**Course Description: “Walt Whitman and 1860’s America”**

In this series, we will cover the life and times of the transcendentalist poet, Walt Whitman. Through Whitman’s story, we will get a glimpse into five different aspects of the Civil War-era United States that illustrate how the nation was rapidly changing. The lectures will start in 1860 when Whitman published his first reprint of “Leaves of Grass” up to mid-1865 when he wrote his moving elegy to Abraham Lincoln “O’ Captain, My Captain”. We will discuss the rapid shifts in literature, immigration, abolitionism, military service, international relations, medicine, and national politics.

**Course Outline**

**Lecture 1: Leaves of Grass and the Outbreak of the Civil War**

Walt Whitman was a radical poet. He was also an individualist, an abolitionist, and a bisexual man who was not afraid to express himself. When secession began in earnest in 1860, he was completing his first reprint edition of “Leaves of Grass.” A book of poems that shocked the sensibilities of its day. His brother George enlisted in the Union army after Lincoln’s call for volunteers. Whitman wrote poems to encourage enlistment and played a part in the rush to enlist that swept New York.

**Lecture 2: Civil War Medicine and Matthew Brady’s Photography**

After his brother George was mistakenly listed as wounded, Walt moved to Washington D.C. While there, he became a volunteer nurse who tended to the wounded. His experiences showed him the horrors of modern war and brought him into contact with photographer Matthew Brady. This lecture will discuss how the civil war illustrated the deficiencies in the American medical system. We will also talk about how photographers like Brady brought the war’s cost to the American public in a way that it had never seen before.

**Lecture 3: The 1863 New York Draft Riots and the Anti-War Movement**

New York Harbor was one of the busiest harbors in the world in the 1860s. Walt Whitman was one of the best writers of his era at describing the increasingly cosmopolitan and volatile world of the Northern U.S. NYC was a central hub for immigrants fleeing the Irish Potato famine and the failed revolutions of 1848. It was also a city that was hit hard economically by the loss of trade from the South. Anti-war sentiments were exacerbated by the unpopular draft laws implemented by President Lincoln. In the summer of 1863 these feelings caused the city to spiral out of control.

**Lecture 4: The Death of Lincoln and Appomattox**

Having created a new life as a civil servant in Washington D.C., Whitman was able to see the closing days of the conflict from the heart of the American government. However, his success was undercut by the controversial nature of his poetry once again. Walt spent decades working on his poetry, ultimately earning his legacy as one of America’s greatest poets of the 19th century.