THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

More words have been written and published about the American Civil War than any other event in the history of the United States. How can we explain this fascination with the war? Was it simply the unprecedented carnage, the more than 600,000 soldiers’ deaths, the scores of wounded, and the psychological scars of a generation? Were the men and women who fought on both sides exemplary of some special dispensation of courage and resolve? Were they to be pitied for their folly? Or have Americans, North and South, looked back to the Civil War to fight again and again the conflicts that prompted the war in the first place -- the incompatibility of the nation’s noblest ideas of liberty and equality with its entrenched systems and discourses of racial inequality? Has the war ever finished?

This course examines the sectional conflict that prompted the Civil War, the secession crisis, the war years, and Reconstruction, concentrating on the perspective of social and cultural history. Central themes of American history emerge—freedom, equality, self-determination, racial justice and injustice, economic and class conflict, and constructions of gender and sexual power. The course also focuses on the power of memory, and the conflicts over memory, that have shaped the cultural meanings of the Civil War for the century and a half since the surrender at Appomattox.

REQUIRED READINGS:
Books to purchase: The following books are available at the College Bookstore:
Stephanie McCurry, Confederate Reckoning (2010).
Drew Gilpin Faust, This Republic of Suffering (2008).

Moodle & Reserve Readings:
Additional required and recommended readings for class or for the paper assignments will be available on Moodle or General Reserves at McCabe Library. Note: Student “blog” postings are part of the required texts for the course.

Films:
Films comprise an integral part of the assigned “texts” for this course. There will be scheduled “film nights” during the second half of the semester, and the films will be on video reserve at McCabe Library.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
Class participation: Students are required to attend all class meetings, complete all assigned readings (purchased books & Moodle), and be prepared to discuss the readings each week. Students are expected to contribute actively to the collective learning experience of the course.
Writing Assignments:
Papers: Two papers (approximately 2000 words each) will be written over the course of the semester. These will not be research papers, but essays on the assigned readings and recommended supplemental readings. Descriptions of the topics, sources, and expectations for the papers are in the Paper Assignments folder on Moodle. **Paper #1 is due Oct. 24; Paper #2 is due Dec. 11.**

Blogs: Five times during the semester, each student will post a reflective essay (a sort of “blog”) onto the “Blogs” folder on the course’s Moodle site. These essays will be based on brief research assignments, and should be essays of no more than 800 words. Blog essays should be analytical, and although they can be more informal, like a journal entry, they should display an attention to good writing.

Blog Assignments: (More details can be found on Moodle)
1. Secession: Read an editorial written during the secession crisis (1860-61) from either a Southern or Northern newspaper, and interpret its historical meaning and significance.
2. Friends and Pacifists: Find a document in either of Swarthmore’s two resident archives (the Friends Historical Library or the Peace Collection), and write your interpretation.
3. Magazines and Civil War Memory: Find any item (story, play, print, history, memoir) published in an American magazine during the fifty years following the Civil War (1865-1915), and discuss what it reveals about memories and representations of the Civil War.
4. Film Review: Write a review of one of the numerous feature films set during the Civil War and produced between 1939 and 1965.
5. Web Site Review: Find and interpret a current web site devoted to the experience or meaning of the Civil War today.

Final Examination: The final exam will take place at the end of the semester, either on the scheduled exam date, or as a take-home exam, to be arranged by the professor.

POLICIES:
Evaluation/Grading:
Class participation: 10%
Papers: 50%
Blogs: 25%
Final Examination: 15%

Note: Students must complete all writing assignments (including the Final Exam) to pass this course.

Attendance & Communication: The following is the History Department policy on attendance & communication: “Students are required to attend all classes. Unexcused absences will result in a lower grade for the course. If you are having a medical or personal emergency, please contact the Dean’s Office as well as the instructor of the course. It is your responsibility to inform your instructor as soon as possible. It is essential that you check your email on a regular basis since History professors will contact you via email. We also expect you to use email to contact History professors.”
Laptops & Electronic Devices: To facilitate discussion and to avoid distractions, I am going to ask that you do not use a laptop or any other electronic devise in class. Please silence and put away your mobile phone during class. (Disability accommodations requiring the use of a computer are not covered by this policy.)

Accommodations for disability: If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 113) or email lhempli1@swarthmore.edu to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, she will issue students with documented disabilities a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact her as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, visit the Student Disability Service website at http://www.swarthmore.edu/student-life/academic-advISING-and-support/student-disability-service.xml. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

**Part 1. Fissures in the Republic: The Antebellum Years**

**Week 1:**
Sept. 2 – Introduction . . . & the Antebellum Transformation of the North

**Readings:**

Sept. 4 – Into the Recent Past: Still Fighting the Civil War in the Late 20th Century

**Readings:**

**Week 2:**
Sept. 9 – Antebellum White Southern Culture, Slavery & African American Lives

**Readings:**
Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), excerpt [50pp]
[Twelve Years a Slave* (2013), dir. Steve McQueen.]

