

History 295: Contested U.S. Presidential Elections

Fall 2024 Prof. Sarah J. Purcell (she/her)

M, W, F 8:00-8:50 am HSSC S3325 August 30-October 18, 2024

Open Office hours: M, W 9:00-11:00 am and by appointment

Office: ARH 3238 Office Phone: 269-3091 Cell Phone: 515-497-0778

E-mail: PURCELL@grinnell.edu

Please come and see me during office hours, or make an appointment, so I can meet you one-on-one. I can always make time to meet with you, so just ask if the open office hours don't work for you. Please email, call, or text me any time for help with class, or with anything else. I encourage you to take care of yourself. Let me know what you need, and try to share any concerns before they become severe. I am VERY flexible, and I will always listen to you. Share your triumphs, too. I expect flexibility from you, and you may expect it from me. Please communicate, so we can help one another.

Please consider wearing a face mask in class and definitely wear one if you have been sick or anytime you visit my office. I have a medical condition that necessitates extra COVID precaution, and I will always have masks to share with you.

Course Description:

This 8-week short-course is designed to give students historical context and understanding of the U.S. Presidential elections, and especially to contextualize elections whose results have been contested. Students will critically reflect on the specific context of contested elections in U.S. history as a way to understand the political system and to question various outcomes of constitutional and political procedures and disagreements. How often have the results of U.S. presidential elections been uncertain or challenged by the candidates, states, or political parties? What caused the contestation in different eras of political contest? How were contests resolved? Were contested elections the product of constitutional or electoral processes, or did they spring from "norms" and ideological clashes relating to the issues of the day? What do contested presidential elections reveal about American society, and how does this history help us understand the context for the upcoming 2024 presidential election?

Students will read and discuss primary and secondary sources that will help them form historical interpretations of past contested presidential elections in U.S. history, and

they will work together to create a website offering historical commentary on contested elections that will offer the public context for the 2024 election. Do contested elections represent a threat to American democracy across time, or do they show the system in action? How can historians help the public understand elections and enhance civic participation?

Course Objectives:

Students in this class will learn to:

- *Analyze the political history of contested U.S. Presidential elections in specific context
- *Understand how the presidential electoral process works and is shaped over time by politics, parties, race, gender, and legal culture
- *Articulate how historians can create interpretations of the past that inform current events and public understanding of them
- *Create public-facing online writing projects that analyze contested U.S. presidential elections
- *Interpret and analyze primary and secondary sources, especially for U.S. political history
- *Draw larger conclusions about U.S. society from histories of political events and electoral politics

Student Responsibilities:

- Join in all small-group work, online discussion posts, online activities, and live discussions. Comment on other students' blog posts.
- Communicate with Prof. Purcell frequently.
- Read your email daily, and be sure to respond to any requests (such as requests to fill in surveys) from Prof. Purcell and your peers.
- Turn in your assignments by the deadlines, but if you need extensions or other flexible arrangements, DEFINITELY ask for them. Prof. Purcell expects you to ask for help, and she will give it.
- Consult and follow the rules for Academic Honesty in the Grinnell College Student Handbook and the college catalog. You can see the academic catalog policies on "Honesty in Academic Work" here: <https://catalog.grinnell.edu/content.php?catoid=34&navoid=5483#honest-academic>
- If you use ChatCPT or any other AI technology for this class, you must acknowledge it in citations. We may be using and critiquing AI tools in class from time to time, but I recommend that you avoid trying to use AI technology to help you draft writing assignments, unless assignments explicitly direct you otherwise.
- Follow University of Chicago (17th Edition) style citations in footnotes or endnotes for all assignments in this course, unless the assignment directs you explicitly to do something else. You may consult the *Chicago Manual of Style*

online through the Grinnell College Library catalog here: <https://www-chicagomanualofstyle-org.grinnell.idm.oclc.org/book/ed17/frontmatter/toc.html>

- Engage respectfully and vigorously with your classmates. We will *certainly* disagree many times over the semester as we debate primary and secondary sources (and even current events), but keep in mind our common goal of advancing group knowledge. Be respectful and well prepared.
- Engage with the material, and be ready for controversy and difficult subjects. Take care of yourself as you learn to engage with difficult topics from the past that are, nonetheless, vital to understanding the world.

