

Voting Rights and Black Electoral Power in the 21st Century

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Abstract: The 2020 presidential election was unprecedented in many ways, but the controversy around the election's results reignited long-standing debates about voting rights across the country. While former president Trump and his surrogates blasted election results from major cities such as Detroit, Atlanta, and Philadelphia as fraudulent, top intelligence officials and local elections officials repeatedly stated that there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud or cybercrime. The racial subtext of Trump's accusations of fraud was clear, and the subsequent push by many Republican state legislatures to enact restrictions on voting has raised alarm among voting rights advocates, who view such changes as the expansion or reimposition of racist voter suppression laws. It is important for high school students to understand the historical background, current details, and future possibilities in these controversies over voting rights and election results. In addition, students must be able to assess the credibility and arguments of different news and media sources as they enter into civic life. This unit seeks to ground the controversy of the 2020 election in the historical efforts for Black electoral power in the United States while also highlighting important intellectuals and figures in current political discourse. Students in AP Seminar will read and view *The Devil You Know: A Black Power Manifesto* and *All In: The Fight For Democracy* for summer homework, then read selections from *Stolen Justice: The Struggle for African American Voting Rights* in early September to build a common base of knowledge around the past and current state of voting rights in America. Afterwards, students will work in small groups to research a specific subtopic related to voting rights and/or Black electoral power, building skills in research, writing, and presentation through a "dress rehearsal" for Performance Task 1 in AP Seminar.

Keywords: inquiry-based learning, student research, media literacy, voting rights, civil rights, interdisciplinary curriculum, dialogical pedagogy, civic education

Rationale: I teach in a STEM-focused magnet school that has about 800 students. School statistics list the student body as "63% African American, 13% Asian, 10% Latino, 8% Caucasian, and 6% 'other.'" In the past seven years, the school has dramatically expanded AP Enrollment and AP course offerings, with over 25% students taking at least one of the 16 AP Courses. I teach AP Seminar and AP Research in a two-year sequence in 11th and 12th grade, with the interdisciplinary skills in writing and analysis in the former course forming the foundation for a year-long, discipline-specific inquiry project in the latter course. This unit will be used in the summer and early fall of AP Seminar. It will serve as a "Dress Rehearsal" for students to practice the components of the AP Seminar performance tasks that they will embark upon later on in the year.

Content Objectives

Curriculum Objectives

My main objective in pursuing this curriculum unit is to respond to student feedback and interest over the past few years. Next fall will be my fourth year teaching AP Seminar, and I have had the opportunity to receive honest feedback from the AP Seminar students at the end of each year. Without fail, each year I have been told that units that address current events and controversies are the most engaging, and that group work is more meaningful when it allows for autonomy. Additionally, this past year I have worked as a faculty sponsor for the Political Action Committee of the Black Student Union at my school, where I have heard my students discuss time and time again the importance of voter education and their disappointment at not having a more robust curriculum about voting in their high school classes. Finally, in discussing the 2020 election and the 2021 Senate runoff in Georgia with students, I have heard students' interest specifically in learning more about Black electoral power, historically and today. In this way, this unit addresses the specific and timely feedback of students, while also fitting into an existing AP curricular framework (see section to follow for a detailed description of the AP Seminar Performance Tasks).

My secondary objective in this curriculum unit is to prepare students for lifelong civic engagement. Nationwide, such a challenge is steep for educators: as the United States Department of Education's 2020 report, *Educating for American Democracy*, notes, "we as a nation have failed to prepare young Americans for self-government, leaving the world's oldest constitutional democracy in grave danger, afflicted by both cynicism and nostalgia" (p. 8). However, the same report concludes that "all are called to participate in a shared project of achieving excellence in history and civic education in support of civic strength" (p. 8). While the outcome of the Department of Education's grave assessment and its proposed solutions is unsure, the substantial rise in turnout among youth voters in the 2020 election (Redden, 2021) is a sign that perhaps all is not lost, and I hope that my students and I are part of a positive change.

Theoretical Approach to the Curriculum

Before detailing the scope and content of this curriculum, I will review two key theoretical concepts undergirding the content and pedagogy of this unit.

Theoretical Concept #1: Social Epistemology and Societal Injustice

Fundamental to any democracy is a shared notion of reality on which citizens can base their actions, their decisions, and their votes. Jonathan Rauch (2018) refers to such an ideal as the "constitution of knowledge" and notes how agreement on the *means* of such a constitution of knowledge (e.g. free speech, open debate, objective fact-finding

methods) are more important than content of the constitution of knowledge itself; if the process is trustworthy, so too will be the knowledge that is produced. However, as philosophers of social epistemology have noted, the production of knowledge is influenced by the systems of oppression in which that knowledge is produced (Grasswick, 2018). Put simply, history--and in fact the present, too--is written by the victors, or those most powerful in a society. In order to understand the relationship between democracy and truth, then, it is necessary to understand the relationship between societal injustice and social epistemology.

