

Voting and Elections in American History

Professor Allan Lichtman

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Course Description

For most of American history, the right to vote has been a privilege restricted by wealth, sex, race, and literacy. Economic qualifications were finally eliminated in the nineteenth century, but the ideal of a White man's republic persisted long after that. Women and racial minorities had to fight hard and creatively to secure their voices. This course examines the history of voting and elections in America from the constitutional era through the present from an interdisciplinary perspective. It explores both theories of voting and elections and struggles for the vote by minority peoples, women, and other groups. These struggles have taken place in the streets, in the halls of legislatures, and in the courtrooms. It concludes by examining recent threats to American democracy and exploring ways to improve access to voting and ensure the conduct of free and fair elections in the United States.

Course Readings

1. Keyssar, Alexander. *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in America*. Basic Books, 2009.
2. Lichtman, Allan J. *The Embattled Vote in America: From the Founding to the Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
3. Lichtman, Allan J. *Predicting the Next President: The Keys to the White House, 2020*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.
4. Patterson, Thomas E. *Summary of The Mueller Report, for Those Too Busy to Read It All*. Independently Published, 2019.
5. Schulman, Marc. *History of American Presidential Elections, From George Washington to Joe Biden*. New Rochelle: MultiEducator Press, 2021.
6. Zelizer, Julian E., Ed. *The Presidency of Donald J. Trump: A First Historical Assessment*. Princeton University Press, 2022.

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives

1. Communication Skills (Written Presentation): Students will be able to demonstrate their mastery of the knowledge and skills involved in historical practice in a clear and organized manner both in written assignments and orally in Q&As.
2. Historical Understanding: Students should be able to grasp the broad historical significance of struggles for voting rights across the broad span of American history, through our own time.
3. Interpreting Primary and Secondary Sources: Students will be able to deal with both primary and secondary sources regarding history and current affairs and determine how they provide insight into voting and elections in America.

Class Schedule

Week 1: February 9: Voting and Elections in the Constitutional Era

Readings

- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 1–48.
- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 1–35.
- Schulman, pp. 1–31.
- Keyssar, pp. 1–106.

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
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Week 2: February 16: A White Man’s Republic

Readings

- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 36–98.
- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 49–80.
- Schulman, pp. 32–95.
- Keyssar, pp. 107–196.
- “*Hobbs v. Fogg*,” Pennsylvania Supreme Court, 1837, accessed on Westlaw. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
- Short Paper One
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session One: Tuesday, February 21 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 3: February 23: Contested Elections, 1800, 1824, and 1876

Readings

- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 40–43, 50–51, and 92–93.
- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 60–63.
- Schulman, pp. 35–36, 42–43, and 74–76.
- “Remarks of Members of the Electoral Commission,” *Congressional Record*, April 10, 1877, accessed on HathiTrust, pp. 65–67, 73–78. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
- Final Paper/Project Question
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.

Week 4: March 2: Votes for Women

Readings

- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 99–146.
- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 91–94.
- Schulman, pp. 110–111.
- Keyssar, pp. 278–348.
- Seneca Falls Convention, “Declaration of Sentiments,” 1848, accessed on Arizona State University. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
- Short Paper Two
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Two: Tuesday, March 7 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 5: March 9: The Voting Rights Act

Readings

- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 147–179.
- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 94–142.
- Schulman, pp. 112–149, 394–407.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
- Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
 2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.

Week 6: March 16: Enforcing the Voting Rights Act

Readings

- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 180–230.
- Keyssar, pp. 408–476.
- "Shelby County V. Holder, 570 U.S. 529," 2013, accessed on SupremeCourt.gov. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week 7: March 23: The Election of 1980 and the Conservative Revolution

Readings

- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 143–175.
- Schulman, pp. 150–176.
- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 178–179.

- "The Republican 'Contract with America,'" 1994, accessed on Global.Oup.com. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - Short Paper Four
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 8: March 30: The Clinton Scandal and the Contested Election of 2000

Readings

- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 164–170.
- Keyssar, pp. 488–540.
- Schulman, pp. 172–173.
- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 180–186.
- Allan J. Lichtman, "Appendix X: Supplemental Report on the Racial Impact of the Rejection of Ballots Cast in Florida's 2000 Presidential Election and In Response to the Statement of the Dissenting Commissioners and Report by Dr. John Lott Submitted to the United States Senate Committee on Rules in July 2001," August 2001, accessed on USCCR.gov. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.)

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Q&A Session Three: Tuesday, April 4 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 9: April 6: The Election of 2016

Readings

- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 220–223.
- Patterson, all.
- Schulman, pp. 188–190.

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
 - Short Paper Five
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 10: April 13: Elections Have Consequences. The Aftermath of 2016

Readings

- Zelizer, pp. 27–334.

Assignments

- Rough Draft
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Q&A Session Four: Tuesday, April 18 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 11: April 20: The Election of 2020 and Aftermath

Readings

- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 191–196.
- Zelizer to completion
- Schulman, pp. 192–195.
- “Report of the January 6 Committee.” (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine

Q&A Session Five: Tuesday, April 25 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 12: April 27: Reforming Voting and Elections

- Lichtman, *The Embattled Vote in America*, pp. 230–257.

- Lichtman, *Predicting the Next President*, pp. 197–203.
- Keyssar, pp. 553–566.
- “Report of the January 6 Committee.” (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)

Assignments

- Final Paper/Project

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers

Throughout each term students will complete five short papers. Each of these assignments should be 1–2 pages in length, in 12 pt. font, and double-spaced. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings.

Discussion Board Posts

Students will respond to nine virtual discussion board posts for each course. Discussion boards are led by the section professor, who will provide an analytical prompt related to course material and instructions for participation. These prompts will give students the opportunity to interact with fellow students and share their interpretation of course themes.

Question-and-Answer Sessions

Throughout the semester the lead scholar of each course will conduct five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1–2 paragraph evaluation within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If students cannot attend three of the five Q&A sessions, they may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 1–2 page review of topics covered for each missed Q&A.

Final Paper/Project

For the final assignment of each term, students will choose to complete either a 15-page research paper or a research project. The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts, documentary editing and transcription, podcasts, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. The section professor must approve research projects.

Both final assignment options require students to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that they do not yet know the answer to. They will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether students choose to pursue a paper or project, papers and projects are broken down into smaller assignments, or scaffolded, throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows students time to incorporate instructor feedback into their assignment.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Paper/Project Proposal (2%):

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final paper or project. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information on and historical context for your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be very specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing), and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (What is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked, such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%):

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan to use in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Paper or Project Preview (5%):

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.