

Summer 2026 Knowledge for Freedom Seminar

<https://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/teagle/syllabus/>

Dickinson College / Summer 2026

Seminar: M/T/W/TH/F 930am to 12pm

Classrooms: Denny 317 (lecture), Denny 212 (discussion)

Plus various afternoon and weekend activities and field trips

*We hold these truths to ~~be sacred and undeniable~~ self-evident,
that all men are created equal,
that they are endowed by their Creator
with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Liberty
and the pursuit of Happiness. —Declaration of Independence (1776)*

Faculty

- *Director:* Prof. Matthew Pinsker // Email: pinskerm@dickinson.edu
- *Assistant Director:* Prof. Todd Mealy // Email: tmmealy@comcast.net
- *Assistant Director:* Prof. Cooper Wingert // Email: cwingert@fordham.edu

Overview

Slavery, or the idea of holding people as property, might well be the most insidious repudiation of American democratic ideals. And yet, slaveholding was both widespread and long-entrenched in the United States, a country that has always prided itself on embracing individualism and universal natural rights. How was such a fundamental contradiction even possible? That is the kind of searing question that will help open a gateway toward both deeper learning and more engaged citizenship in the Knowledge for Freedom seminar. Students who successfully conclude this program and complete their final web-based projects will receive free Dickinson College credit for the equivalent of a History 101 general topical survey course.

Required Books & Pamphlets (distributed free)

- Andrew Delbanco, ed., *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (Penguin, 2009 ed.)
- Matthew Pinsker, *Boss Lincoln: The Partisan Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Norton, 2026)
- John Stauffer and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., *The Portable Frederick Douglass* (Penguin, 2016)
- *Knowledge for Freedom Source Book* (2026)

Course Policies

For details on course policies, especially those regarding attendance, participation, accommodations for disabilities, plagiarism and general learning objectives, visit the website.

Workshops, Activities and Field Trips

Each afternoon, seminar participants will participate in various workshops, covering topics such as the college admissions process, research, writing and multi-media production. Seminar participants will also undertake historical walking tours on campus and in town and will enjoy extended field trips to places such as Gettysburg, Harrisburg, and Washington, DC.

Participation

Students will be responsible for regular attendance and participation in the daily seminar sessions for two weeks, about 2.5 hours per day. In addition, students will be expected to fully attend separate afternoon workshop sessions and various other program activities. The best way to participate in this seminar (and in most college classes) is to come prepared with thoughtful questions. The most important questions usually concern possible connections with other texts or experiences, designed to draw broader insights and deeper understanding about context and meaning. All participants will receive a written evaluation of their participation.

Close Reading Reflections

During the July seminar, all students will produce one short close reading reflection essay with document video, posted at the 2026 student project website –with first draft due to grad TAs by Sunday afternoon, July 19 and final draft due by Monday night, July 20. Students are expected to begin working with both undergrad tutors and grad TAs in daily workshop sessions during the first week of class to ensure that they are making good progress in the development of their reflection essay posts. Reflections should analyze one of the course texts in close reading style, about 500 to 1,000 words or 2 to 3 pages (single spaced), with 2-3 images (properly credited and captioned) and with one short video or podcast reading (link included in post) that attempts to bring to life a short snippet (20 to 60 seconds) from the assigned text. Students may select ANY document from the course texts list –from 2026 or from previous years. These assignments will be evaluated for analysis, prose and multi-media effort. Models for these reflections are available on the assignment page. The best close reading reflection posts will be published online. Students pursuing optional college credit will also produce a second close reading reflection post with document video (due by mid-August).

Final Essays

Students seeking optional college credit will need to continue to meet remotely with Prof. Pinsker at weekly one-hour Zoom office hour sessions for four weeks following the conclusion of the residential seminar experience. They will work with him to produce a second close reading reflection post (see above) and a final essay (about 1,000 to 1,500 words or roughly 4 to 6 pages, single spaced) that draws lessons about how best to achieve change in American democracy through comparing and contrasting the antislavery strategies of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. All post-campus work will be due by the end of August posted at the 2026 student project site. Final essays should include properly captioned and credited images as well as Chicago-style footnotes, citing wherever relevant the primary source texts from the course syllabus as well as secondary sources provided by the program. Outside research beyond these materials is allowed but not required. Final essays will be graded on prose quality, research, and depth of analysis. Models for these final essays will be available on the assignment

page. The best student essays will also be considered for inclusion in Prof. Pinsker's online Student Hall of Fame gallery. Late projects will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

Grade Distribution

NOTE: all participants will receive grades and comments on their participation and first close reading post. Other grades are only for those seeking college credit.

Seminar Participation.....	35 percent
First close reading post.....	15 percent
Second close reading post.....	15 percent
Final Essay.....	35 percent

Week 1: Background on Slavery and Freedom

Monday 7/13 –Framing Freedom

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 945am = Announcements (Denny 317)
 - **Featured text —Phillis Wheatley, On Being Brought From Africa (1773)**
 - **Featured text —Abigail and John Adams, Letters (1776)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context lecture: Age of Enlightenment (Pinsker)
- 1045am to 11am = Break
- 11am to 12pm = Subtext discussion (Mealy / Denny 212)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- 130pm to 245pm = Workshop: Close Reading (staff / Denny 112)
 - Confirm registrations for network, WordPress, Kline Center
- 3pm to 430pm = Activity: Campus tour (Admissions / outside Old West)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- 7pm to 9pm = Dorm activities (Massey's ice cream –free)
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Tuesday 7/14 --Declaring Freedom