In his foundational work *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1997) analyzes the relationship between power and knowledge production. He describes the omission of information and narratives of marginalized people as “silences” in the past. He notes that:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance) (p. 26).

By Trouillot’s reckoning, every step of the process of knowledge production is a site of silencing, and thus “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences” (p. 27). In this way, past inequalities persist in historical narratives and are re-enacted in the telling of such narratives.

Where Trouillot’s theory of historical silencing can help illuminate the injustices in the social epistemology of the past, Miranda Fricker (2011) establishes a framework explaining how such injustices function in the present in her book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Fricker’s framework rests on two key concepts: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice is the idea whereby a person’s testimony on an issue is disregarded or devalued because of societal prejudice towards their identity as a member of a marginalized group--for example, for hundreds of years, the viewpoints and experiences of women and people of color in America have been ignored and excluded from official political and legal discourse. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when there is a gap between a person’s experience and the broader societal norms of interpretation that leaves that person unable to convey their experience in a manner broadly comprehensible to others--for example, instances of sexual discrimination in male-dominated workplaces are often dismissed due to such workplaces’ broad ignorance of the experiences of women. Building on Fricker’s work, Fatima (2020) notes how microaggressions in social, academic, and workplace life cause “epistemic harm” both in the initial burden upon the microaggressed person to contend with the falsity of the microaggression itself and the secondary burden of contending with gaslighting as explanations of benign intention are offered by the microaggressor(s).

Fatima notes how this combination of epistemic harms “results in the microaggressed doubting her own perception of reality” (p. 169).

It is essential to review the work of scholars in the Black feminist tradition to understand how race and gender intersect in issues of societal injustice, and, therefore, social epistemology. Writing from a legal and political perspective, Crenshaw (1989) notes how the narrow focus of antiracist politics and the narrow application of antidiscrimination law can ignore and erase the experiences of Black women, who experience multiple overlapping experiences of racism and sexism in society. Crenshaw views this erasure of Black women’s experiences as a consequence of epistemic injustices *within* feminist and antiracist movements, arguing that “both feminist theory and antiracist politics have been organized...around the equation of racism with what happens to the Black middle-class or to Black men, and the equation of sexism with what happens to white women” (p. 152). Collins (1989) details the intractability of white patriarchy in academic institutions, explaining how intersectional privilege and intersectional oppression reinforce a white patriarchal status quo:

Since the general culture shaping taken-for-granted knowledge of the community of experts is one permeated by widespread notions of Black and female inferiority, new knowledge claims that seem to violate these fundamental assumptions are likely to be viewed as anomalies. Moreover, specialized thought challenging notions of Black and female inferiority is unlikely to be generated from within a white-male-controlled academic community because both the kinds of questions that could be asked and the explanations that would be found satisfying would necessarily reflect a basic lack of familiarity with Black women’s reality (p. 752).

In this way, Crenshaw’s (1989) and Collins’ (1989) critiques of the structures of knowledge production in society highlight how ways of knowing are inseparable from forms of power.

As this brief review shows, the relationship between societal injustice and social epistemology is a complex web of overlapping systems of power. In this context, Rauch’s (2018) “constitution of knowledge” is a goal rather than a present achievement for American democracy.

Theoretical Concept #2: Facts, Opinions, and Democracy

Central to the contemporary controversy on elections (and to Donald Trump’s former presidency) is a debate over facts and opinions. While numerous government officials declared the 2020 presidential election to be accurate and confirmed that no widespread election fraud occurred, former President Trump continued to allege voter fraud and maintain his victory, only recently admitting that he did not, in fact, win the

election (Solender, 2021). Trump's presidency and his 2020 election loss have raised fundamental questions about truth and democracy. In this section, I will review some key philosophical ideas related to facts, opinions, and democracy in order to provide context for this curricular unit.

A first important distinction to make is the difference between facts and opinions, and, more specifically, what *type* of difference there is between the two. While in common parlance facts and opinions are regarded as different in *degree*, forming opposite ends of a sort of spectrum of truthiness, Christoffer Lammer-Heindel (2016) instead argues that facts and opinions are entirely different in *kind*. According to Lammer-Heindel, facts are simply "the state of affairs or the reality to which a true statement corresponds" (p. 1). Lammer-Heindel defines opinions as beliefs without evidence, contrasting opinions with matters of taste (personal aesthetic preferences) and supported judgments (beliefs supported by strong evidence). In Lammer-Heindel's view, a focus on facts vs. opinions is unproductive, obscuring the more important distinction between opinions (beliefs without evidence) and supported judgments (beliefs with evidence) that forms the basis for most disagreements and debates in public life and politics.

