

AMH 4930: The Promise and Challenge of Freedom during Reconstruction

Spring 2025

Prof. David Silkenat

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Class: Thursdays 12:50pm – 3:50 pm. KF 229.

Office Hours: Fridays 11am – 1pm. KF 231.

This class examines the aftermath of the American Civil War, exploring how African Americans in the American South sought to make freedom meaningful. It explores efforts by African Americans to build institutions (political, religious, educational, financial), while facing new and old forms of discrimination and violence. It emphasizes the freedom struggle during Reconstruction at the grassroots level.

This class also explores the craft of historical research and writing. It provides students with a supportive framework to create a work of original scholarship.

Required Books

Kidada E. Williams, *I Saw Death Coming: A History of Terror and Survival in the War against Reconstruction*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2023.

NB: Other readings are available online, on Canvas, or via the UF Libraries.

Assessment

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|-------------------------------|-----|
| Topic Proposal | 5% |
| Secondary Source Bibliography | 5% |
| Historiography | 5% |
| Primary Source Analysis | 5% |
| Prospectus | 5% |
| Introduction | 5% |
| Rough Draft | 5% |
| Presentation | 5% |
| Participation | 20% |
| Final Essay | 40% |

PART I: Making Sense of Reconstruction

During Weeks 1-3, we will examine the historiography and historiography of Reconstruction. Students will develop a general understanding of the major events and historiographical trends in Reconstruction.

January 16: Introductions

- Kate Masur and Gregory P. Downs, “Monumental Effort: Historians and the Creation of the National Monument to Reconstruction,” *Perspectives on History* (2017): <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/monumental-effort-historians-and-the-creation-of-the-national-monument-to-reconstruction-january-2017/>
- Isaac Choitner and Eric Foner, “Learning from the Failure of Reconstruction,” *New Yorker* (January 2021): <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/learning-from-the-failure-of-reconstruction>
- Richard Vaelely, “How About Erecting Monuments to the Heroes of Reconstruction,” *American Prospect* (2017): <https://prospect.org/civil-rights/erecting-monuments-heroes-reconstruction/>

January 23: Introduction to Reconstruction

- Greg Downs and Kate Masur, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1860-1900* (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Interior, 2017), 1-90. <https://www.npshistory.com/publications/nhl/theme-studies/reconstruction-era.pdf>

January 30: The Past and Future of Reconstruction Studies

- R. Blakeslee Gilpin, “Reconstruction: Emancipation and Race,” in *Reconstruction: Interpreting American History*, ed. John David Smith (Kent State University Press, 2016), 91-111. [on Canvas]
- Nicholas Lemann, “Lecture on the History of the History of Reconstruction,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 83 (2021): 27–35.
- Christopher Grasso, “Reconstruction Revisionism Revisited,” *Reviews in American History* 52 (2024): 230-240.
- “Historians’ Forum: Reconstruction” *Civil War History* 61(2015): 281 – 301.
- Luke Harlow, “Forum: The Future of Reconstruction Studies,” <https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-reconstruction-studies/>
- Fitzhugh Brundage, “Reconstruction in the South,” <https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-reconstruction-studies/reconstruction-in-the-south/>
- Elliott West, “Reconstruction in the West” <https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-reconstruction-studies/reconstruction-in-the-west/>

PART II: Sources and Methods

During Weeks 4-9, we will be examining some of the important types of primary sources used for the study of Reconstruction, as well as some examples of how historians have used them. Students will also be submitting short writing assignments building towards their research essay.

Students will be working closely with a Writing Group (WG) to provide feedback on assignment drafts. Drafts should be sent to WG partners via email prior to class.

February 6: WPA interviews and Government Reports

- **Topic Proposal to WG**
- Kidada E. Williams, *I Saw Death Coming: A History of Terror and Survival in the War against Reconstruction* (Bloomsbury, 2023).
- **Primary sources to explore**
 - Government Reports:
 - Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction (1866):
https://www.google.com/books/edition/Report_of_the_Joint_Committee_on_Reconstruction/Jac_AAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1
 - Report on the Memphis Riots and Massacres and Riots (1866): [on Canvas]
 - Report on the New Orleans Riots (1867): [on Canvas]
 - Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States (KKK Report, 1872):
<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/metabook?id=insurrection1872>
 - Louisiana Affairs: Report on Conditions in the South (1875)
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081764296&view=1up&seq=9>
 - WPA Interviews: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>

February 13: Freedmen's Bureau papers and the Freedmen and Southern Society Project

