

AMS 3607: American Characters: Lincoln

ISS 3444: Major Figures of PPEL: Lincoln

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- Term: Spring 2026
- 100% In-Person, 28 residential students
- MWF 3.00-3.50 pm
- Location CSE 429
- 3 Credits

Instructor

- Instructor: Dr Allen C. Guelzo
- Location: CSE 536
- Office hours: MWF 11.30-1.15
- Phone: 352-273-3040
- Email: aguelzo@ufl.edu

If you need to schedule an appointment outside of office hours, kindly email the course instructor.

Course Description

This multidisciplinary rotating topics course considers major American figures or groups from the colonial era to the present. Courses will focus on one major figure or set of figures such as founders, Puritans, leaders and their roles in American historical, cultural, political, economic and social life.

Variable Topic

This course explores the political culture that is identified with Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States. We will use Lincoln as a means of understanding how the practical necessities of politics in the American democracy were combined with an appeal to democratic political culture, from political philosophy to the *b'hoys* of the Bowery. The most important aspect of the course will be a direct encounter with Lincoln's own writings, so that by the close of course, you will have come to a practical and thorough knowledge of Lincoln's ideas and the cultural environment from which he emerged. The issues to be examined include grass-roots politics in the 19th-century republic, the international context of liberal democracy in the 19th century, the social meaning of the Whig Party, gender and race as contrasted by

Whigs, Republicans and Democrats in the American 19th century, and the war powers of the presidency – many of which have immediate relevance to questions about the presidency today. The modern-day presidential cabinet is very much the institution which Lincoln re-modeled it into, and almost all of what we have debated publicly since 2001 as the “war powers” of the president has been shaped by the decisions Lincoln made during the Civil War.

Required Readings and Works

1. Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858: Speeches, Letters and Miscellaneous Writings – The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989)
2. Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865: Speeches, Letters and Miscellaneous Writings, Presidential Message and Proclamations*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Library of America, 1989)
3. Mark E. Steiner, *An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln* (DeKalb, IL, 2006)
4. Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln* (Dallas, TX, 2001)
5. Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Materials and Supplies Fees: N/A

Note on Recommended readings: These are readings listed in the syllabus, along with the required reading assignments, which are not required but which will shed further light on the subject at hand. These are listed in the syllabus and are generally available on the Web through the provided links. If a particular link proves broken, please inform me at once.

Course Objectives

1. Evaluate the extent to which Abraham Lincoln shaped American politics
2. Identify, describe, and explain key concepts in the life of Lincoln, including political economy, political culture, and the war powers of the American presidency
3. Analyze primary documents by Lincoln and develop an understanding of their long-term impact on American political ideas
4. Develop and articulate in writing clear and effective responses to the central questions raised by the life and writings of Abraham Lincoln

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

1. Active Participation and Attendance: 20%

- a. **Participation: 10%** An exemplary participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class; consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion; and listens considerately to other discussants. See participation rubric below.
- b. **Class Attendance: 10%** On-time class attendance is required for this component of the course grade. You may have two unexcused absences without any penalty. Starting with the third unexcused absence, each unexcused absence reduces your attendance grade by 2/3: an A– becomes a B, and so on. Except for absence because of religious holiday observance, documentation is may be required for excused absences, per [university policy](#).

2. Short Paper: 10%

This short paper (due week 7) will be a 1000-word analytical essay that will focus on one text in the course that will be available in the Fehrenbacher Lincoln anthologies. In three paragraphs, students will place the text in its historical and intellectual context and analyze and explain its meaning and its consequences for the United States of America in the 1850s and 1860s. The instructor will evaluate and provide written feedback on the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization. Students may want to access the university's [Writing Studio](#). An additional writing guide website can be found at [Purdue OWL](#). See Writing Assessment Rubric on syllabus, below.

3. Mid-Term Exam: 20%

An objective exam (multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, matching quotations, short-answer essay).