On the question of *who* is able to discern facts, that is, who is able to discern reality, Lammer-Heindel (2016) posits that "the ability to make an informed judgment as to what the facts are in a certain situation is a function of available evidence, experience, training, and so forth" (p. 2). In other words, experts (in an experiential, not technocratic sense of the word) are custodians of truth. These definitions are helpful for intellectual debate, but what happens when a president is not concerned with truth, or endorses "alternative facts"? C. G. Prado (2017) asks this question in his essay "Post-Truth," an analysis of the opening months of the Trump presidency. As Prado sees it, Trump's rampant lying in the campaign and early days of the presidency are emblematic of the concept of "post-truth," a political and rhetorical approach that blatantly disregards facts altogether. Evidence is not used to support claims. Rather, "Post-truth...is wholly subjective in that it is defined by a personal feeling or belief" (p. 31). Where political norms might dictate that presidents at least attempt to marshal the facts in support of their rhetoric, Trump, in Prado's view, has disregarded such norms completely. In this way, Trump's use of post-truth rhetoric comes closest to Lammer-Heindel's (2016) definition of opinions: beliefs without evidence. So why does post-truth work? Surely millions of people would not choose to disregard reality in their support of a politician? As Prado notes, emotions and prior antipathies may be just as powerful than facts in the political sphere: "Trump avails himself of...long-standing prejudices that make his rhetorically exuberant assertions acceptable to many" (p. 29-31).

Jonathan Rauch (2018) notes how the rise of social media, internet discourse, and the "clickbait economy" (p. 133) provided fertile ground for such post-truth take root, but argues that the courts, the press, and the academy to some extent have resisted this "troll

epistemology” (p. 129). In order for public truth (what Rauch calls the “constitution of knowledge”) to survive, though, Rauch argues that norms of free speech and open debate must be nurtured in order for a shared public sense of reality to survive. Similarly, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (2004), in their book *Why Deliberative Democracy*, contend that our democracy should be reformed into a deliberative democracy by elevating four essential elements: reason-giving, accessibility, binding decisions, and dynamic debate. Regardless of the philosophical or political approach, it is clear that facts and truth are essential to a functioning democracy. As Sophia Rosenfeld (2018) maintains in her book *Democracy and Truth: A Short History*, “Even where truth is unfixed, contested, and precarious, it remains essential that it lasts as a political horizon” (p. 19).

Linking theoretical concepts to unit content

Having reviewed the core theoretical concepts behind this unit, I will now explain the link between such theory and the content in this unit. The present controversy over voting rights and elections is situated at the nexus of democracy, truth, and social epistemology. The content of this unit asks students to choose a topic that addresses this nexus, framing the present controversy as part of a historical continuum of a struggle for Black electoral power in the United States. Each of the topics presented in the resource bank for student research (see below) invites students to explore these connections in depth.

For example: racial disparities in voting wait times result in people of color waiting much longer than white people to vote. From an epistemic perspective, these disparities have been widely documented in several recent elections; per Lammer-Heindel (2016), they constitute a fact of “the state of affairs” of reality. However, such facts have not entered the general “constitution of knowledge” in America (Rauch, 2018). Rather, they have been subject to debate in a “post-truth” (Prado, 2017) political climate in which some politicians and constituents are unwilling or unable to acknowledge such a reality. This denial of such disparities is a clear example of Fricker’s (2011) concepts of testimonial injustice (the disbelief of a person’s word because of their identity in society) and hermeneutic injustice (the inability of people in a dominant group in society to comprehend the experience of people of a different identity). Such injustice is perhaps most clear in the case of Stacey Abrams’ run in the 2018 Georgia gubernatorial election. In her resistance to gaslighting (Fatima, 2020) regarding these disparities in the aftermath of this election, she was also the subject of intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) criticism from political opponents and media pundits.

The example above illustrates how student research topics in this unit trace the nexus of democracy, truth, and social epistemology through the lens of the struggle for Black electoral power. While students have the option to research any topic related to elections and voting rights, I have tried to select topics that lend themselves to such analysis: gerrymandering, prison gerrymandering, felony disenfranchisement, mail-in

ballots, *Shelby County vs. Holder*, racial disparities in voting wait times, voter roll purging, and restrictive voting bills after the 2020 election.

Linking theoretical concepts to unit pedagogy

In what follows below, I will discuss the specifics of the curricular unit, noting how the skills in the unit link specifically to the theoretical concepts discussed above.

