

A HOUSE DIVIDED: THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

MONDAYS, MARCH 18, 25, APRIL 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, MAY 6; NOON TO 2 P.M.

Location: Advanced Sciences Building, Room L416/417, Entrance 11, Parking Lot 3

Fee: No charge / **Max:** 50

Lifelong Learning membership required

Course #19/FY-CPDV-3011-01

The American Civil War echoes across the decades. At once the best known and least understood era of American history, the fight pulled Americans from all regions of the country. These men found themselves in pitched battles in towns and landmarks that previously had no significance. The sacrifices of soldiers and locals caught up in the battle created names now hallowed in American history. Unlike the American Revolution, the toll in human lives was beyond belief. More Americans fell at Antietam than all the battlefield deaths in the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, or the Spanish American War combined. There was nothing civil about the American Civil War, and it was only getting started.

The goal of these classes is to understand the pressures that led to this conflict, to see the reasons the war came, and how it was fought. We will honor those who fought, but by trying to understand why those battles happened – and why they turned out the way they did. We will meet the personalities involved through writings, letters, notes, and actions.

We will watch as events unfold following the war's final shouts and shots. Too often, the story stops at with Abraham Lincoln's death. We will continue to follow the events of the last days past the vigils that followed Lincoln's assassination. We will see how the war ended, what happened next as former slaves became free people, and what that meant. We will debunk the stories of incompetent ex-slaves unable to govern themselves – but we will look at the actual record of what was happening and why. We will follow the political battles over reconstructing the nation, and try to get beyond the propaganda both sides used to undercut the others. We will meet good people and misguided ones. We will see shameful acts of brutality and great acts of kindness and comfort. We will see the pain of a nation of shrouds, but a nation determined to continue. We will see the horrors of the failure of reconstruction but the indomitable will of people determined to live free.

Despite the Civil War and the peace that followed, the country never stopped moving. Industrialization, railroads, immigration, and westward movement all continued as the war raged - and leapt forward when the war ended. So, too, did the clash of cultures brought on by endless expansion. We will travel the Plains as the Indian Wars build to a crescendo and then a deafening silence.

Advances in industrialization and transportation bound the growing country together, but the fortunes made turned the heads of many. We will see the rise of robber barons, scandals, and great fortunes. We will witness the fight as work life is transformed by new factories and the effort to create wage slaves in the North and Sharecropper serfs in the South.

In every class, we will hear the stories of rebels and unionists, abolitionists and feminists, statesmen and commoners, generals and presidents, farmers and foundry workers, rascals and the righteous, immigrants and industrialists.

We will not ignore the hard truths nor will we embellish the tales. But we will try to introduce you to the warm-blooded humans that made decisions both thoughtful and rash, acted on their choices with some results of success and many that ended in failure. In the process, we will follow as they lived full lives that should be remembered, celebrated, and mourned.

This is the story of America as it turns 100, following a war far more destructive than all she had experienced since her founding. It is coming of age tale in a dangerous time for democracies, as the now truly United States muscled past the monarchies.

There is greatness in this story. We will tell the successes of a people trying to live up to the promises of their founders, whose belief in the proposition that all men are created equal was tested, strained, and confirmed in this history of America. Join historian Russ Gifford and celebrate the successes as a nation conceived in liberty fought to live up to their ideals.

(Note: Each class will be a complete story, but each will fit together for the story of the path from the mid-century to the dawn of the new age.)

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The Coming Crisis: 1850 to 1860

1850 was a high moment in America. Texas, California, and all points in between are now part of the Union. Finding gold in California seemed to confirm that God's grace was certainly smiling on America. Wagon trains began snaking through the tall grass of the Plains boasting "California or Bust," and more immigrants were flowing into the east coast than ever before. The problems of new territories reopened the fight over slavery's expansion and trouble followed in Kansas and Missouri. Abraham Lincoln's election without a single Southern electoral vote foreshadowed trouble, which was far worse than anyone could have conceived.

Monday, March 18; Noon to 2 P.M.