4. Reading Quizzes: 10%

Reading quizzes may be administered at the start of class on Fridays, at given times throughout the semester. Reading quizzes will test the student's knowledge of the week's readings, and will contain short-answer and/or multiple-choice questions.

5. Final Paper: 20%

The end-of-term paper (due week 15) will be a 3,000-wd essay based on your own essay question, which has been agreed upon with the professor. A list of possible topics will be provided on Canvas. The professor will evaluate and

provide written feedback, on all the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization. Students may want to access the university's [Writing Studio](#). An additional writing guide website can be found at [Purdue OWL](#).

6. Final Exam: 20% An objective exam (multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, matching quotations, short-answer essay).

III. Weekly Schedule

WEEK 1 (JANUARY 12/14/16): CLASS INTRODUCTION: LEARNING ABOUT LINCOLN

The first week serves as an introduction to the course. In order to fully appreciate the character and contribution of Abraham Lincoln, we need to understand the scope of the vast literature on Lincoln and ask why he looms so large in the American imagination even today. He is, after all, the only other president after Washington with a major memorial on the National Mall in Washington, DC.

Readings (24 pages):

1. Guelzo, *Lincoln*, 1-23.

WEEK 2 (JANUARY 21/23): DOES LINCOLN STILL BELONG TO THE AGES?

This week considers the reputation of Lincoln in popular culture, and begins to ask about the cultural and political environment into which he was born in 1809.

Readings (19 pages):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 28-36
2. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, 106-108, 160-167

Recommended Readings:

- Josiah Gilbert Holland, *Eulogy on Abraham Lincoln: pronounced at the City Hall, Springfield, Mass.* (Springfield, 1865), 1-18 [online at Google Books]
- Lerone Bennett, "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist" *Ebony* 23 (February 1968), 35-42 [online at Google Books]
- Lerone Bennett, "Reluctant Emancipator" in Brian Lamb, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: Great American Historians on Our Sixteenth President* (New York, 2008), 200-208 [online at Google Books]
- Melvin E. Bradford, "Against Lincoln: An Address at Gettysburg," in Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *The Historian's Lincoln: Pseudohistory, Psychohistory, and History* (Urbana, IL, 1988), 107-115 [online at Google Books]
- George Frederickson, "A Man But Not A Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (February 1975), 39-58 [online at www.jstor.org]
- Ralph Lerner, "Lincoln's Revolution," in *Revolutions Revisited: Two Faces of the Politics of Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), 88-111 [online at Google Books]
- Don E. Fehrenbacher, "Only His Stepchildren," in *Lincoln in Text and Context* (Stanford, CA, 1987), 95-112 [online at Google Books]

WEEK 3 (JANUARY 26/28/30): LINCOLN AS A MAN OF IDEAS

Although Lincoln was best known as a politician, and had only the most rudimentary formal schooling, he was a voracious reader and absorbed much more of the philosophical, literary and scientific culture of the 19th century. From the tell-tale references provided in his writings and those who knew him, we will learn about Lincoln's roots in the 18th century Enlightenment (as opposed to the 19th-century Romantic rebellion against the Enlightenment).

Readings (74 pages):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings*, 1832-1858, 222-224, 259-272
2. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings*, 1859-1865, 3-11, 209-210, 213-214, 493, 532-533, 589-591
3. Guelzo, *Lincoln*, 24-37
4. Steiner, *An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln*, 26-54

Recommended Readings:

- Robert Bray, "What Abraham Lincoln Read—An Evaluative and Annotated List," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* (Summer 2007) [online at www.historycooperative.org/journals/jala/28.2/bray.html]
- Noah Brooks, "Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (July 1865), 222-230 [online at <http://dlxs2.library.cornell.edu/h/harp/harp.1865.html>]
- William Henry Herndon & Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life* (Chicago, 1890), volume three, 423-446, 528-536 [online at Google Books]

WEEK 4 (FEBRUARY 2/4/6): LINCOLN AND MAMMON

We do not often imagine Lincoln as an economic thinker, but in fact, the structure of the American economy was at the center of all his political concerns, including those involving slavery. This week we will unpack the economic assumptions that shaped Lincoln and its connections to the “free labor” ideology.

