

George Mason University

History 373 DL1
The Civil War and Reconstruction
Spring 2021

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Course [BlackBoard site](#)

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 five billion dollars, and freed four million enslaved Blacks. The crisis, the war, and the aftermath touched virtually every nineteenth-century American in some way, and redefined the very political, social, and economic fabric of the country in ways that still reverberate today. The memory of the war continues to affect American politics and identity in ways that are all too visible even in 2021.

This course analyzes the history of the American Civil War era. It begins with its origins in the late eighteenth century, explores the political crisis and the conflict itself, examines the efforts at Reconstruction until the withdrawal of Federal troops from the south in 1877, and considers the way that the memory of the war continues to affect Americans' understanding of themselves and their nation today.

This is an **online, asynchronous** course. You will need access to a computer and a reliable internet connection. The course will run through George Mason's BlackBoard site, and all the material you need to complete the course successfully is organized there.

We will not have any scheduled meetings, in person or virtually. You will be exploring this fascinating period in history by drawing on course readings and on a large pool of primary sources. Narrated slideshows for each module will guide your inquiry, helping you analyze the primary sources and providing you with some questions that will help you make sense of this fascinating and contentious period in American history. And I am *always* available to schedule a meeting with you to discuss concepts or themes that you would like to explore in more detail.

There is a clear structure built into the course. Module 0 serves as an introduction and a chance for you to familiarize yourself with the syllabus, assignments, and deadlines. After that, we will dive into a series of six numbered modules that each explore some facet of the Civil War era, from the role of race-based chattel slavery in the nation's infancy to the fighting itself to the long shadow that the war continues to cast more than a century and a half after its conclusion. Modules will always begin on a Monday morning and end on a Friday evening. Most are two weeks. There is a written assignment due at the end of each module.

This syllabus provides you with information about the course. Take the first week to familiarize yourself with the syllabus, the assignments, readings, and course policies. If you have questions, reach out to me at chamner@gmu.edu. I am more than happy to answer questions via email, phone, Zoom, or Skype. The orientation week is an excellent time to make sure that you understand all of the course requirements and expectations so that we can dive into this fascinating history in Module 1.

COURSE STRUCTURE: The course is divided into a set of modules. Module 0 is the orientation module to give you a moment to familiarize yourself with the class structure, assignments, policies, and expectations. After Module 0 we will start with the substance of the course in Module 1. The syllabus shows exactly what we will cover in each module, the resources available to you, and the assignment you are responsible for in each module.

HOW TO USE THE SYLLABUS: Each module block on the syllabus contains all the information you'll need to complete that module successfully.

The **Title** provides a short description of the material and themes we will cover in the module. The **Dates** show when the Module is scheduled to begin and end. New modules start on Monday mornings and end on Friday evening. Most modules are two weeks long.

The **Overview** section show what new information and skills you will master over the course of the module.

Read indicates the pages from the course text (Allen Guelzo's *Fateful Lightning*) that you should read over the course of the module. If there are supplementary readings for a module, they will appear in the module folder. The reading load in this class is identical to the load in a standard face-to-face course.

Documents refers to the primary sources documents that we will explore in the module. Copies of each module's documents appear in that module's folder. These primary sources come directly from people who lived through and shaped the events we are examining this semester. Primary sources are the raw material that historians use to make their arguments and interpretations about the past.

View refers to the PowerPoints you should view in conjunction with the readings and documents. These are narrated slideshows with an audio track that explore important core themes and concepts using primary sources. The slideshows and the text act as complements. It is important to block out time to read and reflect on both. Most of the slideshows are 10-20 minutes in length. Depending on the module there may be four to eight slideshows. The total amount of time required for the slideshows is based on the time you would spend in class lectures in an in-person class—that is, about two and a half hours per week.

Assignment shows the written assignment that is due for each module. **THERE IS AN ASSIGNMENT DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.** For the introductory Module 0 you will submit a question you have about the Civil War era, just to familiarize yourself with the process for submitting assignments.

For the other six modules you will complete a reflection essay of about 500 words on themes and sources covered in that module. Your five highest scores will constitute your final grade; your lowest score will be dropped. The total writing load is identical to what you would complete in a face-to-face class: that is, about 3,000 words over the course of the semester.

DUE tells you when the written assignment for that module is due. Written assignments should be submitted via BlackBoard by 5:00pm on the last day of the module. All due dates fall on a Friday.

