

The American Civil War

Professor Allen Guelzo

Spring 2025

Course Description

This is a course of study in the most tragic conflict in the history of our nation, the Civil War. Not only does the Civil War contain all the elements of a national epic—the war of brother against brother, the idealism of the anti-slavery movement, the dramatic intensity of battles, surrenders, and even assassination—but its long-term legacies are still very much with us. The political and social struggles over which the Civil War was fought still await final resolution in our national life.

Course Readings

1. Guelzo, Allen C. *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
2. Course Reader (CR) (available on Moodle)

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page research paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives

1. Students will explore the interpretation of the Civil War.
2. Students will study the major questions and issues posed by the Civil War era.
3. Students will examine major turning points in the course of the Civil War, and establish their long-term trajectories in American historical imagination.
4. Students will understand the American Civil War in the international context of nineteenth-century warfare.

Class Schedule

Week One: February 6: The Coming of the War

Readings

- Allen C. Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6–53.
- Daniel Webster, "Second Reply to Hayne," January 26–27, 1830, in *The Webster-Hayne Debate on the Nature of the Union: Selected Documents*, ed. Herman Belz (Indianapolis, 2000). (CR)
- George Fitzhugh, "Slavery Justified," in *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, 1854). (CR)
- James Henry Hammond, "Speech of Hon. James H. Hammon, of South Carolina, on the Admissions of Kansas, Under Lecompton Constitution," (speech, U.S. Senate, Washington D.C., March 4, 1858). (CR)
- David Walker, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of Slavery," in *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles* (Boston, 1830). (CR)
- William Lloyd Garrison, "To the Public," *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831. (CR)
- Excerpt from Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Baltimore: Thomas E. Gray, 1831). (CR)
- American Anti-Slavery Society, "Declaration of Sentiments," 1833. (CR)
- Excerpt from The Northwest Ordinance (July 13, 1787). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
- First post due: Sunday, February 9
 - Second post due: Wednesday, February 12

Week Two: February 13: Expanding into Conflict

Readings

- Guelzo, 54–137.
- Excerpt from the Missouri Compromise (1820). (CR)
- The Wilmot Proviso (August 8, 1846). (CR)
- Excerpt from the Fugitive Slave Act (1850). (CR)
- Excerpt from the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854). (CR)
- "The Appeal of the Independent Democrats" (January 19, 1854). (CR)
- Charles Sumner, "The Crime against Kansas" (speech, U.S. Senate, May 19, 1859). (CR)
- *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857). (CR)

- Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Peoria" (Peoria, IL, October 16, 1854), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "House Divided" (speech, Springfield, IL, June 16, 1858). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "Seventh and Last Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Alton, Illinois," (October 15, 1858). (CR)
- John Brown, "Address of John Brown to the Virginia Court," (December 1859). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "Cooper Union Address" (New York, February 27, 1860) in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)
- South Carolina Secession Ordinance (December 20, 1860). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address" (March 4, 1861) in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)
- Excerpt from Alexander Stephens, "The Cornerstone Speech" (Savannah, GA, March 21, 1861). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
 - First post due: Sunday, February 16
 - Second post due: Wednesday, February 19
- Short Paper One due: Wednesday, February 19
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session One: Wednesday, February 19 at 8:00 p.m. ET

Week Three: February 20: The Aimless War

Readings

- Guelzo, 138–156.
- Jefferson Davis, "Inaugural Address" (February 22, 1861), in *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. 1 (1876). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "By the President of the United States: A Proclamation" (April 15 1861). (CR)
- Samuel Curtis, General Orders No. 15, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* vol. 122 (Washington, 1881). (CR)
- W. H. Russell, "Action at Bull Run," in *My Diary North and South* (Boston, 1863). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
 - First post due: Sunday, February 23
 - Second post due: Wednesday, February 26
 - Final Paper/Project Question due: Wednesday, February 26
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final project or paper will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing.
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Week Four: February 27: The War for Freedom

Readings

- Guelzo, 156–185, 239–261.
- George B. McClellan, “General Plan of Operations” (August 4, 1861), *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 5 (Washington, 1881). (CR)
- George B. McClellan, “Plan of Operations for the Peninsula Campaign” (February 3, 1862), in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 5 (Washington, 1881). (CR)
- Benjamin Butler and the Contrabands, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 114 and 122 (Washington, 1881), and in Frank Moore, *The Rebellion Record* (New York, 1868). (CR)
- Second Confiscation Act (July 17, 1862), in Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America during the Great Rebellion* (Washington, 1864). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, “To Horace Greeley” (August 22, 1862) in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)
- Salmon P. Chase, Diary entry for September 22, 1862, in *Inside Lincoln’s Cabinet*, ed. David H. Donald (New York, 1954). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation (January 1, 1863). (CR)
- Frederick Douglass on Abraham Lincoln, in *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time* (New York, 1886). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
 - First post due: Sunday, March 2
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 5