Readings (150 pages):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 1-6, 9-17, 44-65, 149-158, 187-198, 224-225, 256-257
2. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, 90-101, 132-150, 203-204, 624
3. Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 42-85, 121-131, 156-171, 186-230

Recommended Readings:

- Robert D. Hormats, “Abraham Lincoln and the Global Economy,” *Harvard Business Review* (August 20093) – [online at <https://hbr.org/2003/08/abraham-lincoln-and-the-global-economy>]
- Allen C. Guelzo, “Lincolnomics: The Economic Mind and Policies of Abraham Lincoln,” *City Journal* (Spring 2021) – [online at <https://www.city-journal.org/article/lincolnomics>]

WEEKS 5 & 6 (FEBRUARY 9/16/18/20): LINCOLN AND THE LAW

Lincoln turned to the law after failing, twice, in small-town business. By contrast, he was very successful as a lawyer. What did the profession of law symbolize in 19th-century America, and what kind of law practice did Lincoln develop?

Readings (164 pages over two weeks):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 245-246, 388-403, 404-411
2. Guelzo, *Lincoln*, 38-55
3. Steiner, *An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln*, 55-177

Recommended Readings:

- Roger D. Billings, "Abraham Lincoln and the Duty of Zealous Representation: The Matson Slave Case," *Connecticut Public Interest Law Journal* 14 (Spring-Summer 2015) – [online at <https://cpilj.law.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2515/2018/10/14.2-Abraham-Lincoln-and-the-Duty-of-Zealous-Representation-The-Matson-Slave-Case-by-Roger-D.-Billings-Jr.-.pdf>]
- Mark E. Steiner, "Abraham Lincoln and the Rule of Law Books," *Marquette Law Journal* 93 (Summer 2010) – [online at <https://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5019&context=mulr>]

WEEK 7 (FEBRUARY 23/25/27): LINCOLN AND GOD

Lincoln is the only US president never to have joined a religious body or made any formal religious profession. Yet, he was raised in a strict religious environment, was quite familiar with theological discourse, and especially during the Civil War wrapped many of his public pronouncements in religious terms which were unmistakably sincere.

Readings (20 pages):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 139-140, 255-256
2. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, 264-265, 359, 426-427, 520-521, 529-530, 585-587, 596-597, 627-628, 663, 686-687, 689

Assignment: Mid-term Exam February 23
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Recommended Readings:

- Allen C. Guelzo, "Abraham Lincoln and the Doctrine of Necessity," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* (Winter 1997) [online at www.historycooperative.org/journals/jala/18.1/guelzo.html]
- Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln: The Story of a Picture* (Washington, 1866), 89-90 [online at Google Books]
- James F. Wilson, "Some Memories of Lincoln," *North American Review* 163 (December 1896), 667-676 [online at <http://dlxs2.library.cornell.edu/n/nora/nora.1896.html>]
- Henry Champion Deming, *Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln: before the General Assembly of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1865), 9-58 [online at Google Books]
- Josiah Gilbert Holland, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield, 1866), 232-248 [online at Google Books]

WEEK 8 (MARCH 2/4/6): LINCOLN AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

Lincoln served one term as a member of Congress in the House of Representatives, and then returned to Illinois, apparently with his political future closed. Then, 1854, he awoke and advanced to front stage as an opponent of the expansion of slavery into the Western territories. This was triggered by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, and brought him into his first fateful collision over slavery with Stephen A. Douglas.

