

The American South to 1865

Last Updated: Fri, 01/02/2026

Course prefix: HTS

Course number: 2006

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):

33331 35249

Instructor First Name: Christopher

Instructor Last Name: Lawton

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

Far from the myths about the slow constancy of the antebellum South, this is a course about a region in the throes of momentous transformation. Somewhere between the Revolution and the Confederacy, a geographic determination became a cultural and political construct and the southeastern states became “the South.” Yet “the South” was never as stable, uniform, or old as the mythmakers would have it, then or now.

This semester we will explore histories of Southern space, place, and identity by focusing mainly on issues of race, class, and gender in the decades before the Civil War. We will work together to try to identify and understand some of the extremes that defined varieties of existence across the antebellum South. We will then consider whether it was because of those extremes, or despite them, that Southerners were able to find coherence enough to forge forward through secession and attempt to create their own nation.

Course learning outcomes:

Upon completing this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the social, cultural, and political history of the American South between the Revolution and the Civil War, as explored through the experiences of the enslaved, poor and landless laborers, the rising the middle class, and the planter class.
- Recognize history as an interpretive account of the human past—one that historians create in the present from surviving evidence.
- Recognize the ambiguity that history –and historical inquiry– requires.
- Welcome contradictory perspectives and data

- Describe past events from multiple perspectives.
- Explain and justify multiple causes of complex events and phenomena using conflicting sources.
- Identify, summarize, appraise, and synthesize other scholars' historical arguments.
- Generate substantive, open-ended questions about the past and develop research strategies to answer them.
- Craft well-supported historical narratives, arguments, and reports of research findings in a variety of media for a variety of audiences.

Required course materials:

We will spend most of our days together discussing assigned articles, chapters, and primary source material. All readings are listed on the course calendar and available through the "Texts" module or our Canvas Reading List. Please plan adequate time to read, take notes on, and thoughtfully consider each assigned text. To help prepare for both in-class discussions and written exams, your notes should include specific details about the author's thesis, key points of evidence, and how that evidence supports their argument.

Grading policy:

Exams

- Exam #1: 50pts
- Exam #2: 50pts
- Exam #3: 50pts
- Exam #4 (final): 75pts

Group Projects

- Transatlantic Trade Project: 10pts
- Intra-American Trade Project: 15pts
- Website Project: 20pts
- Biographical Sketches Project: 25pts

Participation

- Attendance and engaged participation: 30pts

Attendance policy:

Regular class attendance is required, will be checked daily, and will be necessary to succeed in this course. You must be here for the entire class period to be counted as having attended for that day. Everyone is allowed two no-questions-asked absences. More than two absences without approved written documentation will adversely affect your grade.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion