HIST 246: The American Civil War Era, 1848-1876  
Spring 2011, Rice University / Dr. Caleb McDaniel / Humanities Bldg 327, TR  
10:50-12:05

Please note that this is a printed version of the online syllabus. Hyperlinks provided to further information is available on the website that will not appear here. Please visit the webpage for full syllabus and updates: http://hist246.blogs.rice.edu

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About

Walk into any big bookstore like Barnes and Noble or Borders, and you are likely to find an entire bookshelf or more devoted to books about the Civil War and key figures from the era. Clearly, among historians there is still great interest in writing about the Civil War Era. In 2009, the bicentennial anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, over 60 books were published about Lincoln alone! And since 2011 marks the bicentennial of the beginning of the War, historians will be busy again this year, trying to make sense of the conflict, its causes, and its consequences for newly interested audiences.

The Civil War era has never been solely the concern of historians, however. It is an era that has a special grip on numerous Americans today for a variety of reasons. At his inauguration in 2008, Barack Obama swore the presidential oath by placing his hand on President Abraham Lincoln's Bible, an action rich with symbolism given Lincoln's role in the wartime emancipation of African American slaves. Some Confederate heritage groups, meanwhile, are working this year to promote their own version of the war's history and meaning. The timing of this course and the bicentennial of the War thus provides us with a unique opportunity to consider the differences between “memory” and “history,” to talk about the way the Civil War is and has been remembered—even in our own backyard at Rice. We will also to delve into historical questions that are still of interest to professional historians and non-historians alike. These questions include, but are not limited to: What caused the war? What were its participants fighting for? Why did the Confederacy lose, and what exactly did the Union win?
Learning Objectives

Students in this course will learn …

* To evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different historical arguments related to questions related to the Civil War Era.
* To take their own positions on these questions and support these positions with sound reasoning and evidence.
* To identify and think critically about the social, cultural, and political factors that influence the way the past is remembered at different moments in time.
* To work collaboratively to make historically informed, reflective judgments about how to commemorate and interpret the Civil War Era for public audiences today.

Because students in this course will also work on a digital archive project related to the commemoration of a Civil War battle fought here in Texas, another objective will be to learn how to use various digital tools to present historical documents and interpretations in online environments. This could include learning how to use some (though not necessarily all) of the following tools: Omeka, SIMILE/Timeline, Flickr, GIS mapping software, audio/visual recording and editing equipment and software, and WordPress.

What to Expect

Expect to attend class. Attentive attendance in every class will be crucial to your success in the course.

Do not expect this course to be a “blow by blow” history of battles, events, and major figures in the Civil War. (If you would like a detailed but accessible history of the War that amply covers the military narrative, I suggest you consult James McPherson's Battle Cry of Freedom, which is widely available at bookstores.) We will have occasion to talk and read some about military history, but we will also range far beyond the battlefield and the Civil War itself.

Expect to do a lot of reading for this course. Four required books are listed below, and we will read and discuss all of them in class. I will supplement these books throughout the semester by assigning short articles and historical documents as additional readings. Additional readings may not always be discussed in class as fully as the books, but completing them is still essential to meeting the course's learning objectives.

Expect to succeed. My only reason for covering topics in class or assigning reading outside of class will be to assist you in meeting the learning objectives for the course. That means that if you apply yourself to doing the work in this class, you can expect to learn. On the other hand, if you decide you can’t commit to doing all the work or to attending class, then don't expect to learn what the course is designed to teach.
Required Books

These books are available for purchase at the Rice University bookstore or on various online stores like Amazon.com, which often have cheaper prices. Please purchase these books at the beginning of the semester so that you will have them when it is time to read them. The Rice bookstore does not keep the books in stock all semester long.


Note on Disability Support Services

If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me outside of class to discuss accommodations confidentially. You will also need to contact and register with the Disability Support Services Office, located in Allen Center.

Assignments

You will be assigned reading throughout the semester, as indicated on the schedule. All of this reading is required. When the schedule indicates that you should “complete” a reading assignment during a particular week, you should start it at the beginning of the week and plan to have it done by our Thursday class meeting, so that we can refer to the texts during our class discussion.

Students in the Spring 2011 semester of HIST 246 will also have the special opportunity to work on an online archive and exhibit project in conjunction with the sesquicentennial of the War. Students will work collaboratively and independently to study Lt. Dick Dowling, a Confederate officer remembered for his role in the Battle of Sabine Pass, and to examine how Dowling and the battle have been remembered, misremembered, contested, and represented at different moments in the past century and a half.