The Break with the Union and the Early War: 1860-1861

Southern fire eaters dashed Lincoln's hope to prevent an open break with the South. The attack on Fort Sumter forced everyone to make choices, including Robert E. Lee, a national hero of the Mexican War, who was offered command of the United States Army. We will peer

over Lincoln's shoulder as he worked to develop his own strategy for the early war and began to meet some of the people of the time: the frustrating George McClellan, whom Lincoln appointed to lead his arriving recruits into the Army; William Seward, Lincoln's astute but sometimes difficult Secretary of State. Did Seward convince Great Britain and other European powers to stay out of this "domestic affair"?

Monday, March 25; Noon to 2 P.M.

1862: Frustrations on the Battlefields, Tensions on the Homefront

Though only 100 miles separated Washington and Richmond, Federal forces made no headway in the east, largely thanks to poorer quality generals on the northern side. Lincoln's prodding produced miracles until the arrival of Robert E. Lee, and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson pushed the Federal army out of Virginia. We will also see the large battles, beginning at Shiloh, and the first signs of a new type of war under Ulysses S. Grant. The results sent shock waves through the home fronts on both sides.

Monday, April 1; Noon to 2 P.M.

From 1862-1863: The South Invades, the North Retaliates

When Lee decided to take the war to the North, the resulting battle at Antietam changed the war forever. After a stalemate victory forced Lee to retreat, Lincoln finally embraced freeing the slaves in the occupied areas. Still, the Southern threat was not diminished. Lee's army humbled and humiliated Joe Hooker at Chancellorsville, and Lee took the Army of Northern Virginia into Union territory. The result was a mutually deadly meeting at Gettysburg.

Monday, April 8; Noon to 2 P.M.

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1863-1864: The Tide Turns

Gettysburg may be considered a Union victory, but Lee's army lived to fight another day when the Union refused to pursue. In the West, Grant cracked the lynchpin at Vicksburg and routed successive Southern armies from the Mississippi to Tennessee. We'll also meet other generals as Grant invaded Virginia, Thomas took Tennessee, and Sherman threatened Atlanta. But the presidential election loomed large as McClellan, the general Lincoln sent home, vied for the presidency on a peace platform.

Monday, April 15; Noon to 2 P.M.

1865 - 1868: Ashes, Victory, Shrouds, and Reconstruction?

Grant's constant pressure forced Lee to abandon Richmond to its fate and the fires. Everything changed when a small group decided to remove the top leadership of the federal government in a final desperate series of assassination attempts. The Confederate president Jefferson Davis fled to avoid capture but pushed Lee to embrace a gorilla-style war. Lee instead surrendered at Appomattox on April 19, 1865, to send a message of his own to other Confederate armies. It was time to lay down arms. There was no real hope left. Supplies were all but gone, and reinforcements did not exist. After the battles stopped, the question loomed – how does the country move forward? Congress and the new president did not agree. Did Johnson carry on Lincoln's policies or lose the peace? The eventual result was the first impeachment of a president, but valuable time was lost.

Monday, April 22; Noon to 2 P.M.

1868 – 1876: Reconstruction And Beyond

Henry Clay failed to convince the Senate to remove Johnson from the presidency but stopped Johnson's efforts to block a more stringent reconstruction. Congress pushed forward new amendments to the Constitution to overcome the Black Codes passed to prevent the integration of former slaves into society. By 1869, facing continued resistance, the newly elected President Grant did not flinch and sent troops to occupy the South. Almost five years after the war, Northerners were looking to move on with their lives. Industry made tracks toward prosperity, while in the West, the Plains wars with the Native Americans continued. All the while, the railroads rolled until scandals and recession rocked everyone's world.

Monday, April 29; Noon to 2 P.M.

1877-1893: Recession, Revival, and Reunion?

The contested election of 1876 meant changes for everyone. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan and their war of intimidation rolled back the protections of the former slaves and gave rise to the Jim Crow laws that held back progress for decades. This set in progress the great black migration to the northern cities. At the same time, immigrants sailed into eastern seaports. This great influx of people provided the manpower required by the expanding factories that churned out steel and food for the country and the world.

It was a time of change in America. As the veterans of the Civil War aged and started to leave the stage, a profound change in how the war was viewed by current and future generations began to take hold.

Monday, May 6; Noon to 2 P.M.