

Understanding Lincoln

Online Graduate Course with Professor Matthew Pinsker, Dickinson College

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Nobody would have appreciated the power of open online education more than Abraham Lincoln, one of the great self-made, lifelong learners in world history. This open online graduate history course aspires to create the kind of course that Lincoln would have appreciated. Just about 150 years ago, President Lincoln explained at Gettysburg how he believed that the Civil War would establish what he termed “a new birth of freedom” for the United States. During our sessions in 2013 (July 23-Nov. 19), Professor Matthew Pinsker will use this anniversary moment to share the latest historical insights about Lincoln as well as to introduce participants to a number of cutting-edge digital resources for the study and teaching of Lincoln’s legacy. The course will be organized around five popular designations that have been applied to the great president over the years (Railsplitter, Honest Abe, Father Abraham, Great Emancipator, and Savior of the Union) and will dig deeper into each of these themes in order to help explore their origins and assess their validity. In the process, participants will come to better understand Lincoln as man and president, and will also enjoy a unique online platform to share their own insights.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

Crowd-sourcing is a phrase used to describe how individuals can help develop online projects by contributing content to them remotely. Through the “Understanding Lincoln” course, we will attempt an experiment in what might be called “class-sourcing.” Participants in this course will have the opportunity to develop various types of content that will be published online as part of a forthcoming multi-media edition of Lincoln’s selected writings. The very best work by course participants will then be featured during a Livestreaming field trip to Gettysburg on November 19, 2013 – the date which marks the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address. We will webcast that day from the historic Wills House where Lincoln slept the night before delivering his famous remarks. Three seminar participants whose work has been judged the best in the course will then be invited to participate in the November 19 events at no cost to themselves –with travel and lodging costs paid for by the course sponsors.

COURSE READINGS

All readings for this course will be freely available online. Beyond intensive readings of Lincoln’s own letters, speeches and personal documents, participants will also have assigned essays and articles to read from leading historians such as David Blight, Michael Burlingame, Eric Foner, Mark Neely, James Oakes, and Sean Wilentz.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Graded assignments for this course will include various types of online discussion and written participation as well as a series of short writing assignments, including blogging. The culmination of the course will involve the production of a major multi-media teaching project with an accompanying research paper that describes the project’s pedagogical intentions. The final multi-media projects will employ at least one of the digital tools introduced during the course utilized in a way that helps teach Lincoln’s legacy in a creative fashion by presenting various documents and writings from his contemporaries.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Dates and times for particular course sessions remain subject to change, but here is a tentative list of key course events:

Friday, July 19	Registration closes
Tuesday, July 23	Seminar Introduction (7-9pm EST)
Thursday, August 1	Discussion section (7-9pm EST)
Wednesday, August 7	Seminar – Lincoln the Railsplitter (7-9pm EST)
Wednesday, August 14	Seminar – Honest Abe (7-9pm EST)
Wednesday, August 21	Discussion section (7-9pm EST)
Wednesday, August 28	Seminar – Father Abraham (7-9pm EST)
Tuesday, September 3	Seminar – Great Emancipator (7-9pm EST)
Tuesday, September 10	Seminar – Savior of the Union (7-9pm EST)
Tuesday, October 15	Final multimedia projects due (graduate course participants only)
Tuesday, November 19	Virtual Field trip – Gettysburg Address with special participant presentations (Time TBA)
Sunday, December 15	Final grades posted (graduate course participants only)

This course is presented jointly by Dickinson College and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

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