Note: Some of our primary sources may contain extremely offensive language and imagery. To quote literary scholar Dr. Koritha Mitchell, we are scholars, “not re-enactors, so we need not let the text dictate what we *give life to* in the classroom (korithamitchell.com).” The same goes for our online discussion. We can’t eliminate all racist, sexist, and other offensive language in our sources—but we always need to remember the historical context. Some slurs are too much. I, for one, do not ever say “the N-word” out loud (or typed in a discussion board), and I expect no one to do so in this class. If you want to read a quotation out loud (or type one) with the word in it, just say “N” or “N-word,” instead. Please be sensitive to other slurs, also, and feel comfortable substituting a similar short-hand substitution in our discussions. We have to grapple with these concepts, but we do not have to give voice to hatred.

Prepare yourself when encountering primary sources—they may all contain upsetting material. Reach out if you need extra support—we can analyze this material and learn how people in the past fought back without letting the material ruin us, and Prof. Purcell can help.

Student Support:

- You can expect support from Prof. Purcell for any kind of need (personal or academic) in this class. Feel invited to call, text, or email her at any time. If you have any questions or need help of any kind, you can always start by asking Prof. Purcell.
- You may consult with the Grinnell College Writing, Speaking, and Reading Lab on any assignment in this course, unless specifically prohibited on the assignment. Make an appointment [here](#).
- If you experience any tech problems at all, please let Prof. Purcell know, and she will help you contact the relevant Grinnell College office to get help solving your issues.
- For health needs (physical and mental), please consult with Student Health and Wellness [here](#)
- If you require accommodation for any diagnosed disability, please speak with Prof. Purcell during the first few days of class. Grinnell College (and Prof. Purcell) provide reasonable accommodations. Students must also arrange their accommodations with Accessibility and Disability Services; contact Jae Baldree at 641-269-3710 or email [baldreej]. Information available [here](#).

- Grinnell College is committed to compliance with Title IX and to supporting the academic success of pregnant and parenting students and students with pregnancy related conditions. If you are a pregnant student, have pregnancy related conditions, or are a parenting student (child under one-year needs documented medical care) who wishes to request reasonable related supportive measures from the College under Title IX, please email the Title IX Coordinator at titleix@grinnell.edu. The Title IX Coordinator will work with Disability Resources and your professors to provide reasonable supportive measures in support of your education while pregnant or as a parent under Title IX.

If you have other needs not addressed above, please let me know soon so that we can work together for the best possible learning environment. In some cases, I will recommend consulting with the Academic Advising staff. They are an excellent resource for developing strategies for academic success and can connect you with other campus resources as well: <http://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/academic-advising>. If I notice that you are encountering difficulty, in addition to communicating with you directly about it, I will also likely submit an academic alert via Academic Advising's SAL portal. This reminds you of my concern, and it notifies the Academic Advising team and your adviser(s) so that they can reach out to you with additional offers of support.

Illness & Attendance policy

Attendance is important to this class, so please attend if at all possible. That being said, we all know that illness can/will happen, **and you should NOT attend class if you are ill**. Please email Prof. Purcell (if possible) if you are ill, and we will make arrangements for how you can keep up with course work on a flexible schedule (depending upon how ill you are). You don't need to provide a doctor's note, or to give Prof. Purcell details about your health challenge, just reveal that you need to be out of class, and we will adjust.

If you need to miss class for a religious holiday, athletics, or other co-curricular activity, please tell Prof. purcell in advance, and she will support you.

