

HIST 4386: Civil War and Reconstruction

University of Texas at Tyler
Fall 2026; T/R, 2:00-3:20; CAS 257

Instructor: Prof. [Matt Stith](#)
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Office: CAS 127
Office Hours: T/R, 12:30-1:30; Tuesday, 3:30-4:30; Or by appointment.

Course Description:

This course explores the causes, course, and consequences of the American Civil War. We will use social, cultural, political, military, and environmental history to both understand and interpret the era.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate a strong understanding of the causes, course, and consequences of the American Civil War era.
2. Think critically and objectively about the Civil War and its place in American social, cultural, environmental, political, and military history.
3. Develop analytical skills through thinking, speaking, and writing about American history generally and the Civil War era specifically.

Important Note:

I encourage you to meet with me regularly to discuss or clarify lecture, discussion, or reading—or to talk about Civil War history in general. My job (and satisfaction) is as much to work with students on an individual basis as it is to lecture and facilitate discussion. Please keep this in mind throughout the semester.

Required Reading: (Free digital copies available via the links title hyperlinks or on Canvas in PDF)

Secondary Sources:

- Michael C. C. Adams, [Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War](#) (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014)
- Drew Gilpin Faust, [This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War](#) (2023; Vintage, 2008)
- Madeleine C. Forrest, "Occupiers in a Strange Land: A Virginia Community's Wartime Experiences in 1862," in *Hundreds of Little Wars: Community, Conflict, and the Real Civil War*, eds. Schieffler and Stith (Louisiana State University Press, 2025) [Full Text PDF on Canvas]
- G. David Schieffler, "Unwriting the Freedom Narrative in the Trans-Mississippi: The Black Refugee Community at Helena, Arkansas, 1862-1863," in *Hundreds of Little Wars: Community, Conflict, and the Real Civil War*, eds. Schieffler and Stith (Louisiana State University Press, 2025) [Full Text PDF on Canvas]

Primary Sources:

- ["The Declaration of Causes of Seceding States"](#)
- [Alexander Stephens' "Corner Stone" Speech](#)
- Vicki Betts and Randal B. Gilbert, eds., "Personal Experiences of Lindsey Zollars During the Civil War," *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 51 (2021): 29-39. [Full Text PDF on Canvas]

Recommended Reading:

- Michael Fellman, Lesley Gordon, and Daniel E. Sutherland, *This Terrible War: The Civil War and Its Aftermath* [Any Edition]
- Elizabeth R. Varon, *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

Exams (2x100 pts):

There will be two exams. Each is worth 100 points. We will have a brief study session during the class before each exam. Exams will consist of two essays worth equal amounts. The first essay will cover a topic from class lecture/discussion. The second essay will relate directly to one or more of the readings.

Camp Ford Tour (50 pts):

On a Thursday afternoon in November (specific date to be announced as we get a bit closer, weather pending), we will meet at the Camp Ford Historical Site in Tyler for a tour of the place. Please be sure to read Lindsey Zollars' reminiscences before the tour. Your grade will be based on active preparation and participation. [Note: Please meet with me asap if you foresee any issues with transportation or other logistics regarding this trip.]

Conference Paper (100 pts):

Please research and write a 2,500-3,500-word paper about a topic related to the Trans-Mississippi Theater between 1860-1865. The paper should be based on primary source research and framed by relevant secondary sources. This project will 1) give you practice researching and writing, 2) allow you an opportunity to do a deep dive on a specific topic, and 3) provide you with the possibility to present your work at a conference and/or expand it into an article for publication.

Attendance/Participation (50 pts):

At different times throughout the semester, I will ask you to write on a piece of paper something related to class and/or your thoughts on some historical, philosophical, or educational issue. These brief exercises will only take 5-6 minutes. There is no set number of these participation exercises, so you will receive a pass (1) or fail (0) for each one in Canvas. By the end of the semester, I'll apply the appropriate number of points to each such that they equal 50. I will drop your TWO lowest scores.

Classroom Conduct:

Be kind.

Make-up Policy:

I'll work with you on any missed or late assignments.

Grade Grubbing:

Except for legal university accommodations, there will be no special circumstances offered to any *individual* student with respect to increasing their grade (such as extra work, bonus opportunities, or similar requests) beyond what is offered to the *entire* class. This is especially important to remember at the end of the semester. The best way to make the grade you want to make is to do your very best on the work required throughout the semester and to ask for honest help on assignments—not bonus points or favors after all assignments are finished. It is bad practice and unethical to request that professors offer you something that isn't offered to the entire class.

Academic Honesty [*IMPORTANT***]**

Cheating of any kind, including plagiarism, will result in immediate failure of the class and possibly further sanctions from the University of Texas at Tyler. Plagiarism, put simply, is using another's work as your own without proper citation or usage. This includes everything from copying and pasting from the Internet to failing to cite an idea from another source that you put in your own words. Please carefully read the university policy for cheating and academic dishonesty at the following website: <https://www.uttyler.edu/mopp/documents/8-student-conduct-discipline.pdf>

AI is not permitted in this course. All work students submit for this course should be their own. This is college. Do your *own* work without artificial intelligence. The use of ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values and will be treated as cheating (see above).

Point Breakdown:

Exam I:	100 pts
Camp Ford Trip:	50 pts
Exam II:	100 pts
Conference Paper:	100 pts
Participation:	50 pts
Total:	400 pts

Grade Scale

A = 400-360 pts (100-90%)
B = 359-320 pts (89-80%)
C = 319-280 pts (79-70%)
D = 279-240 pts (69-60%)
F = 239-000 pts (59-0%)

Course Schedule (subject to change)

- Part 1 (August 24-October 15)
 - Introductions/Civil War Causation
 - Political Collapse, 1848-1860
 - Southerners Secede and Amateurs Go to War, 1860-1861
 - Discovering the Scope of the War, 1861-1862
 - Attack and Die, 1862-1863

Assignments:

- **Exam I (Thursday, October 15)**
- Part 2 (October 20-December 3)
 - An Inconclusive Year, 1863
 - The Other War
 - A War of Exhaustion, 1864-1865
 - Northern Politics and Southern Reconstruction, 1863-1868
 - Destroying Reconstruction, 1868-1877
 - Remembering and Forgetting the Civil War

Assignments:

- **Conference Paper (11:59pm on Friday, October 30, on Canvas)**
- **Camp Ford Trip (Thursday, Nov. 5, 12, or 19—TBA—2:20-3:00ish)**
- **Exam II (Tuesday, December 8, 2:00-4:00)**