Task: “Dress Rehearsal” for Performance Task 1: Team Multimedia Project (TMP)

This unit is intended to prepare AP Seminar students for success throughout the rest of the year. The AP Seminar course mandates that student work submitted for performance tasks be created and revised solely by students. A “dress rehearsal” unit in the fall, then, allows students to practice research, writing, and presentation with heavy input and scaffolding from the teacher, building skills that will serve the students well when they are working independently on their performance tasks in the spring.

In this unit, students will complete a “dress rehearsal” of the AP Seminar Performance Task 1: Team Multimedia Presentation (TMP), where groups of students will choose a topic for research and complete two assignments (see appendix below for a link to the *AP Seminar Course and Exam Description*):

1. A 1200-word Individual Research Report written by each student that discusses the group topic through a certain “lens”
2. An 8-10 minute presentation in which the students in the group present a collaborative review and suggestions for solutions to issues in the group topic

There are many skills needed to complete these two assignments. The major skill areas are listed below, with specific lessons described in the “Teaching Strategies” and “Classroom Activities” sections of this document.

Skill #1: Media Literacy

In today’s political climate, media literacy is more important than ever for young students who will soon register as voters. Inherent in the controversies around the 2020 election was a rise in misinformation from some media outlets and a lack of media literacy by many members of the general public, often siloed in media bubbles mirroring their political ideology. Additionally, false claims and gaslighting from the highest levels of government reinforced this issue, culminating in so-called “Stop the Steal” rallies in the Capital Insurrection on January 6, 2021. This mobilization of thousands of militant protestors to oppose the outcome of a legitimate democratic election is the logical outcome of a cultural moment that teeters on the brink of what philosopher C.G. Prado (2017) has called “post-truth.” A walk back from the edge of this epistemic cliff will not

happen overnight. Indeed, as historian Sophia Rosenfeld (2018) notes in her book *Democracy and Truth: A Short History*, we have arrived at “a particular historical crisis in the relationship between democracy and truth—and one that is unlikely to end with a single dishonest American president” (p. 41). In such a context, it is important for students to be able to understand media bias, verify information from multiple sources, determine the credibility of authors and organizations, and place current events in accurate historical context. Media literacy is central to the QUEST framework (Question and Explore, Understand and Analyze, Evaluate Multiple Perspectives, Synthesize Ideas) that undergirds the AP Seminar course, and students will build skills in media literacy throughout this unit. Though there is considerable debate among teacher educators about the best curriculum or acronym or technique to use to teach media literacy,¹ I have found broad areas of agreement and aim to teach skills that will transfer across any discipline.

Skill #2: Rigorous Research

Though our current moment in American democracy presents ample cause for concern, there may be some reason for hope as well. If our students have come of age in a society lurching towards “post-truth,” these same students are in many ways best equipped to rebuild and repair what Jonathan Rauch (2018) calls the “constitution of knowledge,” a shared collective understanding of reality that prioritizes free speech and rigorous debate. Yet students must also understand the ways in which inequality in our society has and will continue to debase such a constitution of knowledge: as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1997) notes, societal inequalities are embedded in the production of knowledge, leading to “one-sided historicity” and a set of historical facts which are, in fact, incomplete. Furthermore, as Fricker (2011) notes, the perspectives and experiences of marginalized people are often ignored in the official production of knowledge. In this way, students undertaking research projects must be careful to practice just and ethical fact-finding by carefully examining all perspectives on an issue. Through rigorous research, students in this unit will prepare an individualized research report (IRR), an assignment which requires the same skills of discernment they need as active and engaged citizens.

¹The following links below give an outline of the contours of this debate among teacher educators. I find the disagreements to be largely semantic and in some cases to make the bad faith assumption that modeling, conferencing, and peer review are absent from teachers’ lessons.
<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/getting-beyond-craap-test-conversation-mike-caulfield>
<https://www.milforddailynews.com/story/opinion/columns/2020/11/11/students-flounder-when-trying-identify-misinformation-online/6247190002/> <https://news.stanford.edu/2019/11/18/high-school-students-unequipped-spot-fake-news/>

Skill #3: Student Inquiry

Regardless of subject, I try to center student inquiry in all of my classes. I have found that student engagement in writing and research is strongest when students are given voice and choice in their learning. Furthermore, student inquiry is essential to success in the AP Seminar and AP Research course. This unit focuses on student inquiry through a final research project on voting rights. Students will learn how to create and refine a research question, search for information from multiple perspectives, and construct an argument with clear implications and limitations.

Skill #4: Group Collaboration and Presentation

Group work is challenging at any age, and the return to in-person schooling following a 17-month absence from physical school buildings will be a tremendous adjustment. However, through frequent, structured collaborative activities and assignments, students will build trust and skills in working together. Students will also be required to choose a topic together and decide how to divide up the research and group work. In the working out of their topic choice and presentation, students within their groups will practice what Gutmann and Thompson (2004) call “deliberative democracy,” a social contract in which members “give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable...but open to challenge in the future” (p. 7). This structured, deep process of group work is essential not only for success on the AP Seminar Performance Tasks, but also for civic engagement. As Gutmann and Thompson (2004) note, “If schools do not equip children to deliberate, other institutions are not likely to do so” (p. 36).