- **Topic Proposal due**
- **Secondary Source Bibliography to WG**
- Secondary sources to read:
 - Reggie L. Pearson, "‘There Are Many Sick, Feeble, and Suffering Freedmen’: The Freedmen's Bureau's Health-Care Activities during Reconstruction in North Carolina, 1865-1868," *North Carolina Historical Review* 79 (2002): 141-181.
 - Edward Valentin, Jr., "Local Knowledge: Black Texans, the Freedmen's Bureau, and Military Occupation in Reconstruction Texas," *Civil War History* 67 (2021): 29-55.
 - Mary Farmer-Kaiser, "‘With a Weight of Circumstances like Millstones about Their Necks’: Freedwomen, Federal Relief, and the Benevolent Guardianship of the Freedmen's Bureau," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 115 (2007): 412-442.
 - "Land and Labor, 1866-7" in *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*, series 3, vol. 2.
- Primary sources to explore:
 - Freedmen's Bureau Papers

- National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau>
- National Museum of African American History: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/freedmens-bureau>
- Freedmen's Bureau: <https://www.freedmensbureau.com/>
- Freedmen's and Southern Society Project
 - Sample documents: <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/sampdocs.htm>
 - Full volumes available at UF Library (most also available as ebooks)

February 20: Newspapers & Periodicals

- **Historiography to WG**
- **Secondary Source bibliography due**
- Secondary sources to read:
 - Richard H. Abbott, "Civil War Origins of the Southern Republican Press," *Civil War History* 43 (1997): 38-58.
 - Mitchell Snay, "Freedom and Progress: The Dilemma of Southern Republican Thought during Radical Reconstruction," *American Nineteenth Century History* 5 (2004): 100-114.
 - Karin Zipf, "'The Whites Shall Rule the Land or Die': Gender, Race, and Class in North Carolina Reconstruction Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 65(1999): 499-534
 - Brent M. S. Campney, "'Light is bursting upon the world!': White Supremacy and Racist Violence against Blacks in Reconstruction Kansas," *Western Historical Quarterly* 41(2010): 171-194.
- Primary sources to explore
 - Chronicling America (Library of Congress): <https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/dynamic-list-of-titles/>
 - Florida Digital Newspaper Library: <https://newspapers.uflib.ufl.edu/>
 - Alabama Newspapers from Civil War and Reconstruction: <https://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/cwnp>
 - Georgia Historic Newspapers: <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>
 - North Carolina Newspapers: <https://www.digitalnc.org/newspapers/>
 - Texas Digital Newspapers: <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/TDNP/>
 - Historic Newspapers of South Carolina: <https://historicnewspapers.sc.edu/>
 - Catalog of Digital Historical Newspapers: <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/collections/hnccoll>
 - Proquest *New York Times*: <https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/news/fromDatabasesLayer?accountid=10920>
 - Accessible Archives: <https://history-commons-net.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/search/?i=collections>
 - Gale Nineteenth Century Newspapers: <https://go-gale-com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/ps/start.do?p=NCNP&u=gain40375>
 - *Harpers Weekly*: <https://harp-alexanderstreet-com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/>
 - Documenting the American South: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/>

February 27: Manuscripts

- **Primary Source Analysis to WG**
- **Historiography due**

- Visit to UF archives 2:50 – 3:50
- Secondary sources to read:
 - Brad Proctor, “The K.K. Alphabet’: Secret Communication and Coordination of Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan in the Carolinas,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8 (2018): 455-487.
 - Mark Leon DeVries, “Between Equal Justice and Racial Terror: Freedpeople and the District Court of DeSoto Parish during Reconstruction,” *Louisiana History* 56 (2015): 261-293.
 - Samuel B. McGuire, “The Making of a Black Militia Company: New Bern Troops in the Kirk-Holden War, 1870,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 91 (2014): 288-322.
- Primary sources to explore: The links below are only a small sample of the relevant archival collections. Many universities, museums & historical societies, and state archives in the South has significant collections related to Reconstruction. Only a small percentage of these collections have been digitized, but those that have amount to millions of pages of documents.
 - Virginia Memory: https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/collections_by_topic
 - Texas Digital Archive: <https://tsl.access.preservica.com/>
 - North Carolina Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/>
 - Southern Historical Collection, UNC: <https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/archivalhome/collection/00ddd>
 - South Carolina Digital Library: <https://scmemory.org/>
 - Digital Library of Georgia: <https://dlg.usg.edu/>
 - East Carolina Digital Collections: <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/>
 - University of Florida Digital Collections: <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/>
 - Duke University Digital Collections: <https://repository.duke.edu/dc>
 - University of Alabama Special Collections: <https://digitalcollections.libraries.ua.edu/digital/>
 - Portal to Texas History: <https://texashistory.unt.edu/>
 - Louisiana Digital Library: <https://www.louisianadigitallibrary.org/>
 - Florida Memory: <https://www.floridamemory.com/>

