

# Antebellum America: It Still Matters

Walter Frank

## Course Information

Thursdays from 10:00 a.m.–noon for six weeks beginning October 24 through December 6 (no class 11/29).

**HYBRID - LECTURE/DISCUSSION - UNLIMITED**

## Course Description

**Session 1:** This session will focus on the first dozen years of the Republic. When the new government formed, everything was up for grabs. As James Madison said, “We are in a wilderness without a single step to guide us.” Almost immediately the political establishment that had established the constitutional framework divided over the country’s proper direction, further complicating matters. At the same time both Presidents Washington and Adams faced key international crises that could have easily led to war. We will consider how the nation navigated all this and why it was able to do so.

**Session 2:** This session will focus on the Election of 1800 and the Jefferson and Madison presidencies. Among other things we will focus on Jefferson’s first term successes, the friendship between Adams and Jefferson, the rivalry between Hamilton and Adams, the disappearance of the Federalists as a national political force following the election of 1800, how the War of 1812 came about and its significance. We will also consider whether it is right to call the election of 1800 a “Revolution.”

**Session 3:** The America of 1828 was a different place than it had been in 1800 and this session will explore just how much more complex and challenging the nation had become. We will first consider the Panic of 1819 and the Missouri Compromise but will then look more broadly at key developments of the period: the Second Great Awakening, key decisions of the Supreme Court, the denial of the rights of free African Americans and the election of John Quincy Adams and his disastrous subsequent presidency.

**Session 4:** With the campaign of Andrew Jackson in the election of 1828, we see for the first time techniques and organizational structures that will ultimately define modern politics. Jackson's presidency will be a major focus of this session as will be the development of the second two party system that his presidency produced.

**Session 5:** We will explore in this session the growing economic, social and political differences that were beginning to call the whole project of the Union into question and then turn our attention to the growing rift over slavery itself, focusing also on the abolition movement and the many different emotions it aroused, The election of 1844 was a key moment and we will examine it and the subsequent Polk presidency and how it set the stage for the tumultuous events of the 1850's.

**Session 6:** This session will focus on the final road to war and its many key events: the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the collapse of the Whig party and emergence of the Republican Party, the Dred Scott decision, the fight over the LeCompton Constitution, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, and John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, and the election of 1860. We will conclude by examining the secession crisis, asking at the same time to consider whether the War that followed was inevitable.

## Leader

In retirement after a long legal career, Mr. Frank has written three well received books on, respectively, the Constitution, the Gay Rights movement, and the presidential election of 2016. He has recently completed a fourth work on the subject matter of this course, for which he is now seeking a publisher.