Readings (116 pages):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 307-348, 377-382, 426-434, 439-458, 485-494, 460-479
2. Guelzo, *Lincoln*, 56-71

Recommended Readings:

Nicole Etcheson, "A living, creeping lie': Abraham Lincoln on Popular Sovereignty," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29 (Summer 2008) – [online at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jala/2629860.0029.203/-living-creeping-lie-abraham-lincoln-on-popular-sovereignty?rgn=main;view=fulltext>]

Robert W. Johannsen, "Stephen A. Douglas, 'Harper's Magazine,' and Popular Sovereignty," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45 (March 1959) – [online at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1540-6563.1960.tb01665.x>]

WEEK 9 (MARCH 9/11/13) & 10 (MARCH 23/25/27): THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES

March 14-22 Spring Break

In 1858, Lincoln challenged Stephen Douglas for the Illinois US Senate seat Douglas had held for many years and which made Douglas the single most powerful politician in America. Against every expectation, the debates which became the centerpiece of the election campaign vaulted Lincoln to national notice, and became one of the legendary moments in American history. This week will involve the longest sustained reading assignment as we delve into the debates themselves, but it is spread across three weeks (one of which is spring break).

Readings (407 pages over three weeks):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 439-458, 489-822
2. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, 59-89, 111-130
3. Guelzo, *Lincoln*, 72-89

Recommended Readings:

David Zarefsky, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery: In the Crucible of Public Debate* (1990), pp. 1-29 [online at Google Books]

Allen C. Guelzo, "Houses Divided: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Political Landscape of 1858," *Journal of American History* 94 (September 2007) [online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25094958?seq=1>]

WEEKS 11 (MARCH 30/APRIL 1/3) & 12 (APRIL 6/8/10): LINCOLN AND THE PRESIDENCY IN
TIME OF WAR: PRESIDENTIAL WAR POWERS, SUSPENSION OF *HABEAS CORPUS*, MILITARY AND
INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

The outbreak of the Civil War thrust Lincoln into a role as a newly-elected president for which no precedent existed. That he guided the Republic to a successful conclusion, and preserved the Union of the American states unmarred, is his greatest achievement. But it involved a course through a maze of difficulties which he did not always negotiate successfully. This week examines the great controversies which arose concerning the presidential powers in time of war and crisis.

Readings (125 pages):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, 194-200, 215-224, 232-234, 246-261, 279-297, 303-304, 308-309, 317, 336-337, 371, 373-374, 421-423, 454-463, 495-499, 500-501, 511-513, 536, 538-558, 624-625, 641-642
2. Guelzo, *Lincoln*, 90-107

Recommended Readings:

- Allen C. Guelzo, "The Long Shadow of *Ex parte Milligan*" *National Affairs* 65 (Fall 2025) [online at <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-long-shadow-of-ex-parte-milligan>]
- Allen C. Guelzo, "Abraham Lincoln and the Development of the 'War Powers' of the Presidency," *The Federal Lawyer* 54 (November 2007) [online at <http://www.fedbar.org/Publications/The-Federal-Lawyer.aspx>]
- John Yoo, "Lincoln at War," *Vermont Law Review* 38 (2013) – [online at <https://lawreview.vermontlaw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/03-Yoo.pdf>]

WEEKS 13 (APRIL 13/15/17) & 14 (APRIL 20): LINCOLN AND EMANCIPATION

Substitute Day APRIL 22

Reading Days (April 23-24)

Hardly less important for Lincoln's legacy and the American future was his decision to use his constitutional power as commander-in-chief to emancipate the slaves of the breakaway Southern Confederacy through his Emancipation proclamation of January 1, 1863. That decision has been accompanied from controversy and misunderstanding from the first. Through this week, we will unravel both the mysteries and controversies to understand what an epochal document the Emancipation Proclamation really was.

Readings (93 pages):

1. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 18, 73-75, 81-90, 111-112, 161-171, 158-159, 359-363
2. Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, 227-229, 247, 266-270, 276-278, 307-308
3. Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 249-268, 289-297
4. Guelzo, *Lincoln*, 108-128

Recommended Readings:

- James A. Dueholm, "A Bill of Lading Delivers the Goods: The Constitutionality and Effect of the Emancipation Proclamation," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 31 (Winter 2010) – [online at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jala/2629860.0031.104/-bill-of-lading-delivers-the-goods-the-constitutionality?rgn=main;view=fulltext>]
- Allen C. Guelzo, "Understanding Emancipation: Lincoln's Proclamation and the Overthrow of Slavery," *Journal of Illinois History* 6 (Winter 2003) 242-270 [online at <http://www.illinoishistory.gov/journalback.htm>]

Assignment: Final Exam (April 25-May 1): tba
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IV. Grading Scale and Rubrics

Grading Scale

For information on UF's grading policies for assigning grade points, see [here](#).

