

SLAVERY, FREEDOM, AND THE U.S. CIVIL WAR

University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Francis Russo

Spring 2025

HIST 3165-401

W 3:30 PM-6:29 PM



Course Description

It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of the Civil War as a landmark event in the making of the modern United States, and indeed, the modern world. In addition to destroying slavery and the slaveholding class within the United States, the era introduced enduring dilemmas: What is the legacy of slavery in U.S. history and contemporary life? Who is entitled to citizenship in the United States? How do radical social movements relate to democratic political change? What is the nature of liberty in a “free” capitalist society? What do freedom and equality mean in concrete terms? Far from a straightforward transition from slavery to freedom, the story of the U.S. nineteenth century is much more complex: the Union victory in the Civil War eradicated slavery from American life but left it to future generations, including our own, to confront the legacies of slavery and to probe the meaning of freedom and to give it substance. This seminar explores enduring paradoxes of slavery and freedom through an in-depth historical analysis of the causes, course, and consequences of the U.S. Civil War. Topics include the place of slavery in the Federal Constitution, the spread of the cotton kingdom, Jacksonian democracy and the Market Revolution, ideologies of slavery and freedom, the rise of antislavery and proslavery politics, the growing social and economic divisions between North and South, the sectional crisis leading to war, the course and consequences of Northern military victory, emancipation, and the Reconstruction Amendments. We pay attention to these large-scale historical developments while also studying the individual experiences of statesmen and ordinary Americans, women as well as men, the enslaved as well as the free.

Course Assignments

- 1 Book Review (2-3 pages)
- 1 Original Research Paper (15-20 pages)