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COURSE SYLLABUS - Charleston Classroom: Race, Elections and American Politics in the Holy City

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Recommended Citation

Ragusa, Jordan, "COURSE SYLLABUS - Charleston Classroom: Race, Elections and American Politics in the Holy City" (2024). *Teacher Scholars Civic Engagement & Voting Rights*. 1.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/teacher_scholars/1

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COURSE SYLLABUS

Charleston Classroom: Race, Elections and American Politics in the Holy City

What follows is a syllabus outline that was created for the “Civic Engagement & Voting Rights Teachers Scholars” program at Clemson University. It is a modified version of a first-year experience (FYE) seminar taught by [Dr. Jordan Ragusa](#) at the College of Charleston in the fall of 2020. Like that class, this version is intended for a lower or middle division audience (i.e. 100 or 200 level) and represents a brief introduction to several topics at the intersection of race, elections, and national politics. Consistent with the overarching theme of the course “Charleston as a classroom” a key component of this course is three self-guided “walking tours” that align with each section’s major topics. Separate documents provide the location and order of each stop on the tour, short readings about each location/event, and reflection essays for students to complete. Feel free to email me for copies of the readings and assignments.

– Jordan

Description

What can we learn about race, elections and American politics from Charleston’s past and present? Quite a lot! From the arrival of enslaved Africans in the port of Charleston to the first ever Republican presidential candidate, a College of Charleston alum, the city of Charleston was at the forefront of national politics in the early- to mid-1800s. A century and a half later the legacy of slavery is still relevant in American politics and Charleston continues to play an important part in national politics. For example, South Carolina has a critical role in contemporary presidential primaries, with dozens of presidential hopefuls stopping in Charleston every four years. Simply put: this class will focus on Charleston’s unique role in American politics.

Overview

I have divided the course into four sections. Each section we will focus on two broad themes: (1) how Charleston had a direct effect on American politics and (2) what we can learn about American politics from Charleston's history.

In the first section, we will focus on three political institutions and Charleston's role in their formation— slavery, the electoral college, and political parties. Second, we will examine four key individuals with ties to the city and the College of Charleston campus—Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun, John C. Frémont, and Robert Smalls—and discuss how they shaped national politics. In the third section, we cover the postreconstruction era, segregation, and the southern realignment with a focus on Charleston's civil rights history. Fourth, and finally, we will discuss whether the past is prologue, namely, whether Charleston continues to shape contemporary American politics. So, the section-by-section outline looks as follows:

Institutions	Weeks 1–4
Individuals	Weeks 5–9
Civil Rights	Weeks 10–12
Past is Prologue	Weeks 13–15

Objectives

In this class the primary objective is to provide students with a broad understanding of race, elections and American politics as well as a basic knowledge of Charleston's history. After completing this course, students should:

1. understand the process by which we elect presidents
2. explain and critically analyze how political institutions shape national politics, and
3. identify the central issues in landmark elections and key eras of US political history.

Additionally, this course seeks to develop students' skill set, including:

1. reading comprehension
2. effective oral and written communication, and
3. critical thinking.

Books

Each day's required reading(s) can be found below. Standalone texts such as journal articles, book chapters, and newspaper articles will be made available online. We will also read the following books:

- Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. 2018. *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Reichley, A. James. 1992. *The Life of the Parties: A History of American Political Parties*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Course Schedule

INSTITUTIONS: SLAVERY, THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE, AND PARTIES

Week 1: Charleston's Founding and Role in the Slave Trade

READING(S)

- Fraser, "The Proprietary Colony"
- Hicks, "A Chronicle of Human Bondage in the Holy City"
- Listen to the Hansen interview with Dr. Bernard Powers.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What does Fraser mean when he writes that Charleston is "both beautiful and ugly?"
- In what ways was Charleston important in the slave trade?
- How did the presence of enslaved Africans shape Charleston's development?

Week 2: Charleston, Slavery, and the Electoral College

READING(S)

- Longley, *Electoral College Primer*
- Blake, "The Overlooked Racial Dynamics of the Electoral College"

KEY QUESTIONS

- In the Founding era, what were the arguments for and against the Electoral College?
- How did slavery shape Framers' decision to create the Electoral College?
- What are the contemporary effects of the Electoral College?

Week 3: Washington's Visit to Charleston

READING(S)

- Listen to the Charleston Time Machine podcast on Washington's visit.
- Washington, "A Farewell Address"
- Mount Vernon Library, "Ona Judge"

KEY QUESTIONS

- Why was Washington's tour of the South consequential? What were his objectives?
- Why did Washington warn of the dangers of parties? What are their negative effects, in his mind?
- What are the benefits of parties? What purpose do they serve?

Week 4: Political Parties and the Election of 1800

READING(S)

- Reichley, chapter 3
- Houdek and Phillips, "Public Memory"

KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the policy positions of the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans?
- What is a political realignment? Why was 1800 a realigning election?
- How did the 12th Amendment alter the functioning of the Electoral College?
- What is public memory and why is this concept so important?

Walking Tour #1 (Public Memory)

For the first tour the theme is public memory. Students will be asked to locate several historic markers in the area around Broad, Meeting, and East Bay and reflect on what is remembered and what is not remembered. Each of the markers relates to the institution of slavery, the US Constitution, and civil rights.