THERE IS A REFLECTION ESSAY DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS: Your written work in the course will take the form of six short (500-word) reflection essays. **THERE IS A REFLECTION ESSAY DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE.** A set of prompts for the reflections will appear in each module folder. These are lower-stakes writing assignments; they are not as developed as a fully-developed five-page essay. They provide a chance for you to apply some of the ideas and concepts the module has covered to primary sources and to think hard on some of the difficult questions this era poses.

The reflection essays also provide a chance for you to practice writing short think pieces on a variety of topics, a valuable skill that is well worth practicing.

REFLECTION ESSAYS ARE DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE at 5:00pm.

GRADING: Over the course of the semester you will submit six 500-word reflection essays. Your five best scores will count toward your final grade. We will drop your lowest score. Each reflection essay will count as 20% of your final grade.

There are six due dates throughout the semester, corresponding to Modules 2 through 7. Mark them on your calendar now in red ink. Your reflection essays are due at 5:00pm on Fridays.

Module 1: Friday, February 12

Module 2: Friday, February 26

Module 3: Friday, March 19

Module 4: Friday, April 2

Module 5: Friday, April 16

Module 6: Friday, April 30

Remember:

THERE IS A REFLECTION ESSAY DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE at 5:00pm.
NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED. NO EXCEPTIONS.

If you have not submitted a reflection essay for a particular module by the due date, you will receive a failing grade of F for that reflection. Your lowest grade of the six reflections will be dropped to calculate your final grade.

GRADING: Over the course of the semester you will complete six assignments, one per module.

THERE IS A REFLECTION ESSAY DUE ON THE LAST DAY OF EACH MODULE at 5pm.

NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED. NO EXCEPTIONS.

The grading scale is as follows:

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

Module 0

Introduction: Overview and expectations

Week 1

January 25-January 29

Overview	<p>This module serves as the introduction to the course structure, policies, and assignments. It will familiarize you with the structure of the course, give an overview of the material we will be covering this semester, and explain all of the material and written assignments you'll be responsible for from now until the end of April.</p> <p>By the end you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understand the structure of the course• understand the written reflection assignments• be familiar with the due dates for each assignment• understand how course grades are calculated• be able to navigate the course Bb page to access course materials and submit assignments.
Read	Course syllabus
Documents	
Watch	Module 0 slideshow
Assignment	Write up a question you have about the Civil War era that you hope to explore this semester.
DUE:	Friday, January 29 at 5:00pm

Module 1

Race and slavery in American history

Week 2-3

February 1—February 12

Overview	<p>The institution of race-based chattel slavery has a history in the United States older than the country itself. It is one of the most barbaric phenomena in American history, and also one of the most complex and persistent.</p> <p>This module explores how race-based chattel slavery for Blacks came to be engrained in a country based on the “self-evident” truth that “all men are created equal” and endowed with “unalienable rights” including “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” It analyzes the debates on the future of the institution during the colonial period, the effects of Black slavery on the entire country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the various solutions proposed to ease the mounting friction caused by the existence of race-based chattel slavery and its growing concentration in only one geographic region of the country.</p> <p>By the end of the module you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• describe the origins and implications of race-based chattel slavery in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American history;• identify the legal roots and complexities of the American version of race-based slavery;• describe the paradoxes at the heart of the American vision of “liberty” at the country’s founding.
Read	<i>Fateful Lightning</i> , 3-53
Documents	1A, Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, 1776 1B, The Constitution of the United States of America, 1789 1C, The Bill of Rights, 1789 1D, John C. Calhoun’s “Positive Good” speech (excerpt), 1837 1E, <i>American Slavery As It Is</i> , 1839 (excerpt)
View	Module 1 slideshows
Assignment	Reflection essay 1
DUE:	Friday, February 12 at 5:00pm

