“There's an app for that”: Adventures in Using Technology to Teach and Research the American Civil War.

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Teaching the Civil War Online: Who I Am

- I have been a working university professor for over fifteen years.
- My first thirteen years were in traditional “brick and mortar” universities (and my courses were almost always hybrid).
- The last three have been as a purely online instructor, working for APUS and two other online institutions.
- I have taught the history of the American Civil War either in dedicated courses or in the context of other history courses. At APUS, MILH202 and HIST552.

Pretending to be a Civil War soldier at West Point Summer 2005
I am also an active scholar of the American Civil War, especially as it pertains to African Americans.

My 1996 dissertation on black Civil War veterans was published by the University Press of Kansas in 2004, as *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans*.

In 2008, I published with Elizabeth Regosin, *Voices of Emancipation*, a reader presenting black voices of the Civil War era found in federal pension records from the conflict (which also were the main source for my 2004 book).

Currently, I blog on emancipation in the Civil War.
Online technology in teaching the Civil War has advanced tremendously in fifteen years.

- I began in the late 1990s with email listservs for outside discussion.
- I initially used online technology in a traditional setting because it enriched the class with resources and useful activities outside of class.
  - Discussion boards: add an element of active learning for large lecture courses.
  - Supplementary web readings (especially primary source materials which increasingly were available for free via the web).
  - Share videos and photos.
  - Distribute course handouts.
Teaching the Civil War Online: Online vs. Traditional

- Of course, now I teach the Civil War purely online.
- **Similarities**
  - Students are students, grading is grading—it is still work.
- **Differences**
  - Online students at APUS tend to be more knowledgeable and genuinely enthusiastic about studying the Civil War than their brick and mortar counterparts.
  - It is nice not having to try to work with students unprepared for class who ignore the lecture and spend their time surreptitiously texting.
  - In traditional classes, you don’t get phone calls from students at a firebase in Afghanistan.

Would you believe we are both teaching?
Both academics use social media, blogs, web discussion boards, and even old-fashioned email listservs to stay in touch.

Indeed, thanks to online technology, especially social media, people interested in the Civil War have never had an easier time staying in touch.

Technology, especially social media and blogs, is helping to bridge the gap between the academic and lay enthusiasts of the Civil War.

Brooks Simpson’s *Crossroads* blog best epitomizes this exchange:
- [http://cwcrossroads.wordpress.com](http://cwcrossroads.wordpress.com)
Teaching the Civil War Online: Interesting Uses of Technology in Civil War Studies

- Battlefield guide smartphone apps.
- Computer games to simulate Civil War battles for students.
- Geographic Information Systems: using maps and demographic data to achieve new macro-level insights in the Civil War:
  - Ed Ayers
  - Susan Schulten
- Computer produced online simulations.
- The online archive:
  - Fold3
  - Ancestry.com
  - National Park Service: Soldiers and Sailors database
Teaching the Civil War Online:
Thank you for listening!

Questions?

Comments?