

HS 495/500: Abraham Lincoln
Winter/spring 2011
Tuesdays, 6-9:15 pm
History dept. seminar room, B-272

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This class is all about truth in advertising: we are studying the life and times of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), the sixteenth president of the United States. This is *not* a “core” class – it does not satisfy div. II or any other type of credit in the JCU core curriculum. It satisfies major, minor, elective, or graduate credit. It takes a very in-depth look at Lincoln’s life through biography; scholarly analysis of his life, his work, and the major themes and events of his time period; his own words (speeches and writings); and our own research and conversation.

The value of studying Lincoln’s life in an academic setting is probably self-evident if you are reading this, but it’s worth spelling out anyway. Lincoln’s life is worth studying in its own right because of the momentous events he witnessed and participated in. But his life also merits study as a window into the time period in which he lived – what historians call the Antebellum and Civil War eras of American history. With care, a single life can shed bright light on a time period in interesting and unique ways. In particular, Lincoln’s life helps us understand antebellum politics, social class relations, the sectional conflict, slavery, racism, and emancipation, the course of the Civil War, and even Reconstruction. Lincoln has much to teach us about leadership and statesmanship, and Lincoln’s legacy – what successive generations of Americans (and non-Americans, besides) have made of him tells us much about how the United States has evolved as a nation.

Course requirements:

- Weekly writings (12@50%): Address, in no less than two double-spaced pages of text (or about 600 words if you want to space it another way), the main themes of the materials covered for that calendar week. Do not repeat the narrative of Lincoln’s life and times (this happened, and then this happened, etc.). Instead, focus on the main historical or biographical problems that a focus on Lincoln’s life and times must confront, and assess how the various authors deal with them. For example, how do these authors interpret Lincoln’s religion, his aptitude as a military commander, his leadership, his views on race and slavery, his political evolution, his skill as a writer and speaker? In these essays, be sure to raise questions and criticisms – as well as to praise – the various texts. Read these texts critically, and write about your assessments of their strengths and weaknesses. Don’t worry about your level of expertise about Lincoln and his times. Use all the tools at your disposal – your historical knowledge, your critical faculties, your instincts, and simply your common sense – to assess these sources. These papers are not formal essays. You don’t need footnotes and a bibliography (assuming you stick to

the texts assigned for that week). However, these papers should be written carefully, with attention to style, organization, clarity, spelling, and grammar.

- Research paper (40% total [see breakdown below]): you will write a roughly 3000-word essay (5000 for those in HS 500) essay on some aspect of Lincoln’s life and times (3000 words is roughly 10 double-spaced pages). You may choose from two types of essay: historiographical or research. A historiographical essay examines how scholars have interpreted a particular issue – like Lincoln’s religious views, his racism (or lack of racism), his relationship with his cabinet – and countless others. A research paper is an interpretive essay that uses primary and secondary sources to address an interpretive issue, like those discussed above. It differs from a historiographical essay in being based on primary sources and using secondary sources as a foundation, not as the chief source of evidence. The final paper is due Tuesday, May 10. A preliminary proposal, including a topic description, research plan, and annotated bibliography, is due Feb. 22. A final proposal – with a firm description of the thesis, argument, and contents, and an updated, finalized bibliography, is due March 22. Formal presentations of research will take place May 3 and May 10.
 - 40% total: Proposals (2 @ 5%), final paper (25%), presentation (5%).
- Class participation (10%). Class participation means regular, informed, and engaged verbal exchange with your fellow students and the instructor. It includes quantity but above all quality (see *informed*, above – meaning in particular that participation should be grounded in the week’s texts). Participation includes comments, questions, answers to direct questions, analysis of other peoples’ contributions, and assessments of comments and texts. It does not necessarily include the quantity of participation, particularly if that participation is vapid. And it certainly does *not* mean attendance. One may attend class but not participate, although one *must* attend in order to participate. Participation is crucial to the successful running of this course, which is a seminar – meaning, not a lecture class. It doesn’t work if we sit around looking at each other every week, and it certainly won’t work if everybody looks at me expecting me to break out into a lecture. That’s not going to happen.

Texts (available at the bookstore but easily accessible elsewhere):

Ronald C. White, Jr., *A. Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2010) [abbreviated as *AL* on the calendar].