Sept. 11 – Sectional Conflict on the Eve of the Civil War

**Readings:**
Week 3:
Sept. 16 – Secession & the War Begins

Readings:

Blackboard Blog # 1 Due By 11:20am

Part 2. House Divided: The Civil War and Reconstruction
Sept. 18 – What They Fought For

Readings:
James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (1997), ch. 1-2, 8-9 [skim ch. 10].

Week 4:
Sept. 23 – Emancipation (Who Freed the Slaves?) & Slavery’s Deliberate Destruction

Readings:

Sept. 25 – The War’s Turning Points

Readings:

Week 5:
Sept. 30 – The Carnage of War

Readings:
Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, ch. 2.

Oct. 2 – Soldiering and Manhood (plus)
Conscientious Objectors and Pacifists During the Civil War

Readings:

Blackboard Blog # 2 Due By 11:20am
Week 6:
Oct. 7 – The Confederate Home Front
Readings:
Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, pp. 85-193, 214-33, 252-88, [skim 317-52]

Oct. 9 – Spies, Cross-Dressers, & Political Women: Gender in the North & Border States
Readings:
Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (2005), ch. 4.

Fall Break: Oct. 14 & 16

Week 7:
Oct. 21 – Killing and Dying in America
Readings:

Oct. 23 – Counting the Costs: The Meaning of Death in the Civil War
Readings:

Paper # 1 Due Oct. 24 by 5pm

Week 8:
Oct. 28 – Civil War in the Cultural Imagination: Songs and Stories
Readings:

Oct. 30 – Civil War in the Cultural Imagination: Race and Gender
Readings:
Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War*, ch. 3-7.
“Interpreting the Civil War: Jeff Davis in Drag,” draft for Bruce Dorsey and Woody Register, eds., *Crosscurrents in American Culture* (Houghton Mifflin, 2009), 2nd edition.
James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, ch. 25.

Week 9:
Nov. 4 – Emancipation & Reconstruction
Readings:


**Blackboard Blog # 3 Due by 11:20am**

Nov. 6 – Reconstruction

**Readings:**
“White Terror,” in Dorsey & Register, eds., *Crosscurrents in American Culture*.

**Part 3. Remembering, Forgetting, and Erasing: The Civil War in Memory and Popular Culture**

**Week 10:**
Nov. 11 – The Study of History and Memory

**Readings:**

Nov. 13 – Reconstruction and the War over Memory: The Lost Cause

**Readings:**

**Week 11:**
Nov. 18 – African American Memories and Countermemories.

**Readings:**

Nov. 20 – *Birth of a Nation: History Doesn’t Get Any Worse Than This*

**Readings:**
Birth of a Nation (1915), dir. D. W. Griffith.  
David W. Blight, Race and Reunion, Epilogue.  
Bruce Chadwick, The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film (2001), ch. 6-8.

Week 12: 
Nov. 25 – Gone with the Wind: The Lost Cause Meets the Great Depression

Readings:
Gone with the Wind (1939), dir. Victor Fleming.  
Bruce Chadwick, The Reel Civil War, ch. 10-11.  
Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic, ch. 11.

Blackboard Blog # 4 Due by 11:20am

Nov. 27 – No Class (Thanksgiving Holiday): Watch Civil War Movies

Week 13: 
Dec. 2 – Tourism and Gettysburg: The Making of an American Shrine

Readings:
Jim Weeks, Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine (2003), Intro. & ch. 5 & 8.

Dec. 4 – Ken Burns’s Civil War

Readings:
The Civil War, dir. Ken Burns, reel 1, 9.  
Leon Litwack, “Telling the Story: The Historian, the Filmmaker, and the Civil War,” in Robert Brent Toplin, ed., Ken Burns’s The Civil War, 119-140.

Blackboard Blog # 5 Due by 11:20am

Week 14: 
Dec. 9 – Re-enactors, Battle Flags, and Disney: Contemporary Popular Culture and Current Controversies

Readings:
Tony Horwitz, Confederates in the Attic, ch. 8-10, 12-15.  
Jim Cullen, The Civil War in Popular Culture, ch. 4-6.

Paper # 2 Due: Dec. 11 by 5pm

Final Examination: Date______________________ Time_______________________