

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

21H.116J / STS.029J

CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

Fall 2007

Instructor: Professor Merritt Roe Smith

Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30-11 a.m.

Focus: Although attention will be devoted to the causes and long-term consequences of the Civil War, this class will focus primarily on the war years (1861-1865) with special emphasis on the military and technological aspects of the conflict. Four questions, long debated by historians, will receive close scrutiny:

1. What caused the war?
2. Why did the North win the war?
3. Could the South have won?
4. To what extent is the Civil War America's "defining moment"?

REQUIRED READINGS

The following books – all in paperback – may be purchased at the MIT Bookstore:

James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (Oxford UP, 1988)

Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels* (Ballantine, 1993)

Sam R. Watkins, *Company Aytch: A Confederate's Memoir of the Civil War* (1882; Simon & Schuster, 1997)

David Donald, ed., *Why the North Won the Civil War* (Collier, 1962)

David Mindell, *War, Technology, and Experience Aboard the USS Monitor* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2000).

In addition, we will be viewing Ken Burns's renowned documentary *The Civil War*, a nine-part series that made television history when over 40 million viewers watched it in September 1990. Praised and criticized, *The Civil War* does one thing very well: it gives the viewer a vivid visual sense of what the times were like. And that's why I'm using it – it puts a human face on the war. As you watch the series, think about how Burns's presentation comports or departs with what James McPherson and other authors we'll be

reading have to say about the war. Differences in interpretation definitely exist. As the instructor, I am counting on you to pick up on these differences and bring them to the attention of the class during our discussions. The better your level of perception in these matters, the better will be your final grade!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This class will operate more like a reading seminar than a traditional lecture class (though a few lectures will be delivered during the term). Students are expected to participate in class discussions by reading the assigned materials by the date they are due. To guide class discussions, students are asked to prepare brief 1.5/2-page reflection papers (6 in all, as designated below) for each set of readings during the term. Please note that the final reflection paper topic is intended as an exercise in comparison and interpretation. Now is the time to start to think about how you want to frame it. Specific instructions about these assignments and how to do them will be discussed in class.

In addition to the reflection papers, there will be two (2) reading quizzes during the term. The final grade will be determined as follows:

Reflection papers: 50%
Quizzes: 50%

Note: Regular attendance, participation, and a good attitude are essential. Without all three, you will not get much out of this course. Attendance will be taken and poor attendance will result in severe final grade penalties. Class participation is particularly important because it can determine your final grade in borderline situations (more about this later).

CLASS SCHEDULE & READING ASSIGNMENTS

Sept. 6 – Introduction

Assignment: start reading McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* and Donald, *Why the North Won the Civil War*

Sept. 11 – Film: Ken Burns' *The Civil War*, Episode 1, "The Cause"

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 3-275 (pay close attention to pp. 3-46)

Sept. 13 – Lecture: Why the war came; how well were the adversaries prepared?

Sept. 18 – Reading period / class will not meet

1st REFLECTION PAPER DUE about Donald's book by 7:00 pm via email to Prof. Smith

Sept. 20 – Class discussion of Donald's book (using reflection papers as framing device)

Sept. 25 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 2, "1862 – A Very Bloody Affair"

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 276-427

Sept. 27 – Lecture: "The Civil War at Sea"

Guest lecturer: Dr. Brendan Foley (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute)

Oct. 2 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 3, "Forever Free, 1862"

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 428-567

2nd REFLECTION PAPER DUE BY 7:00 pm (covering McPherson, pp. 308-567)

Oct. 4 – Class discussion [framed around reflection papers]

Oct. 9 – Columbus Day holiday: no class

Oct. 11 - **FIRST READING QUIZ [covering all material – readings, films, lectures-to date]**

Oct. 16 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 4, "Simply Murder, 1863"

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 568-665

Oct. 18 – No class; reading period

Oct. 23 – Lecture: "The Impact of New Weapons Technologies"

- Oct. 25 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 5, “The Universe of Battle, 1863”
3rd REFLECTION PAPER DUE BY 7:00 pm [covering Shaara’s *The Killer Angels* and McPherson, pp. 568-665]
- Oct. 30 – Class discussion [framed around reflection papers]
- Nov. 1 – Lecture: “Medicine, Battle Wounds, and Health Conditions”
Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 666-717
- Nov. 6 – Lecture: “Roads, Rails, and Waterways: Why They Mattered”
Reading assignment: Sam Watkins, *Company Aych* (complete)
- Nov. 8 – Lecture: “Supplying the Troops: Montgomery Meigs and the Logistics Revolution”
4th reflection paper due by 7:00 pm [covering Watkins, *Company Aych*]
- Nov. 13 – Class discussion of Watkins and life in the ranks [framed around discussion papers]
- Nov. 15 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 6, “The Valley of the Shadow of Death, 1864”
Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 718-50
5th reflection paper due by 7:00 pm [covering McPherson, pp. 666-750]
- Nov. 20 – Class discussion of McPherson, pp. 666-750
- Nov. 22 – Thanksgiving holiday: no class
- Nov. 27 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 7, “Most Hallowed Ground, 1864”
Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 751-806
- Nov. 29 – Lecture: “Was the Civil War America’s ‘Defining Moment’?”
- Dec. 4 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 8, “War is Hell, 1865”
Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 807-62
- Dec. 6 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 9, “The Better Angels of Our Nature, 1865”
Final reflection paper due by 7:00 pm [covering all the books and films, and asking “who got it right? The writers (McPherson, Donald, and Shaara) or the film maker (Ken Burns)?” This paper should be 5 or 6 pages in length, absolutely no longer than 10 pages.
- Dec. 11 – Class discussion / wrap up: “Who got it right?”

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