of the semester. You should pick a single state which underwent Reconstruction and, to the extent that the sources available to you will allow it, focus your assignments on that state. Except for the Omeka assignments, embed these in a page on your WordPress website. Due dates and further instructions are listed on the schedule. These are the assignments: (1) metadata in Omeka; (2) exhibits and storytelling in Omeka; (3) database of Freedmen's Bureau records; (4) georeferencing a historical map; (5) mapping data; (6) text mining WPA former slave narratives; (7) visualizing data; (8) creating a timeline of Reconstruction; (9) creating a portfolio of your other assignments for the course.

Participation (10%). You are expected to attend each class meeting and participate actively. Bring a laptop and power cord, so that you can follow along with instructions in class and work on assignments. Bring the textbook and a copy of any other readings to class on any day for which they are assigned.

Schedule

Tues. Jan. 24. Introduction.

In class:

- Introduction to Reconstruction and digital history.
- Virginia Secession Convention.

Assignment: Sign up for web hosting at Reclaim Hosting. *Think carefully* about your domain name.

Thurs. Jan. 26. What is digital history?

Readings:

- Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, "Introduction: Promises and Perils of Digital History" and "Getting Started," in *Digital History*, online edition (Center for History and New Media, 2005).
- Miriam Posner, "How Did They Make That?," August 29, 2013. Click through to all of the projects listed in this post.
- Megan O'Neil, "Confronting the Myth of the 'Digital Native'," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 21, 2014.
- Miriam Posner, Stewart Varner, and Brian Coxall, "Creating Your Web Presence," *ProfHacker*, February 14, 2011.
- Ryan Cordell, "Creating and Maintaining a Professional Presence Online," *ProfHacker*, October 3, 2012.

In class:

- Valley of the Shadow.
- Visualizing Emancipation.
- Installing WordPress. Instructions from Reclaim Hosting.

Assignment: Write a blog post reviewing one of the following digital history projects. What topic, period, and place of history do they cover? What arguments or interpretations do they make? What is the audience for the site? What sources are they based on? Who created them, and who did what work? Who funded them? What technologies do they use? Include screenshots of important parts of the website. Be sure to cite the project according to the *Chicago Manual of Style* conventions.

- Digital Harlem
- Geography of the Post
- Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives
- Her Hat Was in the Ring
- Histories of the National Mall
- History Quest DC and explanation
- HistoryPin
- Hurricane Digital Memory Bank
- Language of the State of the Union, Mapping the State of the Union, and The State of the Union in Context
- Locating London's Past
- Lost Museum
- Mozilla Digital Memory Bank
- New Orleans Historical
- Old Bailey Online
- Orbis
- Papers of the War Department
- PhilaPlace
- Railroads and the Making of Modern America
- Redlining Richmond
- September 11 Digital Archive
- Serendip-o-matic
- Voting America
- Women Writer's Project

Tues. Jan. 31. Overview of Reconstruction.

Readings:

- *The American Yawp*, ch. 15 ("Reconstruction").
- Foner, preface.
- Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney, "America's Reconstruction: People and Politics after the Civil War."

In class:

- Install Zotero and read/watch the quick start guide.
- Sign up for an account at Feedly.

Thurs. Feb. 2. Finding secondary sources / history of the Internet.

Readings:

- Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History Be Open Source: Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," *Journal of American History* 93, 1 (2006).
- "How Search Works," Google.
- "How the World Came to be Run by Computer Code," BBC.
- "How the Internet Works in 5 Minutes."
- "History of the Internet."
- "The Web at 25 in the U.S.," Pew Research, February 27, 2014.
- Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic* (July 1945).

In class:

- GMU library catalog
- JSTOR.
- Chicago Manual of Style.
- George Oberle, "U.S. History Sources 1820s-1880s."
- We go to Fenwick!

Assignment: Using the library catalog, JSTOR, and other library resources, find a book on Reconstruction history, a journal article on Reconstruction history, and a book review (preferably of the book you found). Check the book out of the library and bring it to class on Tuesday. Write a blog post with correct citation information for the book, book review, and journal article you found according to the Chicago Manual of Style. In a paragraph each, summarize their argument. Add the items to your Zotero library. Include a link to your public Zotero library including those items in your blog post.