- Short Paper Two due: Wednesday, March 5
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Two: Wednesday, March 5 at 8:00 p.m. ET

Week Five: March 6: The Dilemma of Constitutional Power

Readings

- Guelzo, 213–231, 278–313.
- Roger B. Taney, "Ex parte Merryman," in James Mason Cambell, *Reports of Cases at Law and Equity* (Philadelphia, 1871). (CR)
- Excerpt from the Legal Tender Act (February 25, 1862), *Statutes at Large* (37th Congress, 2nd Session, chapter 33). (CR)
- "Prize Cases," 67 U.S. 2 Black (1862). (CR)
- *Ex parte Milligan*, 71 U.S. Wall. 2 (1866). (CR)
- R. M. Hunter, "The Capture of Mason and Slidell" in *The Annals of the War Written by Leading Participants North and South*, ed. A. K. McClure (Philadelphia, 1878). (CR)
- James Russell Soley, "The Union and Confederate Navies," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York, 1887). (CR)
- John Taylor Wood, "The First Fight of the First Iron-clads," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York, 1887). (CR)
- Report of Capt. Van Brunt, U.S. Navy, Commanding U.S.S. Minnesota, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, ser. 1, vol. 7 (Washington, 1898). (CR)
- The Declaration of Paris (April 16, 1856), in *Conventions and Declarations between the Powers Concerning War, Arbitration and Neutrality* (The Hague, 1915). (CR)
- John McIntosh Kell, "Cruise and Combats of the Alabama," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York, 1887). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
 - First post due: Sunday, March 9
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 12
- Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due March 12
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback, AND

2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.
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Week Six: March 13: Year of Despair, Year of Triumph

Readings

- Guelzo, 325–345, 186–213, 346–356.
- Ulysses Grant, "The Confederate Attack on Shiloh," in *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York, 1885–1886). (CR)
- Grant, "The Battle of Shiloh," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York, 1887). (CR)
- Ambrose Bierce, "What I Saw of Shiloh," in *London Sketch-Book 1* (April and May 1874). (CR)
- Grant, "The Battle of Chattanooga," in *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York, 1885–1886). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address (November 19, 1863), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "To James C. Conkling" (August 26, 1863), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
 - First post due: Sunday, March 16
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 19
- Short Paper Three due: Wednesday, March 19
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Three: Wednesday, March 19 at 8:00 p.m. ET

Week Seven: March 20: A Vast Future

Readings

- Guelzo, 448–459, 356–372
- Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction" (December 8, 1863), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)
- The Wade-Davis Bill (1864), in Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America during the Great Rebellion* (Washington, 1864). (CR)

- Sir Garnet Wolseley, "A Month's Visit to the Confederate Headquarters," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 93 (January 1863). (CR)
- Excerpt from Edward Pollard, *Life of Jefferson Davis and the Secret History of the Confederacy* (Philadelphia, 1869). (CR)
- Excerpt from Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, eds. Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery (New York, 1905). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - First post due: Sunday, March 23
 - Second post due: Wednesday, March 26
- Short Paper Four due: Wednesday, March 26
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week Eight: March 27: Soldiers Blue and Gray, Black and White

Readings

- Guelzo, 261–277, 371–389.
- Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, chs. 24 and 65, in *Prose Works* (Philadelphia, 1862). (CR)
- Frank Wilkeson, "How Men Die in Battle," in *Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac* (New York, 1887). (CR)
- David Thompson, "With Burnside at Antietam," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 2, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York, 1887). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "To Michael Hahn" (March 13, 1864). (CR)

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview due: Wednesday, April 2
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Q&A Session Four: Wednesday, April 2, at 8:00 p.m. ET

Week Nine: April 3: Our Bleeding, Bankrupt Country

Readings

- Guelzo, 418–448.
- Ulysses Grant, "Preparing for the Campaigns of '64," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York, 1887). (CR)
- Frank Wilkeson, "The Battle of the Wilderness," in *Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac* (New York, 1887). (CR)
- Ulysses Grant, "The Battle of Cold Harbor," in *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York, 1885–1886). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, "Memorandum Concerning His Probable Failure of Re-Election" (August 23, 1864), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
 - First post due: Sunday, April 6
 - Second post due: Wednesday, April 9
 - Short Paper Five due: Wednesday, April 9
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Ten: April 10: Our People Have Not Been in Earnest