March 6: Census and Pension Records

- **Prospectus to WG**
- **Primary Source Analysis due**
- Secondary sources to read
 - Richard Lowe, “Local Black Leaders during Reconstruction in Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 103 (1995): 181-206.
 - W.J. Meggison, “Panorama of Black Families in Freedom,” in *African American Life in South Carolina’s Upper Piedmont* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2022), 230-248.
 - Elna C. Green, “Protecting Confederate Soldiers and Mothers: Pensions, Gender, and the Welfare State in the U.S. South, a Case Study from Florida,” *Journal of Social History* 39 (2006): 1079-1104.
 - Brandi Brimmer, “Black Women’s Politics, Narratives of Sexual Immorality, and Pension Bureaucracy in Mary Lee’s North Carolina Neighborhood,” *Journal of Southern History* 80 (2014): 827–58.
- Primary Sources to explore
 - 1870 Census <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1438024>

- North Carolina Confederate pension records: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/spotlights/confederate-pension-applications>
- Federal Pensions: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/300020>

March 13: Alternative Sources and Methods

- **Prospectus due**
- **Introduction to WG**
- Secondary sources to read:
 - Gregory P. Downs and Scott Nesbit, “Zones of Occupation, Zones of Access: Digital History and the Spatial World of Emancipation,” *Southern Quarterly* 59 (2020): 26-40.
 - Frances Osborn Robb, “‘Two Men in Ku Klux Klan Disguises’: A Photograph from Reconstruction Alabama,” *Alabama Review* 70 (2017): 222-246
 - Campbell F. Scribner, “Surveying the Destruction of African American Schoolhouses in the South, 1864–1876,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 10 (2020): 469-494
- Primary sources to explore:
 - Mapping Occupation: <https://www.mappingoccupation.org/>
 - Alfred Waud drawings of African Americans: <https://www.loc.gov/search/?fa=contributor:ward,+alfred+r.+%28alfred+rudolph%29%7Csubject:african+americans>
 - Reconstruction images from LOC: <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/reconstruction/>
 - Thomas Nast Cartoons: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/reconstruction-thomas-nasts-political-cartoons/>

SPRING BREAK

PART III: Writing & Sharing

March 27: NO CLASS RESEARCH/WRITING TIME

- **Introduction due**

April 3: Editing Rough Drafts

- **Rough Draft to WG**

April 10: Presentations

- **Abstract to WG**
- **Rough Draft due**

April 17: Presentations

- **Abstract due**

Final Draft due April 24.

Assignments

Students should refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style* for all questions of style, citations, and formatting: <https://www-chicagomanualofstyle-org.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/book/ed17/frontmatter/toc.html>

Topic Proposal. No more than 500 words. The Topic Proposal should clearly define your topic (chronologically, thematically, geographically, etc.) and explain its significance.

Secondary Source Bibliography. A properly formatted list of 7 to 10 secondary sources. Assessed based on the quality of the sources, their relevance to your project, and the accuracy of the citation.

Historiography. No more than 500 words. Put your project into historiographic context. Explain how other historians have approached your topic and how your essay will build/contrast/expand on that scholarship.

Primary Source Analysis. No more than 500 words. Describe the foundational primary sources you will rely upon in your essay. Assess their strengths and weakness and the methods you will use to employ them.

Prospectus. No more than 1000 words. The Prospectus should explain the essay's argument, historiographic context, use of primary sources, and briefly explain its structure. The Prospectus will also include a title for the essay.

The Prospectus may incorporate elements from the Topic Proposal, the Historiography, and the Primary Source Analysis.

Introduction. No more than 1,000 words. Your introduction should articulate a clear thesis and provide the reader with an enticing reason to keep reading.

Rough Draft. The rough draft should follow all of the requirements for the Final Essay. See below.

Presentation. You will provide a brief (5-8 minute) summary of your project, explaining its findings and larger significance. 5 minutes of Q&A will follow from your classmates.

Participation. Students are expected to come to class having done the assigned reading and prepared to engage in a vigorous discussion on their contents. Quality of your contributions is as important as their quantity. Please visit office hours if you feel that your contributions in class do not reflect your engagement with the course materials.

Final Essay. No more than 5,000 words (not including bibliography). Your final essay should have an attractive title, a clear and enticing introduction, a well-structured argument, and a full accounting of the evidence and the extant scholarship. You should include a full bibliography.

The final essay will be assessed based on its originality, the depth of the research, its engagement with the historiography, and the quality of the prose and citations. It can incorporate materials from earlier assignments.

Course and University Policies

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester: <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>

Students are expected to attend class and submit assignments on or before the due date. However, I recognize that life often intervenes, and I would rather see your best work rather than something rushed or incomplete. If you cannot submit an assignment on time, please email me in advance so we can come up with an appropriate solution. Submitting late assignments will obviously delay the feedback process.

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code of the University of Florida: <https://policy.ufl.edu/regulation/4-040/>

Grades will be assigned according to UF grading policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> . Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.