Tues. Feb. 7. Wartime reconstruction.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 1 ("The World the War Made").
- Caleb McDaniel, "How to Read for History," August 1, 2008.
- The Spread of U.S. Slavery.

In class:

- A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation
- Abraham Lincoln Papers

Thurs. Feb. 9. Finding primary sources.

Readings:

- Sam Wineburg, "Thinking Like a Historian," *Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly* 3, 1 (Winter 2010).
- William Cronon, "Getting Ready to Do History," *Carnegie Essays on the Doctorate* (2004), pp. 1–6.

In class:

- DPLA
- African American Newspapers
- ProQuest Historical Newspapers.)
- Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
- Databases listed in the Mason library's history guide.
- George Oberle, "U.S. History Sources 1820s-1880s."

Assignment: Find five primary sources, from at least three different collections. You are welcome, even encouraged, to look for sources mentioned in the textbook. Add your sources to Zotero, and include a link a collection in Zotero. Write a blog post that cites the items using correct Chicago citations, and indicate which database they came from. Briefly summarize each of the sources. What did you learn from reading these sources? What did you learn about looking for sources and the reliability of sources found online?

Tues. Feb. 14. Early Reconstruction. Timelines.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 2 ("Rehearsals for Reconstruction").
- Anne Kelly Knowles, "A Cutting-Edge Second Look at the Battle of Gettysburg," *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 27, 2013.

In class:

- Timeline.js. Make sure you have a Google account before coming to class.

Assignment: Over the course of the semester, create a timeline of events in Reconstruction. The timeline should include approximately 20 events in two different categories: national events and events in your chosen state. Each event should include an accurate date, several sentences of description, links to more information when appropriate, and an image if possible. Unlike most assignments, this is **due on May 11 at 5 p.m.**

Thurs. Feb 16. Metadata and Omeka. Copyright.

Readings:

- Miriam Posner, Up and Running with Omeka, *The Programming Historian* (2013).
- Explore Dublin Core, "Metadata Basics."
- Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, "Owning the Past," in *Digital History*.
- Zachary Crockett, "How Mickey Mouse Evades the Public Domain," *Priceonomics*, January 7, 2016.
- Corynne McSherry, "Court Upholds Legality of Google Books: Tremendous Victory for Fair Use and the Public Interest," Electronic Frontier Foundation, November 14, 2013.
- Nate Harrison, "The Amen Break" (2004).
- George Mason Copyright Office, sections on copyright and fair use.

In class:

- ALA, "Digital Copyright Slider" (2012).
- Creative Commons licenses, including the "license deed" for each license.

Assignment: Using the primary sources that you gathered earlier, or other sources that you have found, create an Omeka collection with at least five Omeka items. Each item must be fully described in the metadata, though you do not necessarily have to use every Dublin Core field. Do not violate copyright restrictions in creating these items. Be sure to include a reference to the place you found the source in the appropriate field, and every item must include a copyright notice.

Tues. Feb. 21. Freedom and Emancipation.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 3 ("The Meaning of Freedom").
- Documenting the American South

Before the next class: Install the ExhibitBuilder plugin on your Omeka site. (Here is how to install a plugin.) Make sure that your Omeka site has at least five interesting items that work together to tell a coherent story about some aspect of Reconstruction. If you need to find other sources, then find other sources.

Thurs. Feb 23. Omeka exhibits.

Readings:

- Yoni Appelbaum, "The Great Illusion of Gettysburg," *The Atlantic*, February 5, 2012.
- Exhibit builder tutorial.

In class:

- Sample exhibits: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Assignment: Create a coherent Omeka exhibit that tells a story about some aspect of Reconstruction. The exhibit should include a minimum of five items, each with metadata and in most cases with images. Link these items together with prose. You are practicing not just the technology behind Omeka, but the craft of writing for the web.

Tues. Feb 28. Free labor.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 4 ("Ambiguities of Free Labor").
- The Freedmen's Bureau Online.

Before the next class: Create a Slack channel for people who are working on the same state. No more than four people may work in a single group. Sign up for Airtable.

Thurs. Mar. 2. Databases.

Readings:

- "Spreadsheet Thinking vs Database Thinking."
- Mark Merry, Designing Databases for Historical Research, especially part D.
- Lev Manovich, "Database as a Genre of New Media," *AI & Society* 14 (2000).

