

Re-Writing and Re-Fighting the Civil War

English 358:442

New Academic Building East, room 2250

MTWTh 10:30am-12:20

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Office & office hours: by appointment

Class Description

As recent conflicts over Confederate monuments have shown, the American Civil War remains hotly contested over one hundred and fifty years after its conclusion: why did it begin? what did soldiers or politicians on either side fight for? what was the result? who really “won”? If even such fundamental questions as these seem unclear to so many people, it’s because the story of the Civil War has been retold so many times and for so many different reasons that the war itself has become less important than the stories we tell about it.

The Civil War was started by a book – or so we’re told Abraham Lincoln once said of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853). Since before the dust of battle settled up to our present moment, the Civil War has been revisited as a means of debating racial equality, masculinity, government expansion, and economic inequality. Like the war started by a book, these new socio-political battles were spurred on first and foremost by art as well: film, music, painting, monuments, and, especially, literature. Past and present, cause and effect, fact and fiction begin to blur in the face of this complex cultural legacy. This class will explore how and why the Civil War was re-imagined and re-contested from 1860 to the present in order to understand the foundations of the stories we continue to tell about it – and fight over.

Course Goals

1. Rutgers Core Curriculum WCR goal: Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience, and respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, &/or supervisors through successive drafts & revision.
2. To sharpen aesthetic and linguistic interpretive skills, particularly with regard to the use of tropes, construction of pathos, and structure of narrative.
3. To develop a thorough understanding of the complex cultural legacy of the Civil War, how art has largely shaped that legacy, and how it intersects with other issues in American cultural history, such as race, gender, religion, economics, and politics.
4. To explore questions of the relationship between history and narrative, and to press beyond the binary of fact and fiction to better understand the inseparability of events and the stories we tell about them. What makes particular histories amenable to narrative? What makes particular narratives effective for making histories?

There is one final goal in all of my courses: that class members become better people. Life is short; you owe it to yourself and to those around you to make the most of every semester of it.

Schedule

Week	Date	Class	Text
Week 1	7/9	Introduction; the Sentimental War	Sentimental poetry of the war from <i>Words for the Hour</i> : "The Picket-Guard" (65), "Let My People Go" (69), "Battle Hymn of the Republic" (75), "The Stars and Bars" (83) "Wanted – A Man" (89), "Wouldst Thou Have Me Love Thee" (114), "I'm Dying, Comrade" (163); also, from Sakai: "The Dying Confederate's Last Words"
	7/10	Patriotism	Walt Whitman, "Beat! Beat! Drums!" "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim," "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice," and selections from "Song of Myself"; Henry Timrod, "Ethnogenesis," "A Cry to Arms," "Charleston," "The Unknown Dead," and "The Cotton Boll"
	7/11	Northern Nobility	John W. De Forest, <i>Miss Ravenel</i> chapters I-VIII (minus IV)
	7/12	Boredom	John W. De Forest, <i>Miss Ravenel</i> chapters IX-XV (minus XIII)
Week 2	7/16	Romancing the War	John W. De Forest, <i>Miss Ravenel</i> chapters XVI-XXIX (minus XXVII and XXIX)
	7/17	"Great American Novel"?	John W. De Forest, <i>Miss Ravenel</i> chapters XXX-conclusion (minus XXXIII)
	7/18	The War in Prints	Newspapers (from ChroniclingAmerica.loc.gov) and Civil War photography (<i>Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War</i>)
	7/19	Servants or Soldiers	Albery Allson Whitman, conclusion of Not A Man and Yet A Man (1877); Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Colored Soldiers" (1896) and "Dirge for a Soldier" (1903); Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "Words for the Hour" and "To the Cleveland Union Savers"; Thomas Nelson Page, "Marse Chan" (1884); Clyde N. Wilson, Introduction to Marse Chan and Other Stories (1991)
Week 3	7/23	Can the Leopard Change His Spots? Part 1	Albion Tourgee, <i>A Fool's Errand</i> (1879) chapters 6, 21, 24, 41, 43-6
	7/24	Can the Leopard Change His Spots? Part 2	Thomas Dixon, Jr., <i>The Leopard's Spots</i> (1902) chapters 1, 9, 11-12, 16-20, 2.2, 2.20, 3.6-9, 3.14
	7/25	Battle of the Sexes	Loreta Janeta Velazquez, <i>The Woman in Battle</i> (1876) chapters 1-7; selection from Sarah Emma Edmonds, <i>Nurse and Spy in the Union Army</i> (1865)
	7/26	Bitterness	Ambrose Bierce, "Chickamauga," "A Son of the Gods," "The Affair at Coulter's Notch," and "One of the Missing"; Herman Melville, "The Portent," "Shiloh," "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," and "The March into Virginia" from <i>Battle Pieces</i> (1866)
Week 4	7/30	Manhood	Stephen Crane, <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> (1895)
	7/31	Inventing Cinema, Re-Inventing War	D. W. Griffith's <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> (1915) beginning to 1:05:10 (based on the sequel to The Leopard's Spots)