There is only one required book purchase for this class (all other readings are on reserve/linked in the syllabus):

Richard Beeman, ed. *The Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution* (Penguin Books, 2012)

Grading:

For this course you will be graded for your class engagement and your production of public communication—historical contextualizing of contested U.S. presidential elections).

Class engagement: 30% (Class engagement will consist of in-class discussion and participation, contributions to the news discussion board, volunteer note-taking posts, online comments on class-mates' public blog posts, attendance at campus or online events with discussion board reflection, and any other engagement that you propose via email to Prof. Purcell)

Primary Source assignment: 5%

Blog posts: 10% each (Blog posts will be graded on a completion basis. If you complete four public blog posts, you will receive an "A"; three public blog posts will earn a "B"; two public blog posts will earn a "C"; one public blog post will earn a "D"; zero public blog posts will earn a failing grade) Instructions and a rubric for the blog posts will be distributed in class.

Final Project: (informal proposal, informal reflection, final public communication): 25%

Course Schedule:

Before you come to class, please complete the class survey here:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=Pp5PUsr6ZE-z7K2yuu6IB4MWJLhqh5PvX5GkfiDVj9UQUpPWlUyVUVKTUE4TzhZUFIPNVc1Qo1QUC4u>

Week One: Historians and Presidential Elections

Friday, August 30: **Course Introduction: Using History to Contextualize Elections**

Week Two: The Bugs in the System

Monday, September 2 The Constitution and Presidential Elections

Reading Due:

- Beeman, *The Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution*, pp. xxv-xlv, 25-77 (concentrate especially on pp. 49-60)
- Jack N. Rakove, "Presidential Selection: Electoral Fallacies," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 1 (2004): 21-37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20202303>

1800 The Results Weren't Contested, but the Election Was

Wednesday, September 4 The Election of 1800

Reading Due:

- James Horn, "Election of 1800," *Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia*, <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/election-1800/>
- Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello, "A Nation Divided: The Election of 1800" interactive site, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/wgURxDCU-6gaJA>
- National Constitution Center, "Adams Jefferson and the Turbulent Election of 1800," <https://constitutioncenter.org/news-debate/americas-town-hall-programs/adams-jefferson-and-the-turbulent-election-of-1800> (as part of this, watch YouTube Video-- <https://www.youtube.com/live/UtMyVYosLv8?si=Dh7F7sBvTlRydoLh> OR listen to podcast-- <https://megaphone.link/NCC6290644154>)
- John J. Turner, Jr., "The Twelfth Amendment and the First American Party System," *The Historian* 35 (February 1973): 221-237, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24443256>
- Beeman, *The Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution*, pp. 94-97

Friday, September 6 Interpreting the Primary Sources

Reading Due:

- Thomas N. Baker, "'An Attack Well Directed' Aaron Burr Intrigues for the Presidency," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 4 (2011): 553-98, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41261652>
- Herbert Sloan, "'In a Choice of Evils... Jefferson Is in Every View Less Dangerous than Burr': Alexander Hamilton to Harrison Gray Otis on the Deadlocked Presidential Election of 1800," *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (2004): 53-57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163723>
- Library of Congress, "Creating the United States: Election of 1800," <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/election-of-1800.html> (click through to read the documents)
- Resource: Founders Online Database: <https://founders.archives.gov/>

Primary-Source Assignment due at 5:00 pm on P-web

Week Three: **1824** The "Corrupt Bargain," Congress, and the Electoral College

Monday, September 9 The Election of 1824

Reading Due:

- William Nester, “The Corrupt Bargain,” In *The Age of Jackson and the Art of American Power, 1815-1848* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 88-100, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1ddr8oh.11>
- Margaret Hogan, “Corrupt Bargain,” The Miller Center at the University of Virginia, <https://millercenter.org/contested-presidential-elections/corrupt-bargain>
- Donald Ratcliffe, “Popular Preferences in the Presidential Election of 1824,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 1 (2014): 45–77, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24486931>

