

George Mason University
Department of History

History 373 001:
THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION
Fall 2017

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Office hours: Mondays, 12:00-2:00 and by appointment

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The American experiment in self-government was scarcely eighty years old when the Civil War threatened to tear the country permanently in two. The massive cataclysm lasted four years, cost nearly 750,000 lives and billions of dollars, freed some four million slaves, and touched virtually every American in some way. It redefined the very political, social, and economic fabric of the country in ways that still reverberate today.

This course analyzes the history of the American Civil War from its origins in the late eighteenth century to the withdrawal of Federal troops from the south in 1877. The analysis occurs in three sections: “The Impending Crisis,” which deals with the broad eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political, social, and economic issues that led to war, as well as with the specific events that triggered the conflict in 1861; “The War,” which covers a variety of issues intertwined with the military outcome of the war itself—the home fronts, war leadership, diplomacy, combat motivation, military technology, and grand strategy; and “The Aftermath,” which deals with the issues associated with reconstructing the nation’s political institutions and with re-integrating millions of newly-freed African-Americans, along with the long shadow of the war on American memory.

Throughout the semester our focus will be not just on narrative—that is, re-telling the story of the conflict—but also on learning to *think* like historians: exploring issues of cause and effect, analyzing evidence, and presenting arguments to solve the puzzles of the past. By the end of the course students will be able to identify the causes, course, and effects of the war. Students will be able to apply the core skills of historical analysis to a variety of primary source documents. Students will also be able to formulate arguments in response to complex historical questions and to defend those arguments with evidence.

Reading List

Allan Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning*

Digital Primary Source packet (attached)

Grading

Course performance will be determined by two written assignments, your participation in class, and a final exam. There are seven separate opportunities to complete the written assignments, and, as the handout indicates, each assignment is different in both topic and form. You must do one of the first four assignments and one of the last three assignments. Within those guidelines, you are free to choose two assignments that fit your interests and schedule.

Assignments are due in class on the date indicated on the syllabus.

No late assignments will be accepted. No exceptions.

You are also free to do *more* than two of the assignments; in that case, your two highest scores will count towards your final grade, and the lower scores will be dropped. The system is intended to give you maximum flexibility; do not let that slack tighten into a noose around your neck. If you have not completed two assignments by the end of the course, you will receive a failing grade for each missing assignment.

The final grade will break down as follows:

First paper:	25%
Second paper:	25%
Final Exam:	25%
Participation:	25%

The grading scale is as follows:

A-	90-93;	A	94-100	
B-	80-83;	B	84-86; B+	87-89
C-	70-73;	C	74-76; C+	77-79
D	64-66;	D+	67-69	
F	50			

Class Schedule and Readings

28 August. Introductions and expectations: What do historians do, exactly?

Part I: The Impending Crisis

30 August. How do historians study the Civil War era? An introduction to historical thinking

4 September LABOR DAY—NO CLASS

6 September. Slavery and the Constitution
Allen Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning*, 3-23; Documents A, B, C

11 September. The growing problem of slavery and the rise of abolitionism
Fateful Lightning, 23-53; Document D

13 September. The Second Party System, national unity, and party collapse
Fateful Lightning, 54-83; Document E

18 September. Bleeding Kansas and the rise of the Republican Party
Fateful Lightning, 83-113; Document F

20 September. John Brown's raid
Fateful Lightning, 113-137; Documents G, H

25 September. The Election of 1860 and the secession movement
Fateful Lightning, 138-156; Documents I, J

Part II: The War

27 September. Assessing the combatants
Fateful Lightning, 156-172
FIRST PAPER DUE

2 October. The war's opening moves
Fateful Lightning, 186-200; Document K

4 October. The changing technology of war
Fateful Lightning, 200-213; Documents L

9 October. COLUMBUS DAY—CLASS SHIFTED TO TUESDAY

10 October. The individual experience of war: Raising the armies
Document M
SECOND PAPER DUE

11 October. Emancipation
Fateful Lightning, 172-185; Documents N, O

16 October. Presidential war leadership in the Union and Confederacy
Fateful Lightning, 213-231; Document P

18 October. The home fronts, North and South
Fateful Lightning, 278- 313, 356-372; Document Q
THIRD PAPER DUE

23 October. The campaigns of 1863
Fateful Lightning, 313-356; Document R

25 October. The individual experience of war: Facing battle
Fateful Lightning, 232-277; Document S

30 October. African-Americans and the war effort
Fateful Lightning, 373-389; Documents T, U
FOURTH PAPER DUE

1 November. The Union Campaigns of 1864 and the move to total war
Fateful Lightning, 418-448; Documents V, W

6 November. *Ars Moriendi*: Death in the Civil War
Fateful Lightning, 389-417

8 November. The Election of 1864 and the end of the war
Fateful Lightning, 448-464; Documents X, Y

13 November. Why the North won
Fateful Lightning, 465-483; Document Z
FIFTH PAPER DUE

Part III: Reconstruction

15 November. The War's aftermath
Fateful Lightning, 483-497

20 November. Long-Legged Yankee Lies and the Birth of the "Lost Cause"
SIXTH PAPER DUE

27 November. Reconstructing the nation
Fateful Lightning, 497-513; Document 1

29 November. African-Americans and Reconstruction
Fateful Lightning, 513-536; Document 2

4 December. The Civil War in popular memory
Document 3

6 December. Conclusions and review
SEVENTH PAPER DUE

FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, 13 DECEMBER, 10:30-12:00

COURSE POLICIES:

A note on plagiarism. Each assignment completed as part of this course is bound by the University's Honor Code and its strict rules regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism entails presenting someone else's words, work, or ideas without proper acknowledgement, or borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment. Whether the source is another historical work, an internet source, a classmate, or your roommate does not matter; failure to cite the source properly constitutes plagiarism, the most serious academic violation one can commit. Students found plagiarizing in this class will fail the course. These assignments are designed so that it is easier to simply write the essay than to cheat.

Classroom Behavior. Active participation in class discussions is a vital part of mastering this set of skills and information. (Individual participation is weighted as one-fifth of the overall grade to reflect its critical importance.) In order to maximize opportunities for every student to participate constructively and to minimize distractions, a few simple guidelines will be observed:

- civil, respectful interactions among *all* class participants
- **NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES**—cell phones, smart phones, laptops, and so on. If it runs on electricity and it's not an iron lung, switch it off for the duration of class.