

**HIST 3380**  
The American Civil War  
Sam Houston State University  
Fall Semester 2017



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Department of History

Sam Houston State University

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Office Hours: T/W/Th, 2:00-4:00pm, or at a mutually convenient time by appointment

Class Meetings: T/Th, 9:30-10:50am

Classroom: CHSS 120

## ABOUT OUR COURSE

“The Civil War,” the southern novelist Robert Penn Warren mused nearly a century after southern muskets were stacked at Appomattox, “is our only ‘felt’ history—history lived in the national imagination.” Some of the most enduring images and compelling characters in all of American history have emerged from the Civil War years. More than 60,000 books have been written about the conflict (if you are keeping score, that’s more than one every day since the war ended). The American landscape is littered with monuments to hometown regiments and common soldiers. We re-enact the war’s battles (large and small), preserve “hallowed ground,” and celebrate the conflict both as the end of slavery and as a great test of democracy.

In this course, we will critically examine our collective relationship with the Civil War era, reconsidering both the meaning and the legacy of the nation’s fratricidal conflict. By examining the war’s cause (understanding *how* slavery caused the Civil War, and *why* the war erupted when it did), its conduct (understanding *what* motivated Americans to fight, and *how* ordinary soldiers and the families they left back home felt, interpreted, and experienced combat), and its consequences (the questions that the war resolved *and* the ones it didn’t), we will seek to understand the Civil War anew—informed by both the latest scholarship and a sense of empathy for the people of the past.

While we will spend a considerable amount of time covering the military campaigns, this course will not be exclusively about “battles and leaders”; we will consider the war from the perspectives of social, cultural, political, intellectual, and environmental history. We will likewise seek to hone our skills as historians, analyzing and interpreting primary source evidence and evaluating secondary sources.

## SKILL OBJECTIVES FOR THIS COURSE

*Critical Thinking.* Students will be taught to think critically and analytically, and to ask appropriate questions about different historical societies and cultures, integrating and synthesizing knowledge they gain in the course, forming conclusions, and building an informed belief system from the complex of information presented in the course content.

*Communication.* This includes the effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication. Communication skills will be addressed in this class through class participation, the reading and discussion of historical texts, attending lectures, and/or watching films. Students will learn through the use of historical materials to critically evaluate the time periods in which these materials originated.

*Personal Responsibility.* This includes the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making. Personal responsibility will be addressed in this course as students articulate how to make sound ethical judgments based on the development of their personal value systems. By studying how individuals in the past drew upon their cultural belief

systems to make ethical choices students will learn how their personal choices based upon ideas, values, and beliefs influence their larger society and culture today.

*Social Responsibility.* This includes intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities. Social Responsibility will be addressed in this course as students learn about the ways in which individuals and groups in the past made decisions aimed at promoting civil discourse, civic participation, and other social values so as to improve society for all. Students will thus learn about their own social responsibilities in improving society.

## REQUIRED READINGS

Together, we will read and discuss three monographs in this course:

Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners & the Causes of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

Also, while we will not formally discuss it in class, I strongly recommend that you read James M. McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), for a broad, synthetic overview of the period. This book will be considered the "textbook" for the class. All of the books are available at the SHSU Barnes & Noble in the Lowman Student Center. Other supplemental readings (short articles, chapters, and a large selection of primary sources) will be posted to BlackBoard throughout the term.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

*Attendance and Participation:* Regular and punctual attendance in class is expected of all students. Because my lectures will complement the McPherson text (expanding on themes it develops, introducing new material and more recent scholarship, for only a few examples), it will be nearly impossible for you to pass the exams without coming to class and taking thorough lecture notes. Students will sign a roll sheet each day; this roll sheet shall serve as our official record of class attendance, and it is your responsibility to place your name (and your name only) on it. It is expected that you will come to class engaged and ready to pose questions, engage in book discussions, and contribute to the scholarly discourse. While I understand that not everyone is a natural classroom orator, my goal is to create a safe environment for the vigorous exchange of ideas. Please note: students who arrive late, leave early, sleep, or disrupt the class will not be counted as "present." *Beginning with the fourth unexcused absence, each absence will reduce your final grade by 40 points.*

*Exams.* There will be two written exams in this course: a midterm examination, covering all material from the beginning of the semester, to be administered in class on Thursday, October 5; and a comprehensive final exam, to be administered during the final exam period. Both exams will entail identifications (asking you to supply basic details and to assess the historical significance of a given person, event, or idea) and several essays. More information and review for the exams will be provided in class.

*Book Review.* Students will write a critical review (of no more than 3 pages, double-spaced, set in 12 pt. font) of *either* the Charles Dew book or the James McPherson book. These papers are due on the date that we are scheduled to discuss each book (even if we are running behind in lecture). Papers should identify the thesis of the book and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. The papers should offer a substantive critique of the author's argument and say something about his evidence and methodology. Questions that the book raised (but did not fully address) should also be considered. Examples of book reviews may be found in any scholarly journal—e.g. *The Journal of American History*, *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, or *Reviews in American History*. Note: do not read reviews of the assigned books or use outside sources on these assignments, though the temptation may be great. I am interested in your own, original analysis of the text.

*Regimental History Paper.* You are quite fortunate to be enrolled at SHSU, which has a tremendous collection of original primary materials related to the Civil War era. The Thomason Room (located on the fourth floor of Newton Gresham Library) houses an impressive collection of Union regimental histories. You will select one of these sources and write a longer essay (10-12 pages, double-spaced, set in 12 pt. font) in which you analyze, unpack, and ultimately make an argument using your selected source as the centerpiece of the paper. This will no doubt require work in secondary sources, and some significant research time on your part. You will also be required to work with the source in the Thomason Room; do not wait until the last minute to work on this project. More details about this project will be distributed in class early in the semester.