Unit Overview

This unit will occur in five sections, each of which will be discussed in depth below:

1. Summer Homework
2. Basic Skills in Research
3. Group Topic Selection
4. Individual Research Report
5. Group Presentation

Teaching Strategies and Classroom Activities

In this section, I will present a detailed description of each of the five sections of the unit, with materials and lesson plans for each.

Section 1: Summer Homework (completed over the summer)

Explanation of Summer Homework

For summer homework, students will read Charles Blow's book *The Devil You Know: A Black Power Manifesto* and view the Stacey Abrams documentary *All In: The Fight For Democracy*. *All In* provides a basic historical overview of the historical relationship between racism and voter suppression, while *The Devil You Know* makes a provocative argument for a reverse great migration to gain Southern Black electoral power in the 21st century. Though very different in scope and approach, both *All In* and *The Devil You Know* ask readers to reconsider the future of Black electoral power in America by looking to the past.

Summer Homework Assignment

See the box below for the summer homework assignment.

AP Seminar Summer Assignment: Personal reflections on Voting Rights in America²

RATIONALE: We are in the midst of a historic moment in the summer 2021. While the Biden Presidency approaches the end of its first six months, former President Trump and his allies have continued to make unfounded accusations of rampant voter fraud and a stolen election. While former president Trump and his surrogates blasted election results from major cities such as Detroit, Atlanta, and Philadelphia as fraudulent, top intelligence officials and local elections officials repeatedly stated that there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud or cybercrime. The racial subtext of Trump's accusations of fraud was clear, and the subsequent push by many Republican state legislatures to enact restrictions on voting has raised alarm among voting rights advocates, who view such changes as the expansion or reimposition of racist voter suppression laws. Meanwhile, a bipartisan commission in Congress is investigating the January 6th attack on the Capitol, an attack based on the rallying cry of "Stop the Steal." It is reasonable to predict that a public debate about voting, elections, and voting rights will be pivotal to American politics in the years to come.

² Thanks to my colleague Geoffrey Winikur for helping craft the language in this assignment.

Considering that you as students are witnessing these events at a pivotal moment in your life, it is important to document your thoughts and analysis of these historical events. In order to understand the present moment, you must recognize the current debates as part of a continuum that goes back decades and centuries. In this summer assignment, your job is to describe the views of a teenager living in these times.

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS: This summer, you will read Charles Blow's book *The Devil You Know: A Black Power Manifesto* and watch the documentary *All In: The Fight for Democracy*. The book and documentary make very provocative and compelling arguments about elections and democracy in America. Your job is to create a personalized written/digital response to the current debate about elections in American society. Your response should be 800-1000 words long and can take any form: a poem, an argument, an imagined dialogue between two historical figures or between yourself and a historical figure, a manifesto, a speech, a report, a podcast, an explainer video. You do not need to use academic citations--just say whose ideas or quotations you are using. Email with any questions.

Section 2: Basic Skills in Research (~2 weeks)

Explanation of Basic Skills in Research

In the opening weeks of class, students will review basic skills in research in order to build capacity for their group research project. Using *Stolen Justice: The Struggle for African American Voting Rights* as a central text, students will learn review the following skills within the AP Capstone QUEST framework:

- Claims, Reasons, and Evidence
- Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

Activities and Assignments

Activity #1: Fishbowl with selections from *Stolen Justice*: In this activity, a small group of students sits in the center of the class in a circle, taking turns reading a paragraph at a time and all responding with comments and observations. Students outside the circle are not permitted to talk, but instead listen and take notes. After all of the

students in the center circle have read, a new group of students enters the circle.³ The whole class writes a short reflection about the text and their classmates' ideas for homework.

Activity #2: Claims/Reasons/Evidence outline with selections from *Stolen Justice*: Using the text of *Stolen Justice* as a model, students will outline a chapter of the book, noting the author's use of claims, reasons, and evidence in order to construct an argument. Students note how an author may use qualitative or quantitative evidence to support an argument. Though painstaking, this assignment builds a consensus and enduring understanding of logical reasoning in writing.

Section 3: Group Topic Selection (~1 week)

Explanation of Group Topic Selection

After building a foundational understanding of American history of voting and voter rights, students will work in groups to choose a specific subtopic of their interest. This choice is heavily scaffolded by source bank (see below), which offers ready-made options with sources for preliminary research by group members. After choosing a topic, groups will assign a "lens" for each student to write an Individual Research Report (IRR) using the graphic organizer below.

