

For our first course assignment, we will be holding a mock Constitutional Convention. This is, of course, a literature course and not a history or political science one. That said, as you have noticed, many of the texts we have read concern issues of how America came to be defined and touch on many of the key questions that the delegates at the Constitutional Convention faced, especially related to the rights of Native Americans, blacks, and women.

On February 13 and 15, we will hold our mock convention. A few weeks before, you will be randomly selected into groups, with each group tackling a specific question. You will need to be aware of the concerns that faced the framers as they confronted disparate desires amongst the states. Be prepared to state your case, drawing from the texts we've read, AND to anticipate counter-arguments.

In the past, students have asked, "Aren't you asking us to 1) defend slavery 2) argue against women's rights 3) argue against Native American's rights?" Simply put, no. This assignment is not an attempt to have you rationalize the actions of the past. The assignment is designed to draw upon the nation's historical and literary background in order to discuss how the framers might have articulated the nation's founding ideology in a different manner.

On the day of the Convention, you and your group members will present your answer to your question and engage in a discussion with your classmates. We will dedicate some class time to preparing for this presentation, though you are of course welcome to meet with your classmates on your own. Also, we will NOT spend class time discussing the actual Constitution. My reason for this is to avoid coloring anyone's opinions. You will want to look over it, especially the bill of rights and key sections like the three-fifths compromise, as you prepare your major points.

Group questions:

1. How should the nation address the rights of women in the Constitution?
2. How should the nation address the rights of Natives in the Constitution?
3. How should the nation address the rights of free and enslaved Africans in the Constitution?
4. What role should religion play in our nation, and how should that be reflected in the Constitution?

Your presentation will account for about 20% of your grade, with potential for a few bonus points for groups that are especially convincing. The bulk of your grade will be determined by a 3-4 page double-spaced essay where you analyze the ways in which AT LEAST 2 of the texts we've read in class so far could have had an effect on one of the questions from the activity (NOTE: this does not have to be the same question as the one your group worked on). While similar to your presentation, the chief aim here will be focusing on a few texts and analyzing their relevance to the foundations of American government.

Essays should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced, 1 in. margins, 12 pt. font, and include an appropriate title and header, with your name, course info, and date on it in the upper left-hand corner.