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 945am = Announcements (Denny 317)
 - **Featured text —Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (1776)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context lecture: Remembering 1776 (Pinsker)
- 1045am to 11am = Break
- 11am to 12pm = Subtext discussion (Mealy / Denny 212)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- **115pm** to 245pm = Field trip: CCHS (21 N. Pitt St) (**Meet at Denny**)
- 3pm to 430pm = Admissions Activity: Finding Your College (Denny 112)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- 7pm to 9pm = Dorm activities
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Wednesday 7/15 –Freedom and Slavery

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930 to 945am = Announcements (Denny 317)
 - **Featured text —Douglass, Fifth of July Speech (1852)**
 - **Featured text —Frances Harper, Bury Me in a Free Land (1858)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context lecture: Abolitionism (Wingert)
- 1045am to 11am = Break
- 11am to 12pm = Subtext discussion (Mealy / Denny 212)
- 12pm to **1pm** = Lunch available (HUB)
- **1pm to 430pm** = Visit to State Capitol (meet outside Denny at 1pm)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- 7pm to 9pm = Dorm activities (**Optional** Brainstorming meetings)
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Thursday 7/16– American Feminism

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 945am = Announcements (Denny 317)
 - **Featured text —Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Declaration of Sentiments (1848)**
 - **Featured text —Sojourner Truth, woman's rights speech (1851)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context Lecture: Woman's Suffrage (Mealy)
- 1045am to 11am = Break
- 11am to 12pm = Subtext discussion (Pinsker / Denny 212)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- **115pm to 245pm** = Field trip: UGRR
 - Dickinson & Slavery (Meet at Old West)
 - Old Courthouse
- 3pm to 430pm = Admissions Activity: Application Process (Denny 112)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- 7pm to 9pm = Dorm activities (**Required** Brainstorming meetings)
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Friday 7/17 –Lincoln's Secession Crisis, and Ours

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930 to 945am = Announcements (Denny 317)
 - **Featured text —Lincoln, House Divided speech (1858)**
 - **Featured text —Lincoln, First Inaugural (1861)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context lecture: Secession Crisis (Pinsker)
- 1045am to 11am = Break
- 11am to 12pm = Workshop: Close Reading session (Denny 212)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- 130pm to 245pm = Workshop: League of Women Voters (Denny 112)
- 3pm to 430pm = Activity: Scavenger Hunt
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)

- 7pm to 10pm = Dorm activities
- 10pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Saturday 7/18 – Field Trip to Gettysburg

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 9am to 4pm = Activity: Field trip to Gettysburg (**Outside Denny at 9am**)
- **5pm to 6pm = Dinner available (HUB) (shortened hours)**
- 7pm to 10pm = Dorm activities
- 10pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Sunday 7/19 –Close Reading assignments

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 430pm = Denny 112 computer lab available
- 10am to 12pm = **Optional** Close Reading support (Tutors)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- 1pm to 4pm = **Required** Close Reading Draft Review (Grad TAs)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- 7pm to 10pm = Reading & writing time
- 10pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Week 2: The Other Lincoln-Douglass Debates

Monday 7/20 –New Birth of Freedom

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 945am = Announcements (Denny 317)
 - **Featured text —Lincoln, Gettysburg Address (1863)**
 - **Featured text —Douglass, Mission of the War (1864)**
 - **Featured text —Anna Dickinson, Perils of the Hour (1864)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context lecture: Election of 1864 (Pinsker)
- 1045am to 11am = Break
- 11am to 12pm = Subtext discussion (Mealy / Denny 212)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- 130pm to 230pm = Debate prep (TBD)
- 3pm to 430pm = Project work (TBD)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- **7pm = Close reading reflections due Monday night**
- 7pm to 9pm = Dorm activities (Massey's ice cream –free)
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Tuesday 7/21 – Defining Citizenship

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 945am = Announcements (Denny 317)

- **Featured text —Reconstruction Amendments (1865-70)**
- **Featured text —Emma Lazarus, New Colossus (1883)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context Lecture: Citizenship & Immigration (Wingert)
- 11am to 12pm = Subtext discussion (Pinsker / Denny 212)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- 130pm to 245pm = Debate prep (TBD)
- 3pm to 430pm = Admissions Activity: Financial Aid (Denny 112)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- 7pm to 9pm = Dorm activities
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Wednesday 7/22 –Field Trip to DC

- **7am to 730am = EARLY Breakfast only (HUB)**
- 730am to 9pm = Activity: Field trip to Washington DC
 - **Featured text –Douglass, Emancipation Memorial speech (1876)**
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Thursday 7/23 –Dreaming of Equality

- 7am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 945am = Announcements (Pinsker / Denny 317)
 - **Featured text —Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have a Dream (1963)**
 - **Featured text —Amanda Gorman, “The Hill We Climb” (2021)**
- 945am to 1045am = Context lecture: Civil Rights & Protest (Mealy)
- 1045am to 11am = Break
- 11am to 12pm = Subtext discussion (Pinsker / Denny 212)
- 12pm to 1pm = Lunch available (HUB)
- 130pm to 245pm = Debate prep (TBD)
- 3pm to 430pm = Admissions Activity: **Essays and Interviews** (Denny 112)
- 445pm to 630pm = Dinner available (HUB)
- 7pm to 9pm = Dorm activities (PowerPoint presentations)
- 9pm to 11pm = Personal time / lights out

Friday 7/24 –Closing Activities

- 8am to 9am = Breakfast available (HUB)
- 930am to 10am = Gettysburg Address Lectern + Artifacts with Craig Caba (Stern 102)
- 10am to 1130am = **Team Lincoln vs. Team Douglass Debates** (Stern 102)
- 1130am to 12pm = Photos with Gettysburg Address lectern (Stern 102)
- 12pm to 1pm = Luncheon with parents / guardians (Stern Great Room)
- 1pm to 2pm = Departure from dorm