Graded assignments in this course have two purposes: to help you learn, and to assess—both for your information and for mine—how much you are learning. These assignments will include:

Two Library Assignments. Each will require you to go to Fondren library to complete a research task. One will involve finding a particular issue of a newspaper or magazine, either on microfilm or in a bound volume, that contains an article about Dowling and then preparing the article for digitization. The other will involve examining past textbooks or scholarly works about the Civil War to see whether or how Dowling has been included in
the work, and then preparing an excerpt for digitization. In both cases, I will provide the class with a list of periodical issues and particular book titles, and students will select which ones to look at for your library assignments. These assignments will be due in Week 7 and Week 12, as indicated on the schedule.

**Small Group Project.** Working in a small group of four or five people, you will be designing and producing a *digital product* in support of the online archive and exhibit—we’ll be creating about Dowling and the history of collective memory about him. Each group will be charged with producing one of the following: (1) an interactive map of sites related to Dowling’s life and memory; (2) a digital video related to the project; (3) a Podcast or audio file related to the project; (4) a timeline using special plug-ins in Omeka, the open-source web publishing platform we will be using for the project. Dr. McDaniel will assign students to these groups, and more information will be provided about the projects throughout the semester. Support for the technical dimensions of these tasks will also be available; students’ most important task will be to make judgments about how to interpret and represent Civil War history for an audience in the general public. Working together with other group members and Dr. McDaniel, students will produce a contract in Week 13 that will make clear what work each group member is responsible for completing by the due date for the project. Each group member will be assigned an individual grade based on the expectations outlined in the contract.

**Two Position Papers.** Each will require you to defend, in writing, your position on a question about the Civil War that historians still debate. Dr. McDaniel will distribute the prompt for each paper, along with specific guidelines and criteria for grading, at least one week before each is due. Each prompt will require students to read a set of articles related to the question at hand and then, on the basis of those articles, take a position in the debate and explain the reasons and evidence for that position in around 4 to 6 pages. Dr. McDaniel will read the position papers and assign them a numeric grade on the “zero to 4.3” gradepoint scale. These papers will be due in Weeks 6 and 10, as indicated on the schedule. (If you are unsatisfied with your performance on one of the position papers, you’ll also have the opportunity to write an optional third position paper, due by the end of the final examination period. You must inform me by the last day of class which position paper you want to replace. If your grade on the optional final paper is higher, it will replace the grade on the paper you specified. If the grade on the optional paper is lower, then the earlier grade will stand.)

**Weekly Blog Posts.** Students are required to write a blog post—a short piece of writing that will be published online—every week, with the exception of Weeks 6 and 10. The posts will be due by 9 a.m. on Thursdays, and prompts for them will be distributed in advance. Technical instruction about how to use blogs will also be provided. The prompts for the blog posts will usually ask students to answer questions or respond to ideas raised by the assigned readings, by the library assignments, by class discussions, or by the small group projects. Coming to class and keeping on top of these other assignments is essential to writing the blog posts. Fully responding to the prompts will typically require at least 400-500 words, but may require more. (Dr. McDaniel and Mercedes Harper, the teaching assistant for this course, will both read your blog posts, occasionally commenting on them. Mercedes will
assign a numerical grade to each one using a set of criteria that will be distributed to you, and these grades will serve as guidelines and recommendations to Dr. McDaniel, who will use them to make final decisions about grades and average them together. If you miss a blog post assignment, you will have the opportunity to make up one of these posts within a week of the initial due date, though you may be assigned a different prompt for the make-up. You will receive an official report about your grades on the posts so far in Week 6 and Week 15. Dr. McDaniel reserves the right, but is under no obligation, to bump your blog posts average over the course of the semester.

As each of these assignments approaches on the schedule, the criteria for grading will be discussed and explicitly communicated to you in class. Be aware that these criteria will only be concerned with assessing how well you are meeting the general learning objectives for the course; that is, students won’t be graded on a “curve” in relation to other students’ performance. The point of grades is to let each student know where he or she stands in relation to the specific objectives of the assignment and the objectives of the course as a whole. Here’s how individual assignments will be weighed when calculating your final grade:

Library Assignment #1 = 10%
Library Assignment #2 = 10%
Small Group Project= 20%
Position Paper #1 = 15%
Position Paper #2 = 25%
Average Weekly Blog Posts = 20%

**Deadlines**

As indicated on the schedule, you will have a “week-long window” in which to turn in your two position papers, and the prompts for these papers will be distributed a week before that window opens. This gives you two full weeks to work on each position paper at a pace that works with your own schedule and work habits. You can also think of this policy this way: I’m giving you a due date for the paper one week after the prompts are distributed, and then giving you a week-long grace period in which to turn it in late.

Because of this, I will not be willing to accept position papers turned in after the “week-long window” has closed. Moreover, the longer you wait to turn in the paper, the less time I will have to offer extensive feedback on the paper. It’s in your interest to turn assignments in early in the “week-long window” so that you can get more feedback from me on how you are doing in the course and how to do better. All papers will get a fair read and an honest assessment, but be aware that papers turned in at the eleventh hour will not receive as many comments as papers turned in earlier.