## GRADE CALCULATION

Student grades for this course will be calculated as follows:

Midterm Examination	300 points
Final Examination	300 points
Book Review	100 points
Regimental History Paper	300 points

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Total Points Possible:	1,000 points
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A= 1,000-900; B= 899-800; C= 799-700; D= 699-600; F= 599-0

PLEASE NOTE: you must write each paper and take the final exam to pass this course.

## CLASSROOM POLICIES

*Make Up and Late Work Policy.* There will be **no make-ups** on the exams, except in the case of documented medical or family emergencies. Absolutely no late work will be accepted. A paper is considered late immediately after the class period ends on the assigned due date. Submit papers double-spaced, stapled, and in hard copy. Learn to meet your deadlines. You may appeal for an extension, but must do so at least one week in advance of the due date and have an especially compelling case to make.

*Cell Phones, Laptops, and Electronic Devices.* All cell phones must be turned off and should not be taken out during class. Have respect for your classmates and professor. *Failure to comply with this cell phone policy can and will result in expulsion from the classroom; three or more infractions may result in a failure of the course.* Finally, please note that the University enforces a strict no cell phone policy during exams. A cell phone visible in a testing situation is assumed to be cheating and will result in a “zero” on the exam. I will permit the use of laptops in class, but only for note-taking purposes. Any other use of a laptop in class is strictly prohibited. Chronic violations of this policy may result in a moratorium on laptop use in class.

*Grades.* All student work will be evaluated impartially and returned with both a scoring rubric and substantial written comments. Feel free to ask for clarification or suggestions for improvement during office hours. Do keep in mind that grades are not negotiations—please do not tell me what you “need to make” in this course or ask for extra assignments. While I will work with you to help you achieve your goals, and will offer extra credit assignments throughout the semester, you must work and not bargain for your grades.

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty—including, but not limited to: cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted; plagiarism; collusion; and the abuse of resource materials. A copy of the University policy is available on the Sam Houston State University website. If you need clarification about what constitutes plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask or see me during office hours.

## STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS POLICY

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A

student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center.

## **VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:**

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

## **C-SPAN FILMING:**

C-SPAN will be filming our class session on **November 9**. The class will air at a later date on national television as an episode of the "Lectures in History" series. If you have concerns about this, please see me privately during office hours.

### **Week One: Introduction and the Narrative of the War**

Thursday, August 24: Introduction to the Course and the Study of the Civil War

Read: Faust, Ayers, and Pencak essays (Blackboard).

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### **Week Two: The Antebellum Union**

Tuesday, August 29: The Antebellum South

Thursday, August 31: The Antebellum North

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

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### **Week Three: The Mexican War**

Tuesday, September 5: Antebellum Crises of Union

Thursday, September 7: The Mexican War and Its Consequences

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapter 4.

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### **Week Four: The Political Crises of the 1850s**

Tuesday, September 12: The Bloodhound Law & The Compromise of 1850

Thursday, September 14: "A Hell of a Storm": The Kansas-Nebraska Act

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapters 5 and 6.

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### **Week Five: At the Precipice of Disunion**

Tuesday, September 19: Lecompton & The Impending Crisis

Thursday, September 21: John Brown, Lincoln, and The Election of 1860

Read: Dew, *Apostles of Disunion* (entire).

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**Week Six: The Secession Crisis**

Tuesday, September 26: Book Discussion: *Apostles of Disunion* & Introduce Final Paper

Thursday, September 28: The Secession Crisis & Fort Sumter

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapters 7, 8, and 9.

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**Week Seven: And The War Came**

Tuesday, October 3: The Battle of Bull Run

Thursday, October 5: MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapter 10.

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**Week Eight: Farewell to the Picture Book War**

Tuesday, October 10: The War in the West, 1861-1862

Thursday, October 12: From Bull Run to The Peninsula

Read: McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (entire).

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**Week Nine: Rebellion Becomes Revolution**

Tuesday, October 17: Book Discussion: *For Cause and Comrades*

Thursday, October 19: From The Peninsula to Fredericksburg

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapters 11, 13, 15, and 17.

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### **Week Ten: The ‘Turning Point’?**

Tuesday, October 24: NO CLASS—Dr. Jordan delivers lecture at Christopher Newport U.

Thursday, October 26: The Road to Emancipation and African-American Soldiers

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapters 19, 20, and 21.

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### **Week Eleven: The War Grinds On**

Tuesday, October 31: 1863: The Year of Turning Points?

Thursday, November 2: The Vicksburg Campaign

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapters 22, 23, and 24.

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### **Week Twelve: Victory and Defeat**

Tuesday, November 7: Grant Comes East: The War in 1864

Thursday, November 9: Enduring War: The Overland Campaign

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapters 25 and 26; start Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

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### **Week Thirteen: The Consequences**

Tuesday, November 14: The Road to Appomattox and Beyond

Thursday, November 16: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapter 27; continue Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

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### **Week Fourteen: Reconstruction**

Tuesday, November 21: Book Discussion: *This Republic of Suffering*

Thursday, November 23: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

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**Week Fifteen: The Legacy of the Civil War**

Tuesday, November 28: The Promise and Pitfalls of Reconstruction

Thursday, November 30: The Civil War in American Memory

Read: *Battle Cry*, chapter 28 and afterword.

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**Exam Week**

Final Exam: date and time TBA