

# **One Nation or Two: America at a Balance Point, April 1865**

**WHEN:** Thursday afternoons 1 pm-3 pm  
8 weeks 3/12/2020 -5/7/2020 (No class April 9)

**COORDINATORS:** Eugene Mihaly and Bruce Ruttenberg

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Years of civil war left the outcome hanging on desperate military initiatives by both sides- and on decisions by the major actors. At issue was not only one nation or two but what kind of peace was possible. Join us as we explore that fateful moment in April and the uncertainties that dominated events; and shortly thereafter set the country on its very rocky path. We will set those events in the context of the decades long (and continuing to this day) debate over federal vs state power and the legitimacy of secession.

**RESOURCES:** The primary text will be *April 1865, the Month That Saved America* by Jay Winik

**FORMAT:** Each participant is encouraged, but not required, to choose a relevant topic from the syllabus and prepare a class presentation and/or discussion.

## **HOW WILL TOPICS/ASSIGNMENTS BE ALLOCATED**

Topics will be allotted on a first come, first served basis. Please email your first three choices, in descending order, to the coordinators.

## COURSE CALENDAR

**Week 1 – March 12:** The 13 colonies before the Revolutionary War, a **loose confederation** post revolutionary war and then the Constitutional effort to forge a nation. The fragility of the new nation : the terminology remained “The United States are...” (not singular The United States is).

**Week 2 - March 19:** The build up to civil war: nullification, secession and the rise of **abolitionism**. Simultaneously, the economic impact of the cotton gin and of the subsequent rise in value of slave labor. **Missouri Compromise** and efforts to extend and limit slavery in the West. The **Dred Scott decision**

**Week 3 - March 26:** War comes. The differing perceptions of the stakes and causes in the Union and in the Confederacy. The expectation on both sides of a brief conflict. The shortcomings of the Union military leadership. The contrast to southern leadership: Robert E. Lee, Joe Johnston, Forrest and others.

**Week 4 - April 2:** Lincoln. Who he was. What he wanted in 1860. In 1864-5.

**Week 5 - April 16:** 1864 – 5. The rise of General U.S. Grant, Generals Sherman and Sheridan in the north. Decisive battles and resolution. Decisions by the parties in April, 1865

**Week 6 - April 23:** The death of Lincoln and ascension of Johnson. Conflict between Radical Republicans and the White House.

**Week 7 - April 30** Reconstruction. Its failure and the evolution of policy

**Week 8 - May 7** Is the Civil War over? The legacy of the Civil War and Reconstruction today. What separated us; what unites us. Is secession just a relic of the past.

### **Some Suggested Presentations:**

- Articles of Confederation to Constitution
- Abolitionist movement
- Missouri Compromise
- Dred Scott Decision
- President Abraham Lincoln
- General Robert E. Lee
- General Joe Johnston
- General Nathan Bedford Forrest
- General Ulysses Grant
- General William Tecumsah Sherman
- General Phil Sherman
- President Andrew Johnson