Douglas L. Wilson, *Lincoln’s Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words* (New York: Vintage, 2006) [abbreviated as *LS* on the calendar].

Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008) [abbreviated as *OL* on the calendar].

Andrew Delbanco, ed., *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Penguin, 2009) [abbreviated as *PAL* on the calendar].

HS 500 only:

Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010) [abbreviated as *TFT* on the calendar].

Note on the texts: Although you will be writing a little every week, and that writing should give us much to talk about, it is a good idea to take brief notes on these texts as you read through them. By *brief*, I have in mind not only abstracts or short summaries of their contents (although that's not a terrible idea), but jotting down the thesis of each text (or piece of text, like a chapter); also, jotting down confusing or unclear statements, noting controversial or doubtful statements by the author, or noting passages about which you would like an explanation, or which you think might stimulate discussion. What I think you ought *not* to do is to take detailed notes of what you read. That would be extremely time-consuming. Also, since we are not taking an exam in this class, the payoff would be very limited. Better to take the kinds of notes that will aid your comprehension and stimulate discussion in the seminar.

Course Calendar

Note: Where page numbers are given, it usually means that a chapter section or a document ends on that page. If a section or document ends on the given page, stop at that point; don't finish the page.

Jan. 18: course introduction & Lincoln's early life and times.
AL, chas. 1-4; *PAL*, pp. 1-9; *LS*, prologue and pp. 19-27.

Jan 25: Lincoln's early political life
AL, chas. 5-6; *PAL*, pp. 9-27; *LS*, pp. 27-34; William E. Gienapp, "Politics Seems to Enter into Everything: Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860," in Steven Maizlish and John Kushma, eds., *Essays on Antebellum American Politics* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M Press, 1982), pp. 14-79 (**handout**).
HS 500: *TFT*, chap. 1

Feb 1: Private life and the pressures of politics to 1849
AL, chas. 7-9; *PAL*, pp. 27-33; *LS*, pp. 34-36; essay #3 in *OL*.
HS 500: *TFT*, chap. 2.

Feb 8 T: Private and public, part II: Law and the Slave Power
AL, chas. 10-11; *PAL*, pp. 33-87; *LS*, pp. 36-41. John Ashworth, "Free Labor, Wage Labor, and Slave Power: Republicanism and the Republican Party in the 1850s," in Melvin Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 128-46 (**handout**).
HS 500: *TFT*, chap. 3.

Feb 15 T: Lincoln and Douglas
AL, chas. 12-13; *PAL*, pp. 87-172.

HS 500: *TFT*, chap. 4.

Feb 22 T: The Republican Party and the election of 1860
AL, chas. 14-15; *PAL*, pp. 173-218. **Proposals due.**
HS 500: *TFT*, pp. 132-144.

Mar 1: Lincoln and the crisis of secession
AL, chas. 16-17; *PAL*, pp. 219-235; *LS*, chap. 3.
HS 500: *TFT*, pp. 144-165.

Mar 8: **Spring Break**

Mar 15: A war president
AL, chas. 18-19; *PAL*, pp. 235-261; *LS*, chap. 4; essay #5 in *OL*.
HS 500; *TFT*, pp. 166-189.

Mar 22: Confronting the realities of civil war
AL, chas. 20-21; *PAL*, pp. 262-299; essays 6 & 7 in *OL*. **Final Proposals due.**
HS 500: *TFT*, pp. 189-205.

Mar 29: Slavery, emancipation, and civil rights
AL, chas. 22-23; *PAL*, pp. 262-299; *LS*, chas. 5, 6, 7; *OL*, essay #2.
HS 500: *TFT*, chap. 7.

Apr 5: A new birth of freedom
AL, chap. 24; *PAL*, pp. 300-323; *LS*, chap. 8; *OL*, essay #1.
HS 500: *TFT*, chap. 8.

Apr 12: Religion and reelection
AL, chap. 25; *PAL*, pp. 330-46; *LS*, chap. 9; *OL*, essay #9.
HS 500: *TFT*, pp. 290-311

Apr 19: Victory, assassination, legacy
AL, chap. 26; *PAL*, pp. 347-59; *LS*, epilogue; *OL*, essay # 11.

HS 500: *TFT*, pp. 311-336.

Apr 26: **No class – Monday classes meet.**

May 3: research presentations.

Tuesday, May 10: final exam period, 6-7:15 pm: research presentations & **papers due.**