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A–	90 – 93%		C–	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B–	80 – 83%		D–	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

Grading Rubrics

Participation Rubric

A (90-100%)	Comes to class with pre-prepared questions about the readings. Engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others and consistently elevates the level of discussion.
B (80-89%)	Does not always come to class with pre-prepared questions about the reading. Waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.
C (70-79%)	Attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion. Is only adequately prepared for discussion.
D (60-69%)	Fails to attend class regularly and is inadequately prepared for discussion. Is not frequent participant in discussion.
E (<60%)	Attends class infrequently and is wholly unprepared for discussion. Does not participate in discussion.

Examination Rubric: Essays and Short Answers

	Completeness	Analysis	Evidence	Writing
A (90-100%)	Shows a thorough understanding of the question. Addresses all aspects of the question completely.	Analyses, evaluates, compares and/or contrasts issues and events with depth.	Incorporates pertinent and detailed information from both class discussions and assigned readings.	Presents all information clearly and concisely, in an organized manner.
B (80-89%)	Presents a general understanding of the question. Addresses most aspects of the question or	Analyses or evaluates issues and events, but not in any depth.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details but does not support all aspects of the task evenly.	Presents information fairly and evenly and may have minor organization problems.

	address all aspects incompletely.			
C (70-79%)	Shows a limited understanding of the question. Does not address most aspects of the question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating accurate, relevant facts.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details, but omits concrete examples, includes inaccurate information or does not support all aspects of task.	Lacks focus, somewhat interfering with comprehension.
D (60-69%)	Fails fully to answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating vague facts.	Does not incorporate information from class discussion and/or assigned readings.	Organizational problems prevent comprehension.
E (<60%)	Does not answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues.	Does not adduce any evidence.	Incomprehensible organization and prose.

Writing Rubric

	Thesis and Argumentation	Use of Sources	Organization	Grammar, mechanics and style
A (90-100%)	Thesis is clear, specific, and presents a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and creative interpretation. Argument fully supports the thesis both logically and thoroughly.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are well incorporated, utilized, and contextualized throughout.	Clear organization. Introduction provides adequate background information and ends with a thesis. Details are in logical order. Conclusion is strong and states the point of the paper.	No errors.
B (80-89%)	Thesis is clear and specific, but not as critical or original. Shows insight and attention to the text under consideration. May have gaps in argument's logic.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are incorporated but not contextualized significantly.	Clear organization. Introduction clearly states thesis, but does not provide as much background information. Details are in logical order, but may be more difficult to follow. Conclusion is recognizable.	A few errors.
C (70-79%)	Thesis is present but not clear or specific, demonstrating a lack of critical engagement to the text. Argument is weak, missing important details or making logical leaps with little support.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are mostly incorporated but are not properly contextualized.	Significant lapses in organization. Introduction states thesis but does not adequately provide background information. Some details not in logical or expected order that results in a distracting read. Conclusion is recognizable.	Some errors.
D (60-69%)	Thesis is vague and/or confused. Demonstrates a failure to understand the text. Argument lacks any	Primary and/or secondary texts are almost wholly absent.	Poor, hard-to-follow organization. There is no clear introduction of the main topic or thesis. There is no clear	Many errors.

	logical flow and does not utilize any source material.		conclusion, and the paper just ends.	
E (<60%)	There is neither a thesis nor any argument.	Primary and/or secondary texts are wholly absent.	The paper is wholly disorganized, lacking an introduction, conclusion or any logical coherence.	Numerous errors.

V. Required Policies

All academic policies in this course are consistent with university policies, which can be found here: <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolices>