

History 09700
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Note to Pre-Registered and Prospective Students:

The syllabus for the course follows this sheet. The class cannot exceed 20 persons. It is for first-year students only. Priority for enrollment will go to students who are pre-registered and show up to class on the first day (Sept. 3). Students who do not show up on the first day will lose their spot in the class and be put on the waiting list. Students who have not pre-registered may be able to get into the class if they do the following:

- 1) Show up on the first day of class**
- 2) Email to me by Thursday, Sept. 4, at 5pm a statement of their personal and intellectual interests and why they are interested in taking the course. The email should include your BANNER number (I'll need this to "override" you into the course if you are admitted)**

By Friday, Sept. 5, at noon, I will email students who have been admitted to the course from the waitlist. Students will have 24 hours to register for the course (i.e. by Saturday, Sept. 6, at noon). If there are still spots open in the class after this first wave of admission from the waitlist, I will admit more students and give them 24 hours to register for the course.

History 0970

Fall 2014, Wed. 3-5:20

Location: Watson Inst. 116

Office Hours: Mon. 2:15-4:30, and by appt.

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Description

This seminar uses the life, legacy, and myth of Abraham Lincoln to explore some central themes in American history, such as the frontier in the new republic, the nature of political leadership, early law and legal culture, and the emergence of sectionalism, slavery, antislavery, and Civil War. Sources are drawn from Lincoln's works, the writings of his contemporaries, and modern non-fiction, fiction, and film. Although the immediate subject of the course is Abraham Lincoln, we also examine two larger, interconnected themes: 1) the relationship between memory and history, a crucial topic in the subject of any legendary figure such as Lincoln; and 2) the function of history in modern society. The seminar seeks especially to make students aware of unique sources in the newly renovated John Hay Library, one of the top repositories of Lincoln materials in the world. The course does not have prerequisites and does not presuppose special knowledge of American history.

This is very much a student-directed course. Although I will moderate discussions and help students identify and execute projects, discussions will often consist of students sharing their individual findings with one another and trying to make sense of the work as a group.

Requirements

The requirements of the course are active, informed participation in class discussions and successful, punctual completion of assignments. Most weeks a short, ungraded "reaction paper" (actually an email) will be due the morning of class—sent to me to help frame discussions. In addition there will be two formal assignments: a short paper (5-6 pages) due by Oct. 15 at 9am (sent as attachment to email to professor); and a final project due Dec. 15. The final project can take any of a number of forms: a research paper; a piece of artwork or fiction; a website; a performance; a teaching tool for students at the elementary, high school, or college level; etc.

Students are expected to attend all class meetings. An unexcused absence from one class will drop a student's participation grade by 5%. Unexcused absences from two classes will drop a student's final grade by one full grade. An absence is excused only if written, legitimate notice is provided.

There are **no extensions on papers or projects except with written excuse attesting to an emergency**. A late paper or project will be graded down one half grade per day late (e.g., a B becomes a B- if turned in one day late). **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS POLICY.**

Grading

Regular participation: 35%

Short paper: 25%

Final project: 40%

Books

The following books are required for the course and are on sale at the Brown Bookstore. In addition to the books, various articles or book chapters have been assigned; these are available through OCRA, the online reserve system at Brown. All books for the course are on reserve at Rockefeller Library.

Abraham Lincoln, Selected Speeches and Writings (Paperback One-Volume Library of America Edition)

David Herbert Donald, Lincoln

Richard Slotkin, Abe

Oct. 1 Lincoln the Lawyer (continued)

Viewing: “Young Mr. Lincoln” (available to view on computer through OCRA)

Student Assignment: In Democracy in America (1833), Alexis de Tocqueville, a French commentator who had visited extensively in the U.S., wrote the following:

The more we reflect upon all that occurs in the United States the more we shall be persuaded that the [American] lawyers, as a body, form the most powerful, if not the only, counterpoise to the democratic element. In that country we easily perceive how the legal profession is qualified by its attributes, and even by its faults, to neutralize the vices inherent in popular government. When the American people are intoxicated by passion or carried away by the impetuosity of their ideas, they are checked and stopped by the almost invisible influence of their legal counselors. These secretly oppose their aristocratic propensities to the nation's democratic instincts, their superstitious attachment to what is old to its love of novelty, their narrow views to its immense designs, and their habitual procrastination to its ardent impatience.

Based on what you've read and watched this week about Lincoln, do you think de Tocqueville's assessment was accurate for Lincoln's time? Do you think it is accurate for our time? Email me a paragraph reacting to these questions by 9am on the day of class.

Oct. 8 Lincoln the Politician

Donald, Lincoln, chaps. 7-10

Abraham Lincoln, Selected Speeches and Writings, “Lyceum Speech” (pages 31-21), all documents pages 49-65, 91-99, 117-140, “Cooper Union Speech” (240-252), “First Inaugural Address” (pages 284-293)

Viewing: “Abe Lincoln in Illinois” (available to view on computer through OCRA)

Student Assignment: So often in today's society a political leader is maligned as “only a politician” or as someone who “gives speeches but doesn't really do anything.” As you think about Lincoln as a speech-giver and politician, what is your verdict: Can a good speech make a real difference in a society? Or is its effect, if any, short-lived and superficial? You might remember that this question was very much in the news in relation to the candidacy of Barack Obama in 2008. Email me your thoughts on this issue by 9am on the day of class. If you want to make the case that speeches can make a difference, mention a speech by Lincoln in this week's reading that you found particularly moving and one speech in the modern era that you believe made a major impact. If you want to make the case that speeches don't make much of a difference, offer an answer to the question of what **does** make a difference?

