



African-Americans: The Civil War and Aftermath

The role and status of Americans of African descent have been major aspects of the culture and politics of the United States since the nation's inception. It was THE major issue in the conflict that led to the American Civil War and throughout the war. The war resolved some issues related to slavery, but left most issues related to the role and status of African-Americans unresolved, creating the cultural and political structures that continue to define much of American society and politics. This course offers a series of presentations by different individuals on topics that are intended to broaden our understanding of historical events in this pivotal period in our history. Presentations address topics ranging from Afro-American resistance to slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction "Jim Crow" practices, and the struggle for civil rights during the 20th century. **Gardner Shaw** is a former high school history teacher, professor of political science, consultant to government and industrial organizations, and taxi driver. He is an active member of the Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain Civil War Round Table.

This four-week course was created for Midcoast Senior College (<https://www.midcoastseniorcollege.org>) in Fall 2020. All parties including students, guest speakers and Gardner Shaw have given MSC permission to share it publicly.

Class 1: Why Civil War? ***Guest Speaker: Patrick Rael***

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/477423156>

From 1777 to 1888, slavery died in the Western Hemisphere, a casualty of transformations in both human sentiment and the economy. Among these instances of Atlantic abolition, the US experience of stands out: in no other society did ending slavery require a massive war that cost nearly a million lives, and billions in capital. This session explores the factors that made ending slavery so hard, and so bloody, here. **Patrick Rael** (Ph.D. American History, University of California, Berkeley, 1995) is Professor of History at Bowdoin College. He is the author of several works exploring the role African Americans played in the long struggle against slavery.

Class 2: African Americans in the U.S. Colored Troops

Guest Speaker: Noma Petroff

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/480023869>

A 1920s biographer states a common sentiment of the time, “The American Negroes are the only people in the history of the world... that ever became free without any effort of their own... They twanged banjos around the railroad stations, sang melodious spirituals, and believed that some Yankee would soon come along and give each of them forty acres of land and a mule.” In fact, about 180,000 black men served in the Union armies, taking part in 449 engagements, 39 of them major. We'll examine the struggle to arm the blacks to fight for Union and liberty. We'll find out how their fighting at Fort Pillow, at Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, Fort Wagner, Petersburg's Dimmock Line, Olustee and elsewhere, shaped their prospects for democratic participation after the war. We'll learn how a school to train U.S.C.T. (U.S. Colored Troops) officers became the grandfather of the Officer Candidate School. **Noma Petroff** is an independent scholar, winner of the Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain Civil War Round Table's Warren Randall award, and a member of the Ulysses S. Grant Association. She served for several years as Department Coordinator for the Africana Studies Program at Bowdoin College. Her current work is: *Understanding Ulysses S. Grant: Character, Context and Stories*, which includes an examination of Grant's work with African American troops during the Civil War.

Class 3: African-American Politics and White Violence in the Era of Reconstruction

Guest Speaker: Ashley Towle

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/483203511>

This presentation will investigate the aftermath of the Civil War on the lives of African Americans. Historians have argued that the era of citizenship and suffrage. Reconstruction, however, was also a violent and tumultuous era for newly freed slaves, as white Southerners attempted to reestablish the antebellum status quo by any means possible. This presentation will examine the remarkable strides African Americans made during this time period, and the violent responses white Southerners undertook to curb these advances. **Ashley Towle** is a lecturer in the History Department at the University of Southern Maine. She received her PhD from the University of Maryland where she worked as a graduate assistant at the Freedmen and Southern Society Project. Her scholarship focuses on the experience of African Americans in the South during the transition from slavery to freedom. She is currently at work on a book that examines African-American mortuary culture in the Reconstruction South

Class 4: The Black Freedom Movement, 1945-1975: The Southern Story

Guest Speaker: Chris Myers Asch

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/485645477>

We will discuss the post-World War II Black freedom struggle, focusing on the local movements that emerged to dismantle the legal structure of white supremacy in the South. We will explore the extraordinary achievements of the era while also assessing how and why racial inequality remained embedded in Southern society long after the end of legal segregation. **Chris Myers Asch** teaches history at Colby College and runs the Capital Area New Mainers Project in Augusta. He is the author most recently of *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital*.

Supplemental Reading Suggestions

- Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865* (University of Georgia Press, 2015)
- Ed Ayers, *Promise of the New South* (Oxford University Press, 1993)
- Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1999)
- C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford University Press, 1955)
- Brian J. Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the County of Kings: The Congress of Racial Equality in Brooklyn* (University Press of Kentucky, 2013)
- Brian J. Purnell, co-editor (with Jeanne Theoharis) of *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle Outside of the South*.
- Movie: *Glory*, Edward Zwick director, 19