Library Assignments, Blog Posts, and Small Group Projects must be completed by the deadlines specified in the schedule. Exceptions to the deadline policies will only when there are extenuating circumstances such as an illness or personal emergency, but these circumstances must be documented to my satisfaction and brought to my attention immediately when they arise. Please remember, too, that the power of some circumstances
to make your work late–like becoming sick the night before a post is due–can be mitigated by starting to work on written assignments in advance of the deadline, so that even in cases where rare extenuating circumstances prevent you from finishing something on time, you will have some work to turn in.

Honor Code

Unless specific exceptions are explicitly provided in writing, the Honor Code applies to all written assignments in this course. My default position is trust, and my basic assumption is that students are in this course to learn. But suspected cases of plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Council. (Students: If you are unclear at any time about what constitutes an Honor Code violation in this course, it is your responsibility to clarify the issue with me before any ambiguous case arises.)

Schedule

WEEK 1: January 11-January 13

• Read over syllabus and bring questions about it to class on Thursday.
• Create a Google Account if you don't already have one.
• Fill out online web survey.
• Complete Blog Post #1, distributed in class on Tuesday and due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, January 13.
• Reading: For the weekend, begin Brown, Public Art of Civil War Commemoration, pp. 1-55.

WEEK 2: January 18-January 20

• Reading: Complete Brown, Public Art of Civil War Commemoration, pp. 1-55.
• Blog Post #2, due by 9 a.m., Thursday, January 20.
• Reading: For the weekend, begin reading Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over, all pages.

WEEK 3: January 25-January 27

• Reading: Complete Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over, all pages.
• Write Blog Post #3, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, January 27.
• Introduce yourself on your new group blog, which I will assign you to this week.
• Reading: For the weekend, begin reading either the Ayers and Thomas article, or the Kornblith article. Links will be distributed.

WEEK 4: February 1-February 3

• Reading: Complete articles by Kornblith and by Ayers and Thomas.
• Write Blog Post #4, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, February 3.
• For the weekend, browse through the digitized documents related to Dick Dowling.
WEEK 5: February 8-February 10

- Write Blog Post #5, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, February 10.
- Read through the prompt for Position Paper #1, distributed in class on Tuesday, and begin reading the articles distributed with the prompt.

WEEK 6: February 15-February 17

- Reading: Read Abraham Lincoln documents, distributed in class. Finish articles distributed with the prompt for Position Paper #1.
- There is no required blog post this week.
- Write Position Paper #1, which must be emailed to Dr. McDaniel between February 13 and midnight, February 20.
- Either this week or next, you need to complete Library Assignment #1.

WEEK 7: February 22-February 24

- Complete all tasks for Library Assignment #1 by midnight on Wednesday, February 23.
- Write Blog Post #6, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, February 24.

WEEK 8: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9: March 8-March 10

- Reading: TBA
- Write Blog Post #7, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, March 10.
- Begin reading through the prompt for Position Paper #2, distributed in class on Tuesday, and begin reading the articles distributed with the prompt.
- Have a safe Beer Bike.

WEEK 10: March 15-March 17

- Reading: Finish reading the articles distributed with the prompt for Position Paper #2. For the weekend, begin reading Levine, Confederate Emancipation, all.
- Write Position Paper #2, which must be emailed to Dr. McDaniel between March 13 and midnight, March 20.

WEEK 11: March 22-24

- Begin corresponding or meeting with your small group to talk about your Dowling project.
- Reading: Complete Levine, Confederate Emancipation, by class time on March 22. We will be discussing the book in class.
- Write Blog Post #8, due by 9 a.m. on Tuesday, March 22.
- Either this week or next, you will need to complete Library Assignment #2.
- There is no class on March 24 due to Spring Recess.
WEEK 12: March 29-March 31

- Complete all tasks for Library Assignment #2 by midnight on Wednesday, March 30.
- Write Blog Post #9, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, March 31.
- Reading: For the weekend, begin reading Foner, *Nothing But Freedom*.

WEEK 13: April 5-April 7

- Write Blog Post #10, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, April 7.
- Your small group will meet this week with Dr. McDaniel to discuss your small group project and agree on a contract for work to be completed, both collectively and individually, as part of this project. You should also be working on tasks related to Dowling project as determined by your small group.

WEEK 14: April 12-April 14

- Work on tasks related to Dowling project as determined by your small group.
- Write Blog Post #11, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, April 14.
- Reading: Read Reconstruction Documents, distributed in class. For the weekend, begin reading Brown, *Public Art of Civil War Commemoration*, 79-108, and Horwitz essay. Link will be distributed.

WEEK 15: April 19-April 21

- Work on tasks related to Dowling project as determined by your small group.
- Write Blog Post #12, due by 9 a.m. on Thursday, April 21.

ALL TASKS FOR DOWLING PROJECT MUST BE COMPLETED BY 5 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 4.