Activities and Assignments

Activity: Group Topic Selection Graphic Organizer

Group #	
Group Research Topic	
Group Research Question	
Group Member Lenses	Group Member #1: - Name: - Lens: Group Member #2: - Name: - Lens: Group Member #3:

³ For more specific instructions and for variations, see this guide from *Facing History*:
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/fishbowl>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name: - Lens: <p>Group Member #4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name: - Lens: <p>Group Member #5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name: - Lens:
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Resource: Source Bank

Gerrymandering

- [Fair Districts PA](#): Nonpartisan group explores the consequences of gerrymandering
- [Ballotpedia](#): Nonpartisan information source explains gerrymandering and its history
- [South emerges as flashpoint of brewing redistricting battle](#): *Chicago Sun-Times* article about redistricting, racial gerrymandering, and the 2022 midterm elections
- [The Gerrymander Battles Loom, as G.O.P. Looks to Press Its Advantage](#): *New York Times* article reviews gerrymandering battles looming as the census is tabulated
- [Partisan Gerrymandering Isn't Unconstitutional. But It's Corrosive and It Should End](#): Article in the *National Review* argues that gerrymandering undermines faith in the political system
- [Race-based Political Exclusion and Social Subjugation: Racial Gerrymandering as a badge of Slavery](#): *Columbia Law Review* article analyzes racial gerrymandering and the Thirteenth Amendment
- [How Gerrymandering Efforts Fit Into 2020 Presidential Election](#): *NPR* radio story about gerrymandering's effects on the 2020 election
- [As Biden won the presidency, Republicans cemented their grip on power for the next decade](#): article in *The Guardian* about gerrymandering in Texas, North Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Georgia
- [Republicans Won Almost Every Election Where Redistricting Was At Stake](#): *FiveThirtyEight* article about 2020's down-ballot races and future gerrymandering
- [The Odd Political Alliance Behind Today's Gerrymandering](#): *New York Times* video report on the history of gerrymandering

Prison Gerrymandering

- [The Geography of Mass Incarceration: Prison Gerrymandering and the Dilution of Prisoners' Political Representation](#): *Fordham Law Review* article examines prison gerrymandering from a historical and legal perspective
- [Prison Gerrymandering and the 2020 Census](#): Article from *Harvard Civil Rights - Civil Liberties Law Review* explores the role of prison gerrymandering in the 2020 census
- [Prisoners of the Census](#): Website with dozens of resources about prison gerrymandering and possibilities for reform
- ['Your Body Being Used': Where Prisoners Who Can't Vote Fill Voting Districts](#): *NPR* investigative article about prison gerrymandering maps specific cases
- [Case: Prison-Based Gerrymandering Reform](#): *NAACP Legal Defense Fund* summarizes legal issues with prison gerrymandering
- [How 'prison gerrymandering' shifts political power from urban Pennsylvanians of color to white, rural ones](#): *Philadelphia Inquirer* article looks at how prison gerrymandering affects Pennsylvania
- [Prison gerrymandering: How the prison system distorts legislative redistricting](#): *Prison Policy Initiative* collection of data about prison gerrymandering

Felony Disenfranchisement

- [Criminal Disenfranchisement Laws Across the United States](#): Map from the *Brennan Center* shows policies for each state
- [The Racial Origins of Felon Disenfranchisement](#): chapter from the book *Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy* details racist history of felon disenfranchisement
- [Concealed Motives: Rethinking Fourteenth Amendment and Voting Rights Challenges to Felon Disenfranchisement](#): article from the *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* describes the legal and historical background of Felony Disenfranchisement, as well as current movements in reform
- [Felon Disenfranchisement](#): Article from *FairVote.org* explains the history, current state, and possible future of felon disenfranchisement traces historical connection between racism and felon disenfranchisement laws in the United States
- [Felon Disenfranchisement: Barring people from the polls because of criminal convictions](#): A collection of dozens of sources and research papers curated by the *Prison Policy Initiative*
- [Racism & Felony Disenfranchisement: An Intertwined History](#): article from the *Brennan Center* connects racism and felony disenfranchisement through a detailed historical analysis

- [Felon Voting Rights](#): table from the National Conference of State Legislatures lists policies in each state, including legal language for policies for restoration of rights
- [Felony Disenfranchisement](#): article from the *Equal Justice Initiative* provides a brief historical overview of Felony Disenfranchisement

Mail-in Ballots

- [Fact-Checking Falsehoods on Mail-In Voting](#): *New York Times* article debunks myths about mail-in ballots
- [Mail-in and Absentee Ballot in PA](#): Pennsylvania regulations regarding mail-in ballots
- [Absentee and Mail Voting Policies in Effect for the 2020 Election](#): Table from the National Conference of State Legislatures shows the different mail-in ballot policies for each state in the 2020 election
- [How does vote-by-mail work and does it increase election fraud?](#): Article from the *Brookings Institution* analyzes different vote-by-mail policies and their security

