Overview: The course examines critical events in the U.S. from 1846-1877, from the outbreak of the Mexican War to the restoration of "home rule" in the South. The focus rests on:
- the roots of sectional conflict
- the course, conduct, and consequences of war
- the efforts to reconstruct the nation

The class does not focus exclusively (or primarily) on military issues. Political, social, economic, cultural, and military perspectives on the period all play a role in the course.

On all topics, I present a dual perspective: an "outer" historical view (chronological, descriptive, and evaluative in nature) and an "inner" examination (analyzing the ideas, values, anxieties, and expectations of the historical players themselves). In other words, I will explore how we understand these individuals and how they understood themselves.
The topics we will cover:

Key sources of unity within the Republic

Key sources of division within the Republic

King Cotton: slavery in the South
- economic activity; numbers; ownership; production; wealth
- slavery as a way of life: economically, socially, politically, culturally

Slavery and national politics
- 1787-1845: from the Constitution to the admission of Texas

Crises of the 1850s
- in domestic politics
- in popular culture
- in foreign policy

The election of 1860
- aftermath of the election
- the course of secession

Balance sheet of war
- Strengths & weaknesses the North and South

Similarities in national governments
- the Confederacy and the Union
- political, financial, mobilization, strategy

Military strategy
- choices of the Confederacy and the Union

The course of the war
- 1861
- 1862
- (Who freed the slaves?)
- 1863
- 1864
- 1865
- the long end to the fighting

Reconstruction
- the roots of the project
- Lincoln's positions
- Johnson's positions
- Congressional positions
- African American positions
- Southern positions

Breakdown of Reconstruction
- political, social, economic, ideological, political reasons