In class: Working with no more than four people in a group, create a database that digitizes elements from the Freedmen's Bureau. Decide on the schema of the database, i.e., which tables will hold which comments. Enter a few items each to make sure that your database model actually fits the data. Have the structure of your database complete by next Thursday for review in class. Be prepared to talk in class about the decisions that you made.

Tues. Mar. 7. Presidential Reconstruction.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 5 ("The Failure of Presidential Reconstruction").
- Chronicling America.

Thurs. Mar 9. Radical Reconstruction. Databases continued.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 6 ("The Making of Radical Reconstruction").

In class: Working on database assignment.

Assignment: Working in your group of no more than four people, finalize your database model. Each person should contribute at least twenty records (i.e. rows) to the database. Make sure that each person's contributions are marked in a column. Each person should write his or her own blog post, including a link to the publicly available database. The post should explain the decisions you made in normalizing the data. Submit the link to your blog post to Blackboard.

Tues. Mar. 21. Midterm examination.

Bring a blue book and a pen.

Thurs. Mar 23. Georeferencing.

Before class:

- Pick a map from the period of Reconstruction, preferably including your state, from the David Rumsey Map Collection.
- Create an account at MapWarper.

Readings:

- Richard White, "What is Spatial History?."
- Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States.
- Georectification from "Spatial Humanities Workshop."

In class:

- David Rumsey Map Collection.
- NYPL Building Inspector.
- Ben Schmidt's subway maps.

Assignment: Georeference your historical map. Embed it in a blog post, and write a post explaining what you learned from the map and how georeferencing maps might be useful for understanding Reconstruction. Be sure to include a citation to the map and acknowledge any permissions that have been granted to use it.

Tues. Mar. 28. Southern politics.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 7 ("Blueprints for a Republican South").
- Mapping Occupation

Thurs. Mar 30. Mapping.

Before class:

- Sign up for a free account at CartoDB and look through the introduction.

Readings:

- Stephen Robertson, "Putting Harlem on the Map," *Writing History in the Digital Age*, edited by Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (2012).
- Data Maps

Assignment: Using the sample datasets provided, create a map using CartoDB. The map should clearly communicate its subject. Use annotations and labels as necessary. Embed the map in a blog post, and write about what you learned from making the map and the map itself.

Tues. Apr. 4. Economics of Reconstruction.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 8 ("Reconstruction: Political and Economic").
- Mining the Dispatch

Thurs. Apr. 6. Text mining.

Before class: Experiment with either Google Books or Bookworm.

Readings:

- Ted Underwood, "Where to Start with Text Mining," *The Stone and the Shell*, August 14, 2012.
- Dan Cohen, "Searching for the Victorians," October 4, 2010.

In class:

- [Voyant](<http://voyant-tools.org/>).
- Google Books [Ngrams Viewer](<https://books.google.com/ngrams>).
- Brigham Young University, [Corpus of Historical American English](<http://corpus.byu.edu/coha/>) and
- [Bookworm](<http://bookworm.culturomics.org/>), especially *Chronicling America*.

Assignment: Use Voyant tools to create visualizations of the WPA former slave narratives. Use at Bookworm and Google Books to create additional visualizations of key terms in Reconstruction history. Embed these visualizations in a blog post. What did you learn from this distant reading of texts? What does this approach reveal that other methods do not?

Tues. Apr. 11. Enforcing Reconstruction. Black political conventions.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 9 ("The Challenge of Enforcement").
- Colored Conventions.

Thurs. Apr. 13. Visualization.

Before class: Create a free account at Plotly.

Readings:

- Fred Gibbs, “Gentle Introduction to Historical Data Analysis.”
- John Theibault, “Visualizations and Historical Arguments,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, edited by Kristen Nawrotzki and Jack Dougherty (University of Michigan Press, 2013).
- Explore the visualizations created by Mike Bostock.

In class:

- Minard map in French (higher quality) and English.

Assignment: Using the datasets provided, create at least three visualizations. Be sure to include titles and captions, with citations to the data. What did your visualizations show you that you didn’t see before? What kinds of literacy do your visualizations require? Embed the visualizations in a blog post where you answer these questions.

Tues. Apr. 18. Reconstruction in the North.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 10 (“The Reconstruction of the North”).
- William G. Thomas III and Edward L. Ayers, “The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (December 1, 2003): 1299–1307, doi:10.1086/587017.

Thurs. Apr. 20. Programming and machine learning.

