

Mr. Nicol's RLS US History Class

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Course Description

Following the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Elizabeth Willing Powel, a prominent Philadelphia figure of the time, asked Ben Franklin, “So Doctor, what have we got--A monarchy or a republic?” Ben Franklin's response: “A republic, if you can keep it.”¹

Franklin's response nearly 250 years ago implied that the first three words of the US Constitution define who is responsible for ensuring our republic persists: “We the People...”. While they are many years away from writing a full story of our current time period, historians will certainly write about the Americans today who are fighting for political, economic, and social justice in order to keep the republic Franklin helped shape over two centuries ago. This year, our US History course will explore the building, maintaining, and transforming of the American republic from the founding of our country to modern day. During this exploration, we will meet the ordinary Americans who became extraordinary historical figures in this fight for equity and justice as they attempted to not just keep the world's oldest existing republic, but to perfect it.

Course Guiding Question

The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal,” yet the United States has often failed to achieve such equality. How have individuals and groups sought to make America live up to the founding ideal that all people are created equal?

Course Content (*subject to change based on our schedule this year)

Each of our units this year will focus on analyzing a set of Harvard Case Studies, which are secondary, narrative texts providing information for class discussion. Each unit will also be framed around the following question: How did we get here?!

Introductory Unit: The US Constitution

Unit 1: Electoral Democracy

Unit 2: Racial Injustice

Unit 3: Protest

Required Materials

Below are the materials you are expected to have *everyday* for online class:

- A fully charged laptop (or your charger nearby)
- Earphones as needed
- Any hardcopy materials (if I can get them to you...)
- Something to write on (either a running Google document saved in your US History folder or a notebook)
- Pencils and/or pens

Course “Grading”

The “grading” in this course will be a truly unique experience for you in that there will be NO POINTS, NO PERCENTS, and NO LETTERS on any individual assignment. We'll further discuss this grading system in the coming weeks. **Please note that US History is a Massachusetts graduation requirement!**

¹ [‘A republic, if you can keep it’: Did Ben Franklin really say Impeachment Day’s favorite quote?](#)

Remote Learning

Let's be honest... This year will not be a usual school year. In order to be most effective and successful in your work, here are some tips for remote learning this year: [Surviving and Thriving in Remote Learning Tips](#)

Phrases to Live By

The following three phrases are representative of the values our class will have all year:

1. *"Success is always less funny than failure."* - While the goal is to limit mistakes and failures (especially big ones...), **all** of us will make mistakes and fail. As soon as you accept the fact that you will make mistakes and fail, you can (1) begin to focus your attention on learning the ways in which you can best improve and (2) hopefully laugh about it in the future.
2. *"Communicating lateness means you can never be late."* - Turning something in late can only happen if you've missed the deadline, but if you communicate in advance that you won't turn something in on time, then how can it be late? Every one of us learns at a different pace, has external constraints on our time (sports, music, tutoring, family commitments, etc...), and, unfortunately, deal with emergencies that come up. To that end, as long as you communicate with me in advance of a due date (as best as possible), you'll never be late.
3. *"Umm.... is this good?"* This is probably the most common question from any student, and my response is normally: "What is good?" You are in control of your education, and my goal is to get you to a place where you can *independently* determine what is "good" and what still needs improvement. You should **ALWAYS** ask me direct questions ("Is this good..." is **NOT** a direct question) and **ALWAYS** ask me about feedback or a rubric score **in person**.
4. *"We're all mature until someone breaks out the bubble wrap."* - Since you started back in Kindergarten, your teachers have always said, "You're acting like a [insert a previous age or grade]" when you were acting immaturely. In high school, a lack of maturity begins to be seen as part of your personality by your peers, teachers, and administrators. We will have fun this year, and I expect you to **ALWAYS** show respect for yourself and others.

The faster you internalize these core principles and beliefs, the faster you will be successful in this classroom. If you have any additional questions or concerns to begin the year, please let me know as soon as possible!