INDIVIDUALS: JACKSON, CALHOUN, FRÉMONT, AND SMALLS

Week 8: Andrew Jackson and the Election of 1828

READING(S)

- Feller, "Jackson's Life Before the Presidency"
- Feller, "Andrew Jackson and the American Franchise"
- Reichley, chapter 5 (pages 69–75)

KEY QUESTIONS

- What was Jackson's connection to Charleston?
- Why was the election of 1824 consequential? What about the election of 1828?
- What were the main policy positions of Jackson's Democratic party?

Week 6: John C. Calhoun and the Nullification Crisis

READING(S)

- Kelly, "The First Secession"
- Cogan, "The Theory of Nullification"

KEY QUESTIONS

- How, and why, did Calhoun's political philosophy change over his career?
- What is the theory of nullification? What are the theory's basic claims?

Week 7: John C. Frémont and the 1860 Democratic Convention

READING(S)

- Berry, “On Roads Hard Won”
- Reichley, chapter 6 (pages 93–106)
- Kelly, “War”
- Lovegrove, “Clyburn Speech Is SC’s First Convention Moment Since 1860.”

KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the policy positions of the Whig Party? Why did the Whigs collapse?
- What was Frémont’s path from C of C to the first ever Republican presidential candidate?
- Why did the 1860 Democratic convention deadlock?
- What was the main justification for South Carolina’s ordinance of secession?

Week 8: Reconstruction and the Election of 1876

READING(S)

- Fraser, “War and Peace”
- Reichley, chapter 7 (pages 120–27)
- Listen to the Past Promise Presidency podcast “Grant and the Ku Klux Klan Act.”

KEY QUESTIONS

- What were elections like in South Carolina (and the South) during Reconstruction?
- Why was the election of 1876 consequential for both Reconstruction and subsequent elections?

Week 9: Robert Smalls and Black Members of Congress

READING(S)

- Fraser, “Redemption and the Charleston Style”
- Beckett, “The Past is so Present”
- House.gov, “Black Americans in Congress”

KEY QUESTIONS

- What were elections like in South Carolina (and the South) *after* Reconstruction?
- How does Robert Smalls’s career in Congress mirror national political trends?

Walking Tour #2 (Education)

For the second tour the theme is education. In this tour students will be asked to locate several historic buildings on the College of Charleston campus and reflect on the role of education and educational institutions in the history of slavery and civil rights, specifically as it relates to the College of Charleston.

CIVIL RIGHTS: FROM JIM CROW TO THE SOUTHERN REALIGNMENT

Week 10: Race and Party Politics in the New Century

READING(S)

- Reichley, chapter 12
- Fraser, “Burnet Rhett Maybank and the Great Depression”
- Watch the documentary “The Heritage of Slavery w/ Fannie Lou Hamer and Lerone Bennett Jr.”

KEY QUESTIONS

- What were the “New Deal” and “Conservative” coalitions?
- How was Maybank’s relationship with FDR and the federal government?
- How did Jim Crow circumvent the Reconstruction era constitutional amendments?

Week 11: Segregation and Julius Waites Waring

READING(S)

- Edgar, “All in One Lifetime” (pages 512–20)
- Morrison, “Grice and Privatization”
- Watch the PBS documentary on the “Blinding of Isaac Woodward.”
- Listen to the College Today podcast, “How Alumnus Helped Shape Civil Rights.”

KEY QUESTIONS

- How did the New Deal and World War II alter politics in South Carolina?
- What role did Waring and Grice play in changing city, state and national politics?

Week 12: Strom Thurmond, James F. Byrnes and the Southern Realignment

READING(S)

- Reichley, chapter 14 (pages 241–50)
- Edgar, “All in One Lifetime” (pages 521–52)
- Reichley, chapter 16 (pages 261–69)
- Feinstein and Schickler, “The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered”

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who were the “Dixiecrats” and what did they hope to accomplish in 1948?
- What role did Thurmond and Byrnes play in changing city, state, and national politics?
- What was the southern realignment? What were its basic features?
- How did the Democratic Party, not the Republican Party, come to champion civil rights?

Walking Tour #3 (Resistance)

For the second tour the theme is resistance. In this tour students will be asked to locate several sites of protest, conflict, and violence in the city of Charleston and reflect on the long struggle for emancipation and civil rights.

PAST IS PROLOGUE: CHARLESTON'S CURRENT ROLE IN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS

Week 13: A Primer on the South Carolina Primary

READING(S)

- Knotts and Ragusa, chapter 1
- Knotts and Ragusa, chapter 3
- Owens, "Jim Clyburn Changed Everything for Joe Biden's Campaign"

KEY QUESTIONS

- In what ways does South Carolina's presidential primary matter?
- How did South Carolina become first in the South?
- What are the key features of South Carolina's Republican and Democratic primary electorates?
- Why do demographic representatives matter?

Week 14: Slavery's Linkage to Contemporary Political Attitudes

READING(S)

- Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen, chapter 1 (pages 1–5)
- Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen, chapter 2 (pages 24–38)
- Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen, chapter 7

KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the key claims of the theory of behavioral path dependence?
- Why does slavery still predict White political attitudes? What is the theoretical cause?

Week 15: Slavery's Continued Effects on Presidential Politics

READING(S)

- Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen, chapter 3
- Cobb, "Terrorism in Charleston"
- Williams, "Centuries of Violence"

KEY QUESTIONS

- Is the theory of behavioral path dependence relevant to presidential politics?
- Does slavery still shape American politics?