			Optional but recommended: Lincoln's assassination (1:27:40), "united again in common defense" title card (2:44:40), final battle & finale (3:01:00-3:12:40)
	8/1	Hagar's Daughter	Pauline Hopkins, <i>Hagar's Daughter</i> (1902), pg. 3-75
	8/2	The More Things Change...	Pauline Hopkins, <i>Hagar's Daughter</i> (1902), pg. 75-146
Week 5	8/6	The More They Stay the Same	Pauline Hopkins, <i>Hagar's Daughter</i> (1902), pg. 146-284
	8/7	Blockbuster; or, Womanhood	<i>Gone with the Wind</i> (1939), Part 1 (based on the 1936 novel of the same name by Margaret Mitchell) Optional but recommended from Part 2: Scarlet makes good on her promise, the war ends (1:30-10:38), Scarlet and Ashley reunited (15:30-21:00), Scarlet's curtains (24:00-30:50), Old South / New South (34:25-39:45)
	8/8	Satire / Sincerity	Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead" (1964); Ishmael Reed, <i>Flight to Canada</i> (1976) pg. 3-81
	8/9	Taking Liberties	Ishmael Reed, <i>Flight to Canada</i> (1976) pg. 82-conclusion
Week 6	8/13	Detail and Balance	<i>Gods and Generals</i> (2003) (based on the 1996 novel of the same name by Michael Shaara) From Part 1, watch 5:10-14:40, 26:00-27:40, 1:06:30-1:24:00, 1:28:40-1:30:15, 1:46:40-1:52:40 From Part 2, watch 0:00-30:00, 48:20-52:30, 1:37:40-1:40:15
	8/14	Another Side	Suzan-Lori Parks, <i>Father Comes Home from the Wars</i> (2014)
	8/15	Civil War, Continued	Contemporary news and the Confederate monuments debates

Couse Texts

Words for the Hour: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry, ed. Faith Barrett and Christanne Miller – ISBN 978-1558495098

John W. De Forest, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* – ISBN 978-0140437577

Ambrose Bierce, *Civil War Stories* – ISBN 978-0486280387

Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* – ISBN 978-0486264653

Pauline Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins* – ISBN 978-0195063257

Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* – ISBN 978-0684847504

Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the Wars* – ISBN 978-1559365000

Content Notice

Some of the materials we will read and view in this class are graphic; others are deeply offensive, particularly with regard to racism. We are reading and viewing these materials in order to understand how they work, what cultural function they fulfilled, and how they influenced later (even current) depictions – much as we are the rest of the syllabus. Students are expected to analyze and discuss these materials, like any others, attentively and responsibly. See me if you have any further concerns.

Class Policies and Expectations

1. Attendance and attention.
 - Missing 3 classes will lead to failure of the class.
 - Missing ten minutes or more of any class period will count as half an absence.
 - Electronic devices – this includes e-readers, phones, and computers – are not allowed in class unless approved for class purposes.
2. Preparation and participation.
 - It is expected that all class members complete all the assigned readings for each class and prepare to discuss them. This means you should take notes on what you read and think about how each reading bears on our course before coming to class. Because we are squeezing an entire semester course into just a few weeks, the assigned readings for certain days will be rather long: be sure to set aside enough time every day to complete the readings or to accommodate ahead of time if necessary.
 - Because this is a 400-level seminar, participation is a major part of your grade in this class. This is not only because participation demonstrates preparation; it is also because we all benefit more from the seminar when everyone participates thoughtfully in discussion. The success of the class depends on everyone.
 - In discussion, all class members are encouraged to freely speak their ideas pertaining to the material at hand. In doing so, however, all class members are expected to treat each other with the respect and considerateness they deserve.
3. Grading
 - Do not plagiarize. It is easy to catch; I will catch it. The Rutgers Policy on Academic Integrity defines plagiarism as “the use of another person’s words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit” (see http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2014/12/AI_Policy_2013.pdf). Rutgers also prohibits self-plagiarism. Penalties range from failing the course to being suspended from the university. If you are unclear what constitutes plagiarism, it is your responsibility to educate yourself.
 - One point (four percent) will be taken off late papers for each day they are late. Extensions will be granted only if reasonable circumstances are explained in advance.

Assessment

Participation: 45%

Paper thesis & outline: 10% (due by end of penultimate week of class)

Ten-page paper: 45% (due at end of term)

Paper prompt:

As we encounter time and again in this course, it is impossible to separate the events of history from the narratives told about history. History is never neutral: it is always put to some use, and this is achieved through narrative. For this paper, make an argument about a particular narrative about the Civil War – how it worked, the ends to which it was used, what made it effective, and/or how it developed over time – using three of the materials we read/viewed this semester.

[You may not use more than one film in this paper. Proper parenthetical citation is required for all sources directly cited (this includes photos, films, newspapers, etc. as well).]