Readings:

- Paul Ford, “What is Code,” *Business Week*, June 11, 2015.
- Matthew Kirschenbaum, “Hello Worlds,” January 23, 2009.
- Jeff Atwood, “Please Don’t Learn to Code,” *Coding Horror*, May 15, 2012.
- Ian Bogost, “The Cathedral of Computation,” *The Atlantic*, January 15, 2015.
- Lev Manovich, “The Algorithms of Our Lives,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 16, 2013.

Assignment: Write a blog post about the programming we did in class. Have you ever programmed before? Why or why not? What utility can you see in programming for history? For your major? Include images of your output if they help make your point.

Tues. Apr. 25. Economics of Reconstruction.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 11 (“The Politics of Depression”).
- America’s Public Bible.

Thurs. Apr. 27. Sustainability, ethics, security.

Readings:

- Kieran Healy, “Using Metadata to Find Paul Revere,” June 9, 2013.
- Dan Goodin, “Why passwords have never been weaker,” *Ars Technica*, August 20, 2012.
- Mat Honan, “How Apple and Amazon Security Flaws Led to My Epic Hacking,” *Wired*, August 6, 2012.
- Mat Honan, “How I Resurrected My Digital Life After an Epic Hacking,” *Wired*, August 17, 2012.
- Eli Pariser, “Beware online ‘filter bubbles’

- Jennifer Howard, "Born Digital, Projects Need Attention to Survive," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 6, 2014.
- Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, "Preserving Digital History," in *Digital History* (2006).
- James Baker, "Preserving Your Research Data," *The Programming Historian*, April 30, 2014.

In class:

- Internet Archive
- Wayback Machine

Assignment: Write a blog post about the sustainability of your work in this course so far. What would it take to sustain each of the assignments that you have completed? Which of the assignments are you able to export?

Tues. May. 2. Redemption.

Readings:

- Foner, ch. 12 ("Redemption and After") and epilogue ("The River Has Its Bend").
- Library of Congress Reconstruction resources

Thurs. May. 4. Catch up and conclusion.

Readings: TBD.

Assignment:

- There is no final exam.
- Timeline (see description on Feb. 14) is due Thursday, May 11, at 5 p.m.
- Portfolio is due Thursday, May 11, at 5 p.m. Create a page on your website which links to all of the assignments and blog posts you have created for this course. Include images of the assignments as the link where appropriate. *Make it attractive.* You should write prose describing what each assignment contributed to understanding the history of Reconstruction, and you should tie the assignments together with prose about Reconstruction. The total length of the text on this page should be about 750 words (max 1,000 words).

Fine print

This syllabus may be updated online as necessary. The online version of this syllabus is the only authoritative version.

You are expected to participate actively in each class session. All devices are to be used only for course work. Students who are clearly disengaged from the course may be asked to leave.

Students must satisfactorily complete all assignments (including participation assignments) in order to pass this course. You are expected to attend each class without exception. Grades will be reduced due to repeated absences. Complete all the readings before the start of each class. No unexcused late work will be accepted. You must request any extensions before assignments are due, and excused late work will receive a one letter grade penalty unless otherwise specified. No work will be accepted after the last day of class unless specifically assigned. I will discuss grades only in person during office hours.

Unless otherwise specified, you should work on your own for assignments. If you do receive help or cooperate on an assignment, all such work should be acknowledged explicitly. In general, every source that you use should be acknowledged in a note or bibliography entry. Sources must be adequately paraphrased, meaning (at a minimum) that word choice, sentence and paragraph structure, and the order of ideas must be

made your own. Whenever you use others' exact words, you must mark them as such by quotation marks or block quotations with accompanying citations.

See the George Mason University catalog for general policies, as well as the university statement on diversity. You are expected to know and follow George Mason's policies on academic integrity and the honor code. If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or through their website. You are responsible for verifying your enrollment status. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Please note these dates from the academic calendar.

- Last day to add a class: January 30, 2017.
- Last day to drop a class without penalty: January 30, 2017.
- Last day to drop a class without permission: February 24, 2017.

HIST 390 is taught by many people at George Mason, and I have borrowed assignments, readings, and the structure of the course from syllabi by Erin Bush, Dan Cohen, Amanda French, Mills Kelly, Sharon Leon, Mike O'Malley, and Stephen Robertson.