

Reconstruction and the Constitution

How the Civil War and Reconstruction remade the Constitution

Course #	21FREC
Format:	Seminar
Moderators:	Jay and Margaret Russell
Date and Time:	Wednesday, 1:30-3:30 PM 8 weeks, starting 10/6/2021
Format:	Online
Maximum number of participants:	12
Auditors accepted:	Yes, up to 2

Purpose: We will examine, in the words of Civil War historian, Eric Foner, "the origins, enactment and objectives of the Reconstruction amendments [Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth] and the contest over their meaning that followed their ratification" and continues to the present day.

Description: In *The Second Founding*, Eric Foner writes that "[t]he Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed form the pivotal era of American history." According to Foner, because many present-day issues (including citizenship, the meaning of equal protection, and the right to vote) "are in some way Reconstruction questions..., [i]t is impossible to understand American society today without knowing something about the Reconstruction period a century and a half ago."

This seminar will cover the debates over the drafting, passage and ratification of the Thirteenth (abolishing slavery), Fourteenth (guaranteeing due process and equal protection) and Fifteenth (granting Black men the right to vote) Amendments, legislation Congress enacted during Reconstruction extending federal power to enforce the Amendments, and decisions of the Supreme Court that limited the interpretation and application of the Amendments and legislation. The seminar will incorporate Black perspectives on these topics through the speeches and writings of Frederick Douglass, the Brotherhood of Justice and others.

Role of participants: Each member of the seminar will give a 25-30-minute presentation on a topic from a list prepared by the co-moderators and will have the opportunity each week to participate in the question and discussion periods following the presentations.

Resources: Required reading: Eric Foner, *The Second Founding -- How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (2019). This book is now available in paperback (\$17.95), and there are 47 copies in the CW MARS library system. The moderators will also provide a list of other resources.

About the Moderators: Jay Russell is a retired attorney and has previously co-moderated or moderated a number of legal, political and history seminars, including a Supreme Court seminar in 2017. Margaret Russell, a former newspaper editor and publisher and land trust administrator, has previously co-moderated seminars and has taken political, history and literature seminars.