

U.C. Berkeley OLLI Course Outline: ***The Rehabilitation of Ulysses S. Grant***

Mick Chantler, Instructor Summer Session 2019

Week One: **The Lean Years...and Redemption**— Our opening class will cover Grant's difficult youth and coming of age. Particular emphasis will be placed on the trying relationship between Grant and his obnoxious father. The future war hero and president endured years of poverty and humiliating failure. Strangely, the eruption of Civil War proved a godsend to Grant, giving him his golden opportunity to break free from the seemingly endless cycle of personal defeat.

Week Two: **The War Years**—We will attempt to explain what many contemporaries regarded as a baffling mystery: how a shy, most unwarlike country boy (who drank too much) transformed himself into the fearsome warrior who rescued the nation military fortunes during its darkest hour. A significant part of this talk will consist of a comparative analysis of Grant and his primary antagonist during the last year of the conflict, Robert E. Lee. Many observers often reduce the Civil War to a clash between the roughhewn commoner Grant, and the aristocratic/patrician figure of Lee. We will see how this view distorts and trivializes the real issues at stake in our understanding of the conflict.

Week Three: **Grant, Race, and Reunion**—After the war, Grant remained the nation's foremost military chieftain. It was thus inevitable that he would play a key role during Reconstruction. Far more than most Northerners, many of whom were content to wash their hands of the "Negro Problem" now that the war was over, Grant saw the need to provide *justice* as well as *freedom* for black Americans. We will describe his largely successful fight against the KKK and trace the evolution of his growing commitment to citizenship and voting rights for the Freedmen. In the process, he won the undying admiration of the black abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass, who described him as "the vigilant, firm, impartial, and wise protector of my race."

Weeks Four: **President Grant**—Grant has been reviled as one our nation's most corrupt presidents, as well as praised for providing stable and judicious leadership during such crises as the Panic of 1873 and the disputed election of 1876. Which is the 'real' Grant?—the Gilded Age crony or the imperturbable, stolid Captain of the ship of state? We will see that as president, Grant showed remarkably nuanced and sensitive views on Native Americans. We will also describe how he was able to mend his fences with the nation's Jewish community, a group that he had clashed with during his Mississippi campaign of 1862.

Recommended Readings: (In addition to Grant's Memoirs, of course)

The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace, by H.W. Brands. 2012

Grant, by Ron Chernow. 2017

Grant: A Biography, by William S. McFeely. 1981

Grant and Twain: The Story of an American Friendship, by Mark Perry. 2004

A Victor, Not a Butcher: Ulysses S. Grant's Overlooked Military Genius by Edward H. Bonekemper. 2004

Ulysses S. Grant by Brooks D. Simpson. 2000