Shelby County vs. Holder

- [Oyez](#): Supreme Court recordings of Oral Arguments, as well as concurring and dissenting opinions
- [How Shelby County v. Holder Broke America](#): article in *The Atlantic* argues that the landmark supreme court case will have decades-long effects on American politics
- [Court Case Tracker](#): article from the *Brennan Center* presents a brief summary of the *Shelby* case and its effects
- [Shelby County vs. Holder: The Restoration of Constitutional Order](#): essay written by the lawyers representing Shelby County explains their constitutional argument
- [Between the Lines of the Voting Rights Act Opinion](#): *New York Times* article summarizes the facts of the *Shelby* case and the justices' opinions
- [Impacts of the Voting Rights Act and the Supreme Court's Shelby ruling](#): article written by Harvard Professor examines a rise in minority voter turnout after the Voting Rights Act and a sharp decline after the *Shelby* ruling
- [In 2013 the Supreme Court gutted voting rights--how has it changed the US?](#): Article in *The Guardian* describes the impact of the *Shelby* decision

Racial Disparities in Voting Wait Times

- [Why Do Nonwhite Georgia Voters Have To Wait In Line For Hours? Too Few Polling Places](#): analysis by *NPR* and *Georgia Public Broadcasting* links racial disparities in polling wait time to historical discrimination
- [Racial Disparities in Voting Wait Times: Evidence from Smartphone Data](#): Research study uses smartphone data to study wait time disparities in the 2016 election
- [The Racial Gap in Wait Times: Why Minority Precincts Are Underserved by Local Election Officials](#): research study uses data from election surveys in 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2014 to determine wait time disparities across demographics
- [Report: Waiting to Vote](#): Article from the *Brennan Center* examines wait time disparities

Voter Roll Purging

- [Voter Caging and purging](#): Article from nonpartisan group Ballotpedia explains how voter caging and voter purging work
- ["Use It or Lose It": The Problem of Purges from the Registration Rolls of Voters Who Don't Vote Regularly](#): article in the *American Bar Association* analyzes voter purging using the fourteenth amendment
- [The Messy Politics of Voter Purges](#): Article from the *Pew Charitable Trusts* explores voter roll purging policies in several states
- [After the Purge: How a Massive Voter Purge in Georgia Affected the 2018 election](#): Article from *American Public Media* takes a deep dive into voter purging in the leadup to the 2018 governor's race
- [Groups sue Georgia over Voter Roll Purges](#): Article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* explains a lawsuit that alleges that 200,000 voters were improperly removed from voter rolls in Georgia

Restrictive Voting Bills after the 2020 election

- [State Voting Bills Tracker 2021](#): Resource from the *Brennan Center* tracks state-level voting legislation
- [Georgia G.O.P. Passes Major Law to Limit Voting Amid Nationwide Push](#): *New York Times* article analyzes Georgia voting bill passes in March 2021
- [The States Where Efforts To Restrict Voting Are Escalating](#): article in *FiveThirtyEight* details many states' changes to voting laws in 2021
- [In Statehouses, Stolen-Election Myth Fuels a G.O.P. Drive to Rewrite Rules](#): *New York Times* article discusses many states' push for changes in voting laws following the 2020 election

- [Targeting State Restrictions, House Passes Landmark Voting Rights Expansion:](#) *New York Times* article explains the House of Representatives' goals to expand voting accessibility

Section 4: Individual Research Report (~4 weeks)

Explanation of Mock Individual Research Report (IRR)

The Individual Research Report (IRR) is one of the Performance Tasks in the AP Seminar course. In this Mock IRR, students will practice the task with heavy scaffolding in order to build skills for independent research and writing later in the year. The IRR is a 1200-word assignment in which students report on a topic using one or more “lenses,” summarizing the perspectives of various sources in order to provide an objective summary of an issue. Through the Mock IRR, students will practice the following:

- Writing using claims, reasons and evidence
- Academic respect: in-text citations and bibliography
- Assessing the credibility of online sources

The writing will be structured and scaffolded heavily to support students' development of the above skills, with students being asked to write one paragraph for homework *at the most* during this phase of the project. The goal of such a slow pace is to prioritize quality over quantity of work, and to allow students time in class to build community with their group members.

Activities and Assignments

Activity: Source Searching Graphic Organizer

Students will find a total of 10 sources for this research phase (their paper will only need 7). They may use 5 sources from the source bank (see above). but they must find 5 of their own. They will use the template below to analyze each source, which synthesizes elements of the RAVEN, CRAAP, and other source evaluation methods.⁴

Source #____

⁴ As noted above, I see the differences between various source validation methods as largely semantic and not worth discussing with students, whose focus should be on their interests and the content of their inquiry.

