

HIST 4260-003 and -203: Comparative Civil Wars

University of North Texas, Spring 2026

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30–1:50pm

Wooten Hall 112

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00pm-4:00pm, and by appointment

This course will explore the history of civil war across a variety of geographic and chronological contexts, from Julius Caesar's wars of the late 40s BCE to the ongoing conflict in Burma/Myanmar. We will begin with a theoretical investigation of civil war as a transhistorical phenomenon, drawing on recent work by intellectual historians, political scientists, and literary scholars to address a series of basic questions: Why do civil wars begin, and how do they end? Are civil wars inherently more or less violent than interstate wars? What is the relationship between civil war and political revolution? From there, we will dive into case studies of specific conflicts, including – in honor of its 250th anniversary – the American Revolution.

In addition to reading and discussing primary source materials most weeks, students will be asked to co-lead weekly discussion meetings throughout the semester. Finally, working in consultation with me, each student will complete an intensive research project on a civil war of their choosing. At the end of the semester, students will share their work with one another, allowing us to conclude with a student-led iteration of the course's comparative theme.

Learning Objectives

- Students will develop a comparative historical understanding of civil war in both theoretical and applied contexts.
- Students will practice reading, writing, and thinking like historians through a variety of short- and long-form writing assignments as well as regular student-led classroom discussions.
- Students will complete a lengthy research paper on a topic of their choosing.

Required Texts

During the next fifteen weeks, we will engage with a wide variety of primary sources relating to the global history of civil wars. All readings will be made available on Canvas; you do not need to purchase any books for this course. **However, you will need to acquire – via rental, purchase, or streaming – access to the film *Civil War* (2024),** which you will watch on your own sometime during Week Six. (Please note that the library has placed its copies of this movie on reserve for our use; feel free to use theirs rather than acquiring it on your own.)

Course Assignments and Grading

Your final grade is calculated from the following categories. Please note that a large percentage of your grade is drawn from the participation portion of the course, including the discussion leadership component described below. Students will also complete a scaffolded twelve-to-fifteen-page research paper as well as a comprehensive oral exam at the end of the semester.

Attendance and Participation (25% of your total course grade)

Per UNT's [Student Attendance Policy](#), I expect you to attend class diligently, to read all assigned texts carefully, and to participate in class regularly. Persistent failure to appear in class and/or actively contribute to discussion will result in a significantly lower participation grade. Students who attend class regularly but do not routinely participate in our discussions should not expect to receive higher than a C on this course component, while students who do not appear in class at all should expect to receive a 0 (which, in this class, will automatically put you out of both the A and B range for your overall course grade). Please note that you will not have access to digital copies of our readings during in-class discussion, so if you need a reference in hand for those conversations, you will need to print them out in hard copy before class.

Discussion Leadership (15% of your total course grade)

During one week of the upcoming semester, you and at least one of your peers will be tasked with leading one of our Thursday discussion meetings; see the "Discussion Leadership Guide" for further details. In consultation with me, you will read the assigned texts carefully and put together a lesson plan. Your grade will be based on your familiarity with the material and preparedness for class. A word of advice: the more you participate during someone else's discussion leadership day, the more likely they are to repay you in kind – so speak up!

Research Paper (40% of your total grade – breakdown below)

The major writing assignment for this course will be an original, primary source-driven research project designed in consultation with me. You will select a civil war of your choosing and then research, write, and revise a substantial (12-15 pages) research paper on that topic. We will approach the research and writing process gradually and collaboratively: you will submit an initial proposal (5%) and then a rough draft (10%) for peer review (5%) before turning in the final, completed essay (20%) by midnight on Sunday, May 3rd. Students should also be prepared to share, informally, details of their projects during our last course meeting of the semester. Details of each component of this assignment are available on Canvas.

Oral Comprehensive Exam (20% of your total course grade)

In lieu of a written final exam, your mastery of course content will be assessed during an in-person oral exam conducted one-on-one with me sometime during exam week. We will sit down in my office for a twenty-minute conversation about one of several major course themes and/or historical subjects. (I will provide you with a study guide listing possible questions well in advance of the examination period.) If you can sufficiently demonstrate your mastery of course content during our conversation, you will receive full marks; conversely, failure to demonstrate your engagement with course material will result in a lower grade. Each student will have the opportunity for one practice exam round, my schedule permitting, during the two-week writing period set aside for your research papers. More information to follow.