Readings

- N/A

Assignments

- Rough Draft due: Wednesday, April 16
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
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Week Eleven: April 17: To Die a Thousand Deaths

Readings

- Guelzo, 465–483.
- “Resolution Submitting the Thirteenth Amendment to the States” (February 1, 1865). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, “Response to a Serenade” (February 1, 1865), in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953). (CR)
- Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address” (March 4, 1865). (CR)
- Horace Porter, “The Surrender at Appomattox Court House,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York, 1887). (CR)
- Robert E. Lee, Terms of Lee’s Surrender at Appomattox (April 9, 1865). (CR)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine
 - First post due: Sunday, April 20
 - Second post due: Wednesday, April 23

Q&A Session Five: Wednesday, April 23, at 8:00 p.m. ET

Week Twelve: April 24: The Agony of Reunion

Readings

- Guelzo, 483–528.
- Andrew Johnson, “Amnesty Proclamation” (May 29, 1865), in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 8, ed. Paul H. Bergeron (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989). (CR)
- Laws in Relation to Freedmen (U.S. Senate, 39th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Executive Document No. 6, 1865) (“Black Codes”). (CR)
- Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. (CR)
- Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. (CR)
- Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, ch. 101, in *Prose Works* (Philadelphia, 1862). (CR)

Assignments

- Final Draft due: Wednesday, April 30
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Course and Program Policies

It is the responsibility of students to know, understand, and abide by course and program policies.

For a full overview of program policies, review the Gettysburg College–Gilder Lehrman Institute Student Handbook.

Course correspondence

Correspondence with faculty and administrators should be formal. Include a subject line, addressee, and closing. Put the name and number of your course in the subject line.

Plagiarism and AI

This program uses Turnitin to check for instances of plagiarism and AI. Plagiarism and papers composed fully or in part by AI will not be tolerated. This includes self-plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing or composing papers with AI for the first time may receive a zero on the assignment. A student caught plagiarizing or composing with AI for a second time may be permanently removed from the program.

Your section professor will set the policies for use of AI for research or purposes other than composing your papers.

Late work

Assignments should be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the due date unless otherwise specified by your section professor. If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact your section professor to ask for an extension before the assignment's due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% if less than a week late, 10% if one week late, and an additional 10% for each subsequent week.

Grading scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Grade Points
A	95%–100%	4
A-	90%–94%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3
B-	80%–83%	2.67
C+	77%–79%	2.33

C	74%–76%	2
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1
D-	60%–63%	.67
F	0%–59%	0

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers (25% of grade – 5% per short paper)

Students will complete five short papers. Each should be approximately 500 words long. The purpose of these papers is not to merely summarize weekly readings but to demonstrate that you have read them analytically and contextually. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Student-created prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings and be included at the beginning of the paper. If you need help getting started, you can complete one of the options listed below.

Complete a thesis identification - Select one of your assigned readings and focus on identifying the thesis as well as the evidence the authors use to support that thesis.

Complete a primary source evaluation - Evaluate a primary source from the Gilder Lehrman Collection or elsewhere. Primary sources must be relevant to that week's readings. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is the author of this document?
- Who was their intended audience?
- How might both author and audience impact the content of the document?
- For what reason was this document created?

Complete a book review - Focus on one of the secondary sources assigned in this course and critique it. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's argument?
- Does the author adequately support their argument?
- Are you convinced of their argument? If not, why not?
- How does this source fit into the larger discussion of its topic?

Discussion Board Posts (18% of grade – 2% per discussion board)

Students will interact in nine discussion boards in this course. Discussion boards are led by section professors, who will provide specific instructions for participation in their section. You are required to make at least one post to each discussion board and respond to **at least two other students.**

Question-and-Answer Sessions (15% of grade – 5% per reaction)

Throughout the semester the lead professor of each course will conduct five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must attend the session live and complete a 1–2-paragraph Q&A Reaction within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&As, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 500-word review of topics covered for each missed Q&A. **Makeup assignments must be completed within two weeks of the missed Q&A.**

Final Project/Paper (42% of grade)

For the final assignment of each course, you will choose to complete either a research project or 15-page research paper. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts and podcasts, documentary editing and transcription, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a project or paper, finals are scaffolded throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows time to incorporate instructor feedback into assignments.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Project/Paper Proposal (2%)

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final project or paper. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic

(answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be super specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing) and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (what is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?).

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%)

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan on utilizing in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Project or Paper Preview (5%)

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.