

In 1873, Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, in their novel *The Gilded Age*, provided an epitaph for the era that we shall probe in depth this semester. They maintained that the Civil War and its immediate aftermath “uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations.”

We will examine the coming of the war, the four years of conflict that forever transformed the United States, and the struggle to reconstruct the nation in the decade following Appomattox. Our focus will be primarily on the political, social, and cultural history of the era, though we will also address significant issues in military history. That we will be studying this period during the sesquicentennial of Reconstruction provides additional opportunities to think about how the past is treated today and the ways in which the Civil War continues to resonate.