

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Professor Eric Foner
Spring 2014

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
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History W3432y

THE UNITED STATES IN THE ERA OF CIVIL WAR

AND RECONSTRUCTION

Nearly a century and a half after its conclusion, the Civil War remains the central event in our history. And no period has been as persistently fascinating to Americans. The reasons for the war's continued relevance lies not only in its great accomplishments -- the preservation of the Union and destruction of slavery -- but in the fact that it raised so many questions that remain central to our understanding of ourselves as a nation. What should be the balance of power between local authority and the national government, who is entitled to American citizenship, what are the concrete meanings of freedom and equality in the United States? These questions, central to the meaning of the Civil War, remain subjects of controversy today. In that sense, the Civil War is not yet over.

In the physical destruction it brought to the South, the economic changes it produced throughout the nation, the new technologies it diffused, and the new ideas it spawned, the Civil War permanently affected the future course of national development. The war produced a loss of life unprecedented in the American experience. The 700,000 or so combatants who perished in the conflict nearly outnumber those who died in all other American wars combined. For those who lived through it, the Civil War would always remain the defining moment in their lives.

Central to the war's meaning was the abolition of slavery. Slavery lay at the root of the crisis that produced the Civil War, and the war became, although it did not begin as, a struggle for emancipation. Union victory eradicated slavery from American life, bringing the entire nation, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, a "new birth of freedom." Yet the war left it to future generations to confront the numerous legacies of slavery and to embark on the still unfinished quest for racial justice. This was the essential problem of Reconstruction, the era that followed the Civil War and that remains one of the most controversial and misunderstood periods in American history. How would the South be reintegrated into the Union, who would rule the nation, and, especially, what would be the place of emancipated slaves in American life? These were the questions on which the politics of Reconstruction persistently turned.

This course will examine the events leading up to the Civil War, the war itself, and the era of Reconstruction to gain insight into this central turning point in the American experience. The focus lies less on the battlefield than in the nation's politics, culture, and race relations, and how the Civil War and the destruction of slavery affected these. A new nation emerged from the Civil War, laying the foundations for the world we live in today.

Required Readings: All the readings below are required, and available in paperback. The list of books has been given to Book Culture, 536 West 112th Street. All readings are also on reserve in the Butler reserve reading room.

Sections: In addition to the lectures, students are required to attend a weekly discussion section, directed by a graduate teaching assistant. The list of section hours and assignments will be arranged during the second week of classes. Failure to attend the sections regularly will have an adverse impact on your grade!

Paper: Each student will write a paper of ten to twelve pages, comparing two works of history dealing with the same general subject. The paper is due in section during Week 14 of classes. A list of suggested books is available on the course website.

Graduate students are welcome to take the course for “R” credit, but not for “E” credit.

NB: The use of laptops or any other electronic device in this class is not permitted without the permission of the instructor.

Week 1: (January 22): Introduction

Week 2: (January 27, 29): Origins of the Civil War: An Overview

David Brion Davis, Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World, chs. 4-7, 9-10, 13

William E. Gienapp, ed., The Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 5-7, 14-16, 18-21

Week 3: (February 3, 5): The End of the Second Party System

John Ashworth, The Republic in Crisis, 1848-1861, chs. 1-4

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 33-38

Week 4: (February 10, 12): Rise of the Republicans

Ashworth, Republic in Crisis, chs. 5-7

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 9-11, 43-46

Week 5: (February 17, 19): The Gathering Storm

Eric Foner, The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery,
chs. 2-5

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 47-55

Week 6: (February 24, 26): The Crisis of the Union, 1860-61

Manisha Sinha, The Counterrevolution of Slavery, chs. 7-8, epilogue

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 71-72, 76-77, 81-82

Week 7: (March 3, 5): The Coming of Emancipation

Foner, The Fiery Trial, chs. 6-7

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 103-04, 117-19, 124-26, 165-
68

Week 8: (March 10): The Black Soldier

No readings or discussion section meetings this week

Midterm Examination: Wednesday, March 12

Week 9: (March 24, 26): The War's Impact

Stephanie McCurry, Confederate Reckoning, chs. 3-6

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 131-36, 175-77, 185-87, 222-
28

Week 10: (March 31, April 2): The End of the War

Foner, The Fiery Trial, chs. 8, 9, epilogue

McCurry, Confederate Reckoning, ch. 8

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 177-78, 299-300, 311-12

Week 11: (April 7, 9): Beginnings of Reconstruction

Leon Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long, chs. 5, 7

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 232-34, 377-81

Week 12: (April 14, 16): Origins of Radical Reconstruction

Eric Foner, A Short History of Reconstruction, chs. 1-7

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 325-27, 333-34, 339-42, 360-62

Week 13: (April 21, 23): Southern Republicans in Power

Foner, Short History of Reconstruction, chs. 8-12, epilogue

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 362-75, 387-91

Week 14: (April 28, 30): The Overthrow of Reconstruction

David Blight, Race and Reunion, chs. 7-8, epilogue

Gienapp, Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 395-402, 408-10, 416-17

Week 15: (May 5): New South and New Nation