Course Policies and Procedures

The following course policies apply both in and outside of the classroom. Please note that changes to the course calendar may occur, especially in the event of unforeseen [campus closures](#) (which will be communicated to you by Eagle Alert). Additionally, the instructor reserves the right to alter this syllabus at any time during the semester.

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in any form in this class. If you are caught while engaging in academically dishonest activity (including unauthorized use of generative AI technology – see below), you will receive a failing grade for the course and you will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. If I suspect that you have submitted work for grading that is not wholly your own, I reserve the right to call you into my office for an in-person conversation about the work in question. Failure to demonstrate your mastery of the submitted material in those discussions will be taken as evidence of an integrity violation, and I will alter your grade accordingly. Students are responsible for learning to recognize what constitutes academic dishonesty; ignorance is not an excuse. For further information, see UNT's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Accommodations:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323

Canvas Grade Reporting:

Canvas is a useful tool for sharing grade updates with you quickly and comprehensively, and we will use it in that fashion throughout the coming weeks. However, please be aware that the comprehensive (i.e. the “assignments” and “total” tabs) grades listed on Canvas **do not** represent your actual grade in the course. The reason for this is that I have not done the work necessary to ensure that Canvas accurately reflects the proper weights of each grade category described above. If you want to know your grade at any point in the semester, come see me in office hours – I do not respond to grade requests via email, per FERPA’s requirements – or do the math yourself using the percentages laid out in the preceding section.

Course Resources:

In order to make this class as accessible and enjoyable as possible, I will provide you with an array of additional resources through Canvas to aid in reviewing, essay-writing, and exam prep. They include a “Guide to Written Assignments,” which offers a formatting guide, an introduction to Chicago-style citation, and a few helpful hints for writing argumentative historical essays; a “Course Lecture Questions” document, updated daily, which collects all of our central lecture themes in one convenient place; and a “Course Readings Guide,” updated weekly, in which I will provide context and preliminary discussion questions for all of the texts

that we will encounter in class. Additionally, all lecture slides will be made available on Canvas, as will a variety of other important course and campus resources. Please note that these materials are intended to supplement our time together in class rather than to replace it; if you do not show up regularly, they will almost certainly not save you from a poor grade.

Late Assignments:

All overdue writing assignments will be penalized with a **25%** grade deduction per day late. Generally, I will not accept late submissions more than **three days** after the announced deadline except in cases of medical emergency and/or those falling under the approved categories identified in UNT's attendance policy. It is not possible to make up in-class quizzes or exams unless the absence falls under those same categories.

Statement on Generative AI:

Generative AI technology has made an outsized impact on the shape of higher education since its public debut in November 2022. Although this new toolset may offer important opportunities for doing good in the world, I also believe that it does not necessarily enhance your ability to achieve the course objectives laid out in this syllabus; in fact, if employed uncritically, it is much more likely to do the opposite by robbing you of the opportunity to do hard, meaningful analytical thinking on your own. Accordingly, while you may use GenAI tools for studying purposes, I expect that all graded work submitted for evaluation in this class will be conceived, sourced, and written entirely your own words. Any unauthorized use of GenAI in that context will be treated as an academic integrity violation.

Further information related to course content and other campus resources is available on Canvas.

Course Schedule and Weekly Readings

***indicates student-led discussion meeting.

Week One: Setting the Stage

Tuesday (1/13): Course Introduction
Reading(s): None.
Thursday (1/15): Terms of Engagement
Reading(s): Armitage, "Confronting Civil War"

Week Two: Two Preliminary Case Studies

Tuesday (1/20): Fratricide and the Roman Example
Reading(s): Caesar, *Civil War*
Thursday (1/22): Russia, 1917
Reading(s): Lenin, *Socialism and War*
Lenin, "The Russian Revolution and Civil War"

Week Three: Mobilization, Instability, and Collapse

Tuesday (1/27): How Civil Wars Begin
Reading(s): Potter, "Religious Violence"
Thursday (1/29): Neighbor Against Neighbor***
Reading(s): Demick, *Logavina Street*

Week Four: Climate, Technology, and Media

Tuesday (2/3): A “Global Crisis”?