Wednesday, September 11 Interpreting the Primary Sources

Reading Due:

- Craig B. Hollander, “Corrupt Bargaining: Partisan Politics, the Election of 1824, and the Suppression of the African Slave Trade,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 42 (3): 359–87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27284359>
- Library of Congress, “Presidential Election of 1824: A Resource Guide,” <https://guides.loc.gov/presidential-election-1824/digital-collections>

Friday, September 13 Engaging the Public

Blog post due at NOON

Week Four: **1860** This Means War

Monday, September 16 The Election of 1860

Reading Due:

- Michael Burlingame, “Abraham Lincoln: Campaigns and Elections,” University of Virginia Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/president/lincoln/campaigns-and-elections>
- Adam I. P. Smith, “Beyond the Realignment Synthesis: The 1860 Election Reconsidered,” in *America at the Ballot Box: Elections and Political History*, ed. Gareth Davies and Julian Zelizer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 59-74, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16f8d6d.6>
- Jon Grinspan, “‘Young Men for War’: The Wide Awakes and Lincoln’s 1860 Presidential Campaign,” *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 2 (2009): 357–78, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25622297>

Wednesday, September 18 Interpreting the Primary Sources

Reading Due:

- *Library of Congress, “Presidential Election of 1860: A Resource Guide,”* <https://guides.loc.gov/presidential-election-1860/digital-collections>
- *Sally Heinzl, “To Protect the Rights of the White Race:’ Illinois Republican Racial Politics in the 1860 Campaign and the Twenty-Second General Assembly,”* *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1998) 108, no. 3–4 (2015): 374–406, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jillistathistsoc.108.3-4.0374>

Thursday, September 19 Optional Class-Engagement Event: Documentary “Texas USA” and discussion with producer Sarah Labowitz ’04, sponsored by the Rosenfield Program
Time and Location TBA

Friday, September 20 Engaging the Public: How Did the Election of 1860 precipitate secession and the U.S. Civil War?

Blog post due at NOON

Week Five: **1876** The “Compromise” that Killed Reconstruction

Monday, September 23 The Election of 1876

Reading Due:

- *Beeman, The Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, pp. 98-104*
- *Shiela Blackford, “Disputed Election of 1876,” University of Virginia Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/disputed-election-1876>*
- *Michael A. Ross, “Rutherford B. Hayes,” in The Presidents and the Constitution: A Living History, ed. by Ken Gormley, 253–65.(New York: NYU Press, 2016), 253-65, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1803zfw.22>*
- *Watch: “History with David Rubenstein, Manisha Sinha,” PBS, February 8, 2023 (26:40), <https://www.pbs.org/video/manisha-sinha-pxiqzt/>*
- *Michael W. Fitzgerald and Mark Bohnhorst, “Reconstruction, Racial Terror, and the Electoral College,” The Journal of the Civil War Era 14, no. 1 (March 2024): 31-57, <https://muse-jhu-edu.grinnell.idm.oclc.org/pub/12/article/919853>*

Wednesday, September 25 Interpreting the Primary Sources

Readings Due:

- *Kate Côté Gillin, “Sin and Redemption: The Election of 1876,” In Shrill Hurrahs: Women, Gender, and Racial Violence in South Carolina, 1865-*

1900, 80–104 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013),
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv6sj8sb.9>

- Library of Congress, “Presidential Election of 1876: A Resource Guide,”
<https://guides.loc.gov/presidential-election-1876/digital-collections>

Friday, September 27: Engaging the Public

Reading Due:

- *Equal Justice Initiative*, “Reconstruction in America,” Chapter 3, *Documenting Reconstruction Violence*,
<https://eji.org/report/reconstruction-in-america/documenting-reconstruction-violence/>
- John Copeland Nagle, “How Not to Count Votes,” *Columbia Law Review* 104, no. 6 (2004): 1732–64, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4099382>