Author/Title, Year published, URL	
Author's Background (<i>What is the author's background and expertise? Is she/she trustworthy on this topic? Why?</i>)	
Argument/Thesis (<i>What is the main idea of this article?</i>)	
Methods/sources (<i>How did the author come to the conclusions he/she did? How did the author get his/her information?</i>)	
Sources/Ideas to Follow Up On (<i>What new ideas stood out to you? What sources interest you from this article that you want to follow up on?</i>)	
Criticisms (<i>What are the shortcomings of this article? What information or perspectives are omitted? What biases can you detect?</i>)	

Resource: Sentence Starters for IRR Essay⁵

While students were introduced to claims, reasons, and evidence in the beginning of the unit, in the IRR essay they must write using such a structure. Students are provided the sentence starters below as a scaffold for their IRR paper.

<p>CLAIMS are the main ideas of your essay. Your main claim is your thesis statement.</p> <p>REASONS are your justifications WHY your claim is true.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One reason that _____ is _____ - Another reason that _____ is _____ - For one, _____ - For another, _____ - In addition to _____, - Besides _____, _____

⁵ Thanks to my colleague Geoffrey Winikur for helping craft these sentence starters.

EVIDENCE supports your reasons.

- For example
- For instance
- In the instance of _____,
- Take _____, for example
- This is shown in

ANALYSIS shows the meaning of your evidence.

- This reveals...
- This illustrates...
- This shows...
- This highlights...
- This demonstrates...
- This exemplifies...
- From this, it is clear that (rephrase your evidence)
proves/shows/demonstrates/illustrates that (rephrase your main point)
because...
- It is important to notice how (rephrase your evidence)
proves/shows/demonstrates/illustrates that (rephrase your main point)
because...
- Taken together, the fact that (rephrase one piece of evidence) and that (rephrase
more evidence), clearly demonstrates that (rephrase your main point) because...
- This (illustration/graph/statistic) is indisputable evidence of (rephrase main
point) because...

COUNTERARGUMENT illustrates the opposing viewpoint to your thesis statement.

- Some argue that.....
- Those opposed to _____ argue that
- Some disagree that _____, arguing that

REFUTATION explains why the counterargument is incorrect.

- However, this counterargument fails because....
- However, those opposed to _____ fail to recognize that....
- Those who disagree with _____ do not acknowledge that.....

CONCLUSION:

- It is safe to say...

INTRODUCING SOURCES:

- *Italicize publication names*
- [Author], in a [*name of publication*] article, writes.....
- [Author], writing about [issue] in [*name of publication*], notes.....
- In an article in the [*name of publication*], [author] observes....
- [Youtuber name], commenting on [issue], says...
- In a commentary on [issue], [Youtuber] says....

Section 5: Group Presentation (~2 weeks)***Explanation of Group Presentation***

Following the completion of their IRR essays, students will work together to create a group presentation that proposes a solution to the problem in the research topic they have identified. This group presentation is a challenge for two main reasons: (1) developing a group solution requires intense deliberation among group members and (2) presentation is an often-underdeveloped skill for high school students. As a result, students will receive copious feedback through peer reviews and teacher conferences, as well as several days of structured rehearsal time in class where students record their practice presentations in class and then reflect on the videos for homework in order to improve their skills.

Activities and Assignments**Activity: Video Reflection**

In this activity, students will find a quiet area of the school to practice their presentation, bringing a chromebook along to serve as the “smartboard” for their practice. They will then record the practice presentation, uploading it to google classroom by the end of the period. For homework, the group fills out the graphic organizer below, which is aligned with the first four rows of the College Board Rubric.

RUBRIC CONCEPT	Strengths	Areas to Improve
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Argument (Row 1)		
Solution (Row 2)		
Performance (Row 3)		
Design (Row 4)		

Resources

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Appendix

Standards: AP Seminar is an interdisciplinary course by design. Therefore, the content of this unit is aligned to standards in the Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Standards for English Language Arts and History and Social Studies. See below for a list of standards for each subject area.

ELA Standards

Standard - CC.1.2.11-12.E

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

Standard - CC.1.4.11-12.D

Organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create whole; use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text; provide a concluding statement or section that supports the information presented; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension.

Standard - CC.1.4.11-12.T

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Standard - CC.1.4.11-12.V

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation

Standard - CC.1.5.11-12.A

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Standard - CC.1.5.11-12.D

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective; organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Standard - CC.1.5.11-12.F

Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to add interest and enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence.

History and Social Studies Standards

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.F

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.G

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.H

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

Standard - CC.8.6.11-12.G

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.