Module 2

The crisis of the 1850s

Weeks 4-5

February 15—February 26

Overview	<p>The decade of the 1850s witnessed a deepening geographic divide in the United States, driven fundamentally by the disruptive growth of chattel slavery in parts of the nation at the same time it withered in others. The geographic localization of that institution led to a cascade of political, social, and economic battles as different groups of white Americans tried to assert their interests in shaping the future of the country. This module explores the way the American political system struggled to balance competing interests around slavery, the awkward compromises that system produced in its efforts to stave off disaster, and the eventual collapse of the system with the election of 1860 and the secession crisis of 1860-1861.</p> <p>By the end of the module you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• describe the institutions that held the country together despite profound economic and social differences in the first half of the nineteenth century;• identify the compromises white politicians from different regions and parties made in an attempt to protect their interests and to avoid dissolution of the Union;• explain the emergence and rapid political success of a new anti-slavery part with limited regional appeal;• explain how the events of 1859 and 1860 prepared the way for the secession crisis of from December 1860 to spring 1861.
Read	<i>Fateful Lightning</i> , 54-137
Documents	2A, Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” speech (excerpt), 1852 2B, John Brown, Final speech (1859) 2C, William Seward’s “Irrepressible Conflict” speech (excerpt), 1858 2D, Abraham Lincoln, Cooper Union Address (excerpt), 1860 2E, “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union,” 1860 2F, Alexander Stephens, “Cornerstone” Speech (excerpt), 1861 2G, Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural address (excerpt), 1861
View	Module 2 slideshows
Assignment	Reflection essay 2
DUE:	Friday, February 26 at 5:00pm

Module 3**The Early Years, 1861-1863****Weeks 6-9**

March 1—March 19

(including *Virtual SPRING BREAK!!! March 8-12*)

Overview	<p>Both sides expected the war that began with the bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor to be brief and relatively limited in scope. Over the coming months those expectations would be revealed to be painfully and tragically naïve. Within a year and a half a war that the North undertook in order to restore the Union and the federal authority in the seceded states had begun to change into something much more sweeping in scope. This module explores the first two years of the war, as the conflict</p> <p>By the end of the module you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe both sides’ strategic ideas for winning the war; • identify how technological innovations in the decades leading up to the conflict combines to create a new and vastly deadlier form of warfare; • explain the factors that led Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation in autumn 1862, and his rationale for doing so; • describe the interplay between soldiers in the field and civilians on the home front.
Read	<i>Fateful Lightning</i> , 138-324
Documents	<p>3A, Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, September 3, 1862 3B, Wendell Phillips, speech at Abingdon (excerpt), 1862 3C, Cartoon, “Abe Lincoln’s Last Card,” <i>Punch</i> magazine, 1862 3D, Henry Halleck to Ulysses S. Grant, March 31, 1863 3E, Abraham Lincoln to Erasmus Corning and others (excerpt), 1863 3F, Dora Miller, Vicksburg diary, 1863 3G, David Beem to wife, 1863 3H, Abraham Lincoln to George Meade, 1863 3I, Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863</p>
View	Module 3 slideshows
Assignment	Reflection essay 3
DUE:	Friday, March 19 at 5:00pm

Module 4 The later years, 1863-1865 Weeks 10-11 October 12—October 23	
Overview	<p>By the third summer of the war, the conflict had evolved dramatically in scope and intensity from the spring of 1861. This module explores the latter half of the war. It examines the battles at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July 1863, the savage Overland campaign in 1864, the pivotal election of 1864. And the final surrender of the Confederate armies in the spring and summer of 1865. It examines the role of Presidential war leadership in both the Union and Confederacy, the effects of the war on the increasingly exhausted home fronts, and the impact that nearly 100,000 Black soldiers fighting in Union blue made on the course of the war. It also considers the way the massive national trauma of the war—750,000 young men cut down in the prime of life—affected the nation’s ideas about death, suffering, and sacrifice.</p> <p>By the end you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the significance of the defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg and the Union’s strategy for winning the war in 1864; • analyze the impact of the North’s decision to arm Black soldiers on the course of the war; • describe the role of the election of 1864 in determining the outcome of the war; • summarize and critique different scholars’ arguments for the war’s outcome
Read	<i>Fateful Lightning</i> , 325-464
Documents	4A, Frederick Douglass, “Men of Color, To Arms!”, 1863 4B, Abraham Lincoln to James Conkling, 1863 4C, Ulysses S. Grant to William T. Sherman, 1864 4D, Ulysses S. Grant to George Meade, 1864 4E, Cartoon, Thomas Nast, “Compromise with the South,” <i>Harper’s Weekly</i> , 1864 4F, Cartoon, Thomas Nast, “The Union Christmas Dinner,” <i>Harper’s Weekly</i> , 1864 4G, Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural address, 1864
View	Module 4 slideshows
Assignment	Reflection essay 4
DUE:	Friday, April 2 at 5:00pm

