

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**21H.116J / STS.029J**

## **CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION**

**Fall 2010**

Instructor: Professor Merritt Roe Smith

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

Focus: While 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. What impacts did the war have on America?

### **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).

In addition to the above readings, the following chapter will be placed on the class website:

Alex Keyssar, "Reconstruction" in *Inventing America: A History of the United States*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), pp. 485-508.

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 with and/or departs from 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 number of 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 2-page reflection papers (4 in all, as designated below) for each set of readings during the term. In addition, you will be asked to prepare a longer 7 to 10-page end-of-term reflection paper that compares the primary text for the class (McPherson) with the films shown in class (by Ken Burns) and asks “who got it right?” Since this paper will require some serious assessment and interpretation on your part, now is the time to begin thinking about how you want to frame it and what to include. Specific instructions concerning 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:

Short reflection papers: 30%

Quizzes: 30%

Final reflection paper: 40%

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).

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## CLASS SCHEDULE & READING ASSIGNMENTS

### Sept. 9 – Introduction

Film: Ken Burns *The Civil War*, Episode 1, “The Cause”

Reading assignment: McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 3-275 (pay close attention to pp. 3-46). Also start reading Donald, *Why the North Won*.

Note that 1<sup>st</sup> reflection paper on Donald is due on Sept. 15.

### Sept. 14 – Continuation of Burns, Episode 1.

Lecture: Why the war came; how well were the adversaries prepared for war?

Reading assignment: complete Donald book.

**1<sup>st</sup> REFLECTON PAPER DUE** by 7 pm (on Donald’s book) on Sept. 15 via email to Professor Smith

### Sept. 16 – Class discussion of Donald’s book [using reflection papers as framing device]

### Sept. 21 – Film: Burns, *The Civil War*, Episode 2, “1862 – A Very Bloody Affair”

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 276-427.

### Sept. 23 – Lecture: “The Civil War at Sea”

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

### Sept. 28 – Film: Burns, *The Civil War*, Episode 3, “Forever Free, 1862”

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 428-567.

**2<sup>nd</sup> REFLECTION PAPER DUE** by 7 pm (covering McPherson, pp. 308-567)

### Sept. 30 – Film: Burns, *The Civil War*, Episode 4, “Simply Murder, 1863”

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 568-665.

### Oct. 5 – Class discussion [framed around 2<sup>nd</sup> reflection paper]

Reading assignment: begin reading Shaara’s *The Killer Angels*.

### Oct. 7 – **FIRST READING QUIZ** (covering all reading materials today, plus

Episodes 1-4 of Burns *The Civil War*)

### Oct. 12 – Lecture: “Weapons of the Civil War: Their Impact”

### Oct. 14 – Film: Burns, *The Civil War*, Episode 5, “The Universe of Battle, 1863”

Reading assignment: begin reading Sam Watkins, *Company Aytch*.

### Oct. 19 – Lecture: “Medicine, Battle Wounds, and Health Conditions”

Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 666-717.

### Oct. 21 – **NO CLASS.** **3<sup>rd</sup> REFLECTION PAPER DUE** by 7 pm (covering Shaara’s novel and McPherson, pp. 568-665).

- Oct. 26 – Class discussion [framed around 3<sup>rd</sup> reflection paper]**  
Lecture: “Roads, Rails, and Waterways: Why They Mattered”  
Reading assignment: complete Sam Watkins, *Company Aytch*.
- Oct. 28 – Lecture: “Supplying the Troops: Montgomery Meigs and the Logistics of Mass Production”**  
**4<sup>th</sup> REFLECTION PAPER DUE** by 7 pm (covering Sam Watkins’ memoir, *Company Aytch*)
- Nov. 2 – Class discussion of Watkins book and life in the ranks [framed around 4<sup>th</sup> discussion paper]**
- Nov. 4 – Film: Burns, *The Civil War*, Episode 6, “The Valley of the Shadow of Death, 1864”**  
Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 718-806.
- Nov. 9 – Film: Burns, *The Civil War*, Episode 7, “Most Hallowed Ground, 1864”**
- Nov. 11 – Veterans Day holiday / No Class**
- Nov. 16 – Lecture: “Was the Civil War America’s Defining Moment?”**
- Nov. 18 – Film: Burns, *The Civil War*, Episode 8, “War is Hell, 1865”**  
Reading assignment: McPherson, pp. 807-62.
- Nov. 23 – SECOND READING QUIZ** (covering the material since the 1<sup>st</sup> quiz)
- Nov. 25 – Thanksgiving holiday / No Class**
- Nov. 30 – Film: *The Civil War*, Episode 9, “The Better Angels of Our Nature, 1865”**
- Dec. 2 – NO CLASS. FINAL REFLECTION PAPER DUE** by 7 pm (covering the readings and films and asking “Who got it right? The writer [McPherson] or film maker [Ken Burns]?”) This paper should be between 7 and 10 pages in length (double spaced/typed/footnoted). Although the primary comparison should be between McPherson and Burns, feel free to incorporate the views of other writers we read this term.
- Dec. 7 – Class discussion: “Who got it right?” [framed around final reflection paper]**
- Dec. 9 – Reconstruction and its consequences**  
Reading assignment: Alex Keyssar, “Reconstruction,” chapter 17 in *Inventing America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), pp. 485-508.

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