Oct. 15 Lincoln and the Word [5-6 page paper due today by 9am by email]

Reading and Student Assignment: This week you will work with the online works of Abraham Lincoln at the website: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/> The entire collection is searchable. Choose the Simple Searches option and try a few different searches for a single word, but don't choose obvious ones or big topics (e.g. not slave, Union, Confederacy, Civil War, etc.). The ideal word will yield a manageable set of documents that suggests something interesting about the way the word was used by Lincoln. Your written assignment for this week is a 5-6 page paper that describes and analyzes your findings. Your paper will necessarily be suggestive, not conclusive. It will offer one or more arguments about what your search might tell us about Lincoln and/or his times. Class this week will consist of students sharing their findings with one another.

Oct. 22 The Promise and Perils of Biography

Reading: David Herbert Donald, Lincoln, chaps. 11-end
 *Eric Foner, Review of Lincoln, from the Nation; *Eric Foner, This Fiery Trial, Preface

Student Assignment: Do you agree with the assessments that Eric Foner made of David Herbert Donald's biography? Why or why not? Foner obviously thought there was room for at least one more biography of Lincoln to be done, as he wrote one himself (*This Fiery Trial*, which won most of the major prizes given to history books). Assuming no further important sources relating to Lincoln's life and times were discovered between the publication of Donald's book and Foner's (this assumption, by the way, is for the most part correct), was a new biography really needed? Send your thoughts on these questions to me by email by 9am on the day of class.

Oct. 29 Lincoln and Visual Culture

Reading: *Harold Holzer, "Visualizing Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln as Student, Subject, and Patron of the Visual Arts," in Eric Foner, ed., Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World
 *Elizabeth Young, "Lincoln and the Civil War in Twenty-First-Century Photography," in Thomas J. Brown, Remixing the Civil War: Meditations on the Sesquicentennial

Student Assignment: Use Google Images to identify an image of Lincoln that you find unusual, provocative, and/or relevant to one or more of your personal interests. By 9am on the day of class, email to me a URL where I can find this image on the web, as well as a paragraph in which you describe what you find compelling about the image.

NOTE: Class this week will meet in the Hay Library and examine some of the art and material culture relating to Abraham Lincoln held in the Hay Collections. We will also be introduced to the voluminous Lincoln Newspaper Clippings files held by the Hay.

Nov. 5 Lincoln and the Meanings of America

Reading: Selected documents from Lincoln, Selected Speeches and Writings. (Selections to be announced: they will include mostly wartime documents, chosen in part because of their connection to students' interests and students' final projects.)

Student Assignments (there are two this week): **1)** Choose a file or topic in the Lincoln Newspaper Clippings files held by the Hay Library, read through the documents in the file(s) (some documents can be skimmed, others studied closely, depending on your interests and determination of the value of the documents), and report on your findings to me by an email sent to me by 9am the day of class. The file(s) or topic you choose should relate to your final project. **2)** In the same email you send to me by 9am on class day, include the author and title of one book (secondary source) that you would like to read or know that you have to read for your final project.

Nov. 12 Reading Deeper into Lincoln as History

Reading: Every student reads the book (secondary source) that he or she identified as part of the assignment for the week of Nov. 5. In addition, all students will read a selection of Lincoln documents from Lincoln, Selected Speeches and Writings. The documents to be read will be announced well in advance and will be selected by the students in the class based on their specific interests.

Student Assignment: Email to me by 9am class day a preliminary title and short description of your final project.

Nov. 19 Reading Deeper into Lincoln as Culture

Reading: Every student will read or view a set of “texts” (could be historical, fictional, artwork, film, etc.) made available at the course website on Canvas. The specific “texts” are to be determined through consultation of the professor with class members; the “texts” will relate to students’ final projects.

Student Assignment: Email to me by 9am a preliminary bibliography for your final project as well as a plan of action for completing the project.

Nov. 26 NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break

Dec. 3 Imagining Lincoln Today

Viewing: “Lincoln” (2012 film directed by Steven Spielberg)

Reading: *Michael Vorenberg, “Spielberg’s Lincoln: The Great Emancipator Returns,”
Journal of the Civil War Era, 3 (Dec. 2013)

Student Assignment: Using YouTube, find one video representation of Lincoln produced in the last twenty years that for some reason you find compelling (could be a full film, a piece of a film, a television commercial, a reenactment, a piece of humor, etc.). By 9am send to me the URL for the piece and a few sentences on why this piece caught your attention or was of interest to you.

Dec. 4-8 Individual meetings with students regarding the final project

Dec. 15 Final Projects Completed