Module 5**Reconstructing the nation**

Weeks 12-13

April 5—April 16

Overview	<p>This module explores the decade and a half following the surrender at Appomattox Court House, as the reconstituted nation attempted to repair the damage to its social, political, and legal fabric, as well as to repair the physical damage the war left in its wake. It examines the battles between Lincoln’s successor Andrew Johnson and the Republican Congress, the debates over rights and protections for free Blacks that dominated political debate in the 1860s and 1870s, the passage of the momentous Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution, and the withdrawal of Federal troops from the south following the contentious election of 1876. It concludes with the collapse of Reconstruction in the South and the establishment of an apartheid state based on white supremacy in the former Confederacy.</p> <p>By the end you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the political friction between President Johnson and the Republican congress that slowed Reconstruction legislation and ultimately led to the President’s impeachment; • describe the significance of major federal Reconstruction legislation, including the Reconstruction Amendments and the Freedmen’s Bureau; • identify the formal and informal barriers erected to prevent free Blacks from exercising political and economic power and to maintain white supremacy.
Read	<i>Fateful Lightning</i> , 465-536
Documents	5A, Frederick Douglass, Speech at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (excerpt), April 1865 5B, 13 th Amendment (1865) 5C, 14 th Amendment (1868) 5D, 15 th Amendment (1870) 5E, Louisiana White League platform (excerpt), 1874 5F, Eugene Wellborn, “Election Day in Clinton, Mississippi,” 1875 5G, Philip Sheridan, <i>Memoirs</i> (excerpt), 1888
View	Module 5 slideshows
Assignment	Reflection essay 5
DUE:	Friday, April 16 at 5:00pm

Module 6

The Civil War in memory

Week 14-15

November 16—November 20

Overview	<p>The final module module explores the difference between “history” (the events that happened in the past) and “memory” (the deliberate choices that individuals and groups make about what to remember and emphasize about the past, and what to ignore or eliminate). This distinction is subtle but fascinating. It is visible everywhere in the way different groups choose to remember, commemorate, celebrate, or expunge different people and events. Attention to the distinction opens a host of new insights into the way we understand the world.</p> <p>History and memory are particularly important in the case of understanding the Civil War era since few events in the American past exert such a powerful influence on contemporary understandings of race, the peoples’ relations to their government, and the basic principles of the nation itself.</p> <p>In the last decades of the nineteenth century, white Southerners created a powerful myth of the “Lost Cause,” recasting the war as a fight over “states’ rights” rather than slavery and portraying the southern defeat as tragic and undeserved. That Lost Cause mythology became an important way that the war was taught in the north as well as the south in the twentieth century, and has fascinating and important implications for how we understand the Civil War era in the twenty-first century.</p> <p>By the end you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• define the difference between “history” and “memory”;• describe the “Lost Cause” myth, from its roots in the late-nineteenth century to its 21st century incarnation;• analyze monuments and memorials erected after the war and interpret the statements those sources make about the nature and outcome of the war
Read	
Documents	6A, Jefferson Davis, <i>Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government</i> (excerpt), 1881 6B, Confederate Soldiers Monument, Texas State capitol, 1903 6C, William Taft, “Cornerstone Laying of the Arlington National Cemetery Confederate Monument,” 1912 6D, E. H. Carr, “Unveiling of Confederate Monument at the University” speech, 1913 6E, Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery, 1914
View	Module 6 slideshows
Assignment	Reflection essay 6
DUE:	Friday, April 30 at 5:00pm

FINALLY: A note on plagiarism and academic integrity.

All of the work you submit as part of this course should be your own. There is no need to conduct outside research for any of the writing assignments. All can be answered using materials in the course text, the primary sources, and the course slideshows. Do not be tempted to use Google to find an answer to these prompts. They are specific to the course, and the answers you may turn up will not account for the specific material we are covering and the way we are covering it.

You can find information about Mason's honor code [here](#). It is useful to be familiar with Mason's academic integrity policies throughout your career. For the purposes of this course, we can keep things simple:

Do your own work. Do not make use of outside help. Do not collaborate with friends or classmates.

Follow those simple guidelines and you will have nothing to worry about. A quick tip: Stay on top of your assignments: Looming deadlines often lead students to make poor choices. Don't let procrastination put you in a place where you make a bad decision that has a permanent effect on your academic record.

The above rules are fairly straightforward. The penalties for breaking them are straightforward, too:

SUBMITTING WORK THAT IS NOT YOUR OWN WILL RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE FOR THE COURSE AND SUBMISSION OF THE CASE TO GEORGE MASON'S HONOR COMMITTEE