

## HISTORY 211

Dickinson College / Fall 2025

Mon / Thu 3pm

Classroom: Denny 211

URL: <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-211constitution>

## US Constitutional History

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“Every word ... decides a question between power & liberty.”

--James Madison, January 18, 1792

### Books

- Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019)
- Gordon S. Wood, *Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford, 2021)

### Additional Readings & Resources

- Avalon Project at Yale Law School, US constitutional records [WEB]
- Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center: [Richard Henry Pratt speech](#) (1892)
- Casey Cep, “The Imperfect, Unfinished Work of Women’s Suffrage,” *New Yorker* July 1, 2019 [WEB]
- Casey Cep, “Deb Haaland Confronts the History of the Federal Agency She Leads,” *New Yorker*, April 29, 2024 [WEB]
- Saul Cornell, “Aristocracy Assailed: The Ideology of Backcountry Anti-Federalism,” *Journal of American History* 76 (March 1990): 1148-1172. [JSTOR]
- Mary L. Dudziak, “Brown as a Cold War Case,” *JAH* 91 (June 2004): 32-42 [JSTOR]
- Amanda Frost, “‘By Accident of Birth’: The Battle Over Birthright Citizenship After *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*,” *Yale Journal of Law & Humanities* 32 (2021): 38-76 [WEB]
- Timothy B. Huebner, “Roger B. Taney and the Slavery Issue: Looking Before –and Beyond—*Dred Scott*,” *Journal of American History* 97 (June 2010): 17-38. [JSTOR]
- Knowledge for Freedom seminar (KFF): [Debating Slavery](#) (1787) and [Lincoln](#) (1861)
- Walter LaFeber, “The Constitution and United States Foreign Policy: An Interpretation,” *Journal of American History* 74 (Dec. 1987): 695-717. [JSTOR]
- Jill Lepore, “Flip-Flopping on Free Speech,” *New Yorker*, October 1, 2017 [WEB]
- Library of Congress: [Federalist Papers](#) (1787-88) [WEB]
- Mount Vernon: [Washington Farewell](#) (1796) [WEB]
- National Archives: [Declaration](#) (1776), [Articles of Confederation](#) (1777), [US Constitution](#) (1787), [Bill of Rights](#) (1791)
- National Constitution Center: [Interactive Constitution](#) [WEB]
- Matthew Pinsker, “After 1850: Reassessing the Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law,” in D.A. Pargas, *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom* (2018), 93-115. [WEB]
- David A. Strauss, “The Irrelevance of Constitutional Amendments,” *Harvard Law Review* 114 (March 2001): 1457-1505. [JSTOR]
- Aaron Tang, “Lessons from Lawrence: How ‘History’ Gave Us Dobbs—And How History Can Help Overrule It,” *Yale Law Journal*, FORUM: April 24, 2024 [WEB]

### Course Policies

Attendance is expected and participation will be evaluated and count toward final grades. Those who miss class for any reason must also email a short reflection (about a paragraph or two) analyzing the missed reading assignment within a week of the absence. For further details on course policies, including those regarding electronics, accommodations for disabilities, plagiarism, AI, and general learning objectives, please consult the course website: <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-211constitution/course-policies/>

### **First Essay –1787 Constitution**

On **Friday, October 17**, students will submit a 3-5 page typed, double-spaced essay on a topic about the formation of the 1787 Constitution provided to them in class on the previous Thursday, October 9. All essays must use primary sources from the course syllabus and Gordon Wood's *Power and Liberty* (2021) properly cited with Chicago-style footnotes. Outside research is allowed but not required. Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Essays will be graded on depth of analysis, use of evidence, and quality of prose. Late essays will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

### **Second Essay –Second Founding**

On **Friday, November 14**, students will submit a 3-5 page typed, double-spaced essay on the Reconstruction era constitutional amendments provided to them in class on the previous Thursday, November 6. All essays must use primary sources from the course syllabus and Eric Foner's *Second Founding* (2019), properly cited with Chicago-style footnotes. Outside research is allowed but not required. Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Essays will be graded on depth of analysis, use of evidence, and quality of prose. Late essays will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