Blog post due at NOON

Week Six: **2000** The Electoral College and The Supreme Court

Monday, September 30 The Election of 2000

Due for today:

- Watch: CNN, “*Bush v. Gore: Too Close to Call*,” (2015),
<https://youtu.be/wufOcpTHoHU?si=HJjcyBN26n9NmTMn> (42:18)
- Listen to podcast: *On the Media*, “What *Bush v. Gore* Revealed about Contested Elections,” WNYC, May 17, 2024,
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/articles/what-bush-v-gore-revealed-about-contested-elections?tab=transcript> (57:17)

October 1 at 7:30 pm --Optional Class Engagement event: Federico Finchelstein—a historian at the New School for Social Research who studies fascism, populism, and the Dirty Wars in Argentina—will deliver a talk based on his new book, *The Wannabe Fascists: A Guide to Understanding the Greatest Threat to Democracy* (University of California Press, 2024), which places Donald Trump in the context of other illiberal leaders from around the world, including Jair Bolsonaro, Viktor Orbán, and Narendra Modi. Sponsored by the Rosenfield Program—location TBA.

Wednesday, October 2 Interpreting the Primary Sources

Reading Due:

- E. J. Dionne and William Kristol, eds. *Bush v. Gore: The Court Cases and the Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001),
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctvddztfj>; Read Chronology and Introduction, choose at least ONE court case to read carefully

Friday, October 4: Engaging the Public

- *Resource: Library of Congress, United States Elections Web Archive, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/united-states-elections-web-archive/about-this-collection/>*

Blog post due at NOON

Week Seven: **2020** Can an Election Be Overturned?

Monday, October 7 The Election of 2020

Watch Documentaries (this will take about four hours, more if you choose three total documentaries):

- *Choose ONE or TWO of the documentaries from this list “January 6, Three Years Later, 10 Documentaries to Watch” [Frontline, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/january-6-insurrection-capitol-attack-documentaries-streaming/> ; write down which titles you watch, and take notes](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/january-6-insurrection-capitol-attack-documentaries-streaming/)*
- *EVERYONE WATCH “Democracy on Trial (full documentary),” [Frontline, PBS, dir. Michael Kirk \(2024\) \[https://youtu.be/Y44fyh4ap7k?si=b5-S_cDryiLTTkvR\]\(https://youtu.be/Y44fyh4ap7k?si=b5-S_cDryiLTTkvR\) \(2:23:18\)](https://youtu.be/Y44fyh4ap7k?si=b5-S_cDryiLTTkvR)*

Wednesday, October 9 The Role of Historians

Reading Due:

- *Introduction & Roundtable in [January 6 and the Politics of History](#), ed. Jim Downs (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2024), 1-70.*
- *Barbara F. Walter, “Democracy Needs the Loser,” [The New Yorker](#), August 24, 2024, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-weekend-essay/democracy-needs-the-loser>*
- *Browse Resource: “Select January 6th Committee Final Report and Supporting Materials Collection,” <https://www.govinfo.gov/collection/january-6th-committee-final-report?path=/GPO/January%206th%20Committee%20Final%20Report%20and%20Supporting%20Materials%20Collection>*

October 10 at 11:00 am Optional Class Engagement Event: Scholar’s Convocation Talk by historian Kathleen Belew of Northwestern University—author of *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* and coeditor of *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*. Co-sponsored by the Rosenfield Program and the Department of History. Talk title and Location TBA

Friday, October 11: Engaging the Public

Final Project informal proposal due at NOON on Pweb

Week Eight: Contested Elections: What Does History Show Us?

Monday, October 14 Final Project

Wednesday, October 16 Final Project

Wednesday, October 15 **NOON** “Election Table” sponsored by the Rosenfield Program—show off your public project, and help lead a community discussion about the upcoming election.

Friday, October 18 **Final Project must be completed, and individual reflection turned in by 5:00 pm today!**