

2026-2027 AP GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS SUMMER ASSIGNMENT

Welcome to the APGA class.

The AP U.S. Government and Politics course “provides a college-level, nonpartisan introduction to key political concepts, ideas, institutions, policies, interactions, roles, and behaviors that characterize the constitutional system and political culture of the United States. Students will study U.S. foundational documents, Supreme Court decisions, and other texts and visuals to gain an understanding of the relationships and interactions among political institutions, processes, and behaviors. They will also engage in disciplinary practices that require them to read and interpret data, make comparisons and applications, and develop evidence-based arguments.”

AP U.S. Government and Politics offers students the opportunity to see how individuals and their ideas can shape the world in which they live in; it invites them to explore central questions of liberty and justice in practice. The ideas at the heart of the American founding remain as vital and urgent as they were 250 years ago.

We have much material to cover. We will HAVE BIG FUN!

To get us started on our journey please complete the following assignment:

Directions:

- **Select one of the following books.**
- **All of the books relate to main themes of the course and relate to current political debates that are galvanizing America.**
- **For the selected book, you are to write a 3-5 page Book Review. The Book Review should include a discussion of the author’s thesis/claim, the evidence he/she uses to support his/her thesis/claim, as well as a discussion if, in your view, the author proves his claim/thesis. Finally, the Review should include a personal assessment of the book.**
- **You may purchase the book in any format – new, used, Kindle, or Nook.**
- **Completed Book Reviews are due TUESDAY SEPT. 8TH.