Reading(s): Parker, “The Little Ice Age”
Burke, et. al., “Warming Increases the Risk...”

Thursday (2/5): Broadcasting Civil War***

Reading(s): Gohdes and Steinert-Threlkeld, “Civilian Behavior”
Mozur, “A Genocide Incited on Facebook”

Week Five: The Ramifications of War

Tuesday (2/10): Violence and Atrocity

Reading(s): “The Hutu Ten Commandments”
Machete Season

Thursday (2/12): How Civil Wars End***

Reading(s): Cao, *The Attic*
(watch) [“Finding Dispersed Families”](#)

Week Six: Memory and Popular Culture

Tuesday (2/17): Remembering Civil War

Reading(s): Horwitz, “Confederates in the Attic”

Thursday (2/19): Civil War Onscreen. **No class.**

Reading(s): (watch) *Civil War* (2024)

Week Seven: The English Civil Wars I

Tuesday (2/24): Research Workshop (with [UNT Librarian Doug Campbell](#))

Reading(s): None.

Thursday (2/26): The Crisis of Parliaments***

Reading(s): “The Grand Remonstrance”

Week Eight: The English Civil Wars II

Tuesday (3/3): Roundheads and Cavaliers

Reading(s): Cressy, “The Press Overpressed”
[George Lawrence], *The Debauched Cavalier*
A Puritane Set Forth in His Lively Colours

Thursday (3/5): A King on the Scaffold***

Reading(s): Lagomarsino-Wood, “The King’s Trial Begins”
Kesselring, “A Soldier’s Doubts”

SPRING BREAK. No class.

Week Nine: The American Revolution I

- Tuesday (3/17): Breaking Free
Reading(s): Paine, *Common Sense*
Paine, *American Crisis*
- Thursday (3/19): Spies, Treason, and Traitors***
Reading(s): [Hutson, "Nathan Hale Revisited"](#)
"Writings of Benjamin Church"
Arnold, "Letter to the Inhabitants of America"
- Also due: **Proposals** for research papers, submitted via Canvas before class.

Week Ten: The American Revolution II

- Tuesday (3/24): The Sexual Politics of Civil War
Reading(s): Block, "Rape Without Women"
- Thursday (3/26): Civil War or Revolution?***
Reading(s): Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*
Drayton, "On the Rise of the American Empire"

Week Eleven: The Taiping Rebellion I

- Tuesday (3/31): Strange Visions
Reading(s): Hamberg, *Visions of Hung Siu-tshuen*
- Thursday (4/2): Blood in the Heavenly Kingdom***
Reading(s): "Land System of the Heavenly Dynasty"

Week Twelve: The Taiping Rebellion II

- Tuesday (4/7): The "Ever-Victorious Army" (?)
Reading(s): "Gordon's Campaign in China"
- Thursday (4/9): The Price of Rebellion***
Reading(s): Daye, *World of a Tiny Insect*

Weeks Thirteen – Fourteen: Research and writing time. **No class; individual consultations.**

Week Fifteen: Wrapping Up

- Tuesday (4/28): Comparing Civil Wars: **Peer review and brief presentations.**
Reading(s): None.
Also due: **Rough drafts** of research papers. Bring a hard copy to class.
Brief presentation of research paper topic; no serious prep or PowerPoints needed.
- Thursday (4/30): Writing day. **No class.**
Reading(s): None.

Final drafts of research papers submitted via Canvas by **11:59pm on Sunday, 5/3.**

Oral exams to be scheduled for **Wednesday (5/6)** and **Thursday (5/7)** of exam week.

HIST 4260-003 and -203: Comparative Civil Wars
Honors Supplementary Syllabus
Spring 2026

To earn Honors credit in HIST 4260-203, you must complete a longer research paper than the assignment detailed in the regular course syllabus. Instead of a 12-15 page paper, you will be expected to produce an essay of at least 20 pages on a civil war of your choosing. Because this will require you to do more research, I strongly recommend meeting with me early in the semester to begin discussing potential topics, sources, and research angles.

You will earn Honors credit for this course if your expanded research paper meets all of the following requirements:

- Submitted via Canvas by **11:59pm on Sunday, 5/3**;
- Reaches a minimum length of twenty (20) full pages;
- Presents an original argument, complete with cited evidence, in clear, coherent prose.