### **Research Journal posts**

Students will submit two research journal entries (2-4 pages each or about 500 to 1,000 words per entry), posted PRIVATE at the course website. These narrative posts will detail research efforts for the final papers. The first entry (**due by Tuesday, December 2**) will describe the search for relevant secondary sources, especially in academic books and articles. The second entry (**due by Tuesday, December 9**) will describe the search for relevant primary sources, especially those available in published or digital format. Journal entries do not require footnotes, but they should include Chicago-style bibliographies and 2 to 3 images, properly captioned and credited. Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Entries will be graded on research effort, depth of analysis and quality of prose. Late entries will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

### **Final Paper –Constitutional Change, 1876-1976**

By **Friday, December 19**, students will submit a 10- to 12-page narrative paper that analyzes an amendment, landmark Supreme Court case or major constitutional crisis between the period 1876 to 1976 that resulted in a practical change to the US Constitution. Students should build their papers on a strong foundation of primary and secondary sources to tell a story that puts specific historical figures and their constitutional arguments with each other at the center. All papers should be typed and double-spaced as Word or PDF documents with title page and Chicago-style footnotes (no bibliography required). Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Papers will be graded on research effort, analysis, and prose. These final papers are due by 5pm on December 19.

### **Grade Distribution**

Class Participation	20 percent
First Essay (1787 Constitution)	20 percent
Second Essay (Second Founding)	20 percent
Research journal posts	10 percent
Final Paper	30 percent

Day	Date	Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
<b>Part 1: Landmark Texts</b>			
Monday	9/1	Methods & Expectations	
Thursday	9/4	Declaration of Independence (1776)	Declaration (National Archives)
Monday	9/8	Articles of Confederation (1781)	Articles (National Archives)
Thursday	9/11	US Constitution (1787)	Constitution (Nat Archives)
Monday	9/15	Federalist Papers (1788)	#10, #51, #70, #78 (LoC)
Thursday	9/18	Bill of Rights (1791)	Bill of Rights (Nat Archives)
Monday	9/22	Washington's Farewell Address (1796)	Washington (Mount Vernon)
Thursday	9/25	Lincoln's First Inaugural Address (1861)	Lincoln (KFF)
<b>Part 2: Historical Context</b>			
Monday	9/29	Revolutionary Thinking	Wood, Intro + chaps. 1-2
Thursday	10/2	NO CLASS –YOM KIPPUR	
Monday	10/6	Crisis and Convention	Wood, chaps. 3-4
Thursday	10/9	Slavery and the Constitution	Wood, chap. 5 + KFF
Monday	10/13	Independent Judiciary	Wood, chap. 6
Thursday	10/16	Carlisle and the Constitution	Cornell article
Friday	<b>10/17</b>	<b>Constitutional essays due</b>	<b>By 5pm</b>
Monday	10/20	NO CLASS –FALL PAUSE	
Thursday	10/23	Thirteenth Amendment	Foner, Intro + chap. 1
Monday	10/27	Fourteenth Amendment	Foner, chap. 2
Thursday	10/30	Fifteenth Amendment	Foner, chap. 3
Monday	11/3	Supreme Court and Second Founding	Foner, chap. 4
Thursday	11/6	Woman's Suffrage	Cep 2019 article
Monday	11/10	Chinese Exclusion and Birthright Citizenship	Frost article
Thursday	11/13	Carlisle and Indian Citizenship	Pratt speech + Cep 2024 article
Friday	<b>11/14</b>	<b>Second Founding essays due</b>	<b>By 5pm</b>
<b>Part 3: Subtext and Original Intent</b>			
Monday	11/17	Imperial Presidency	La Feber article
Thursday	11/20	From Fugitive Slaves to Illegal Aliens	Pinsker article
Monday	11/24	Remembering Dred Scott	Huebner article
Thursday	11/27	NO CLASS –THANKSGIVING	
Monday	12/1	Brown v. Board and the Cold War	Dudziak article
Tuesday	<b>12/2</b>	<b>Research journal due –Secondary sources</b>	<b>By 5pm</b>
Thursday	12/4	Campus Free Speech	Lepore article
Monday	12/8	From Roe to Dobbs –And Beyond	Tang article
Tuesday	<b>12/9</b>	<b>Research journal due –Primary sources</b>	<b>By 5pm</b>
Thursday	12/11	Changing Our Constitution	Strauss article
Friday	<b>12/19</b>	<b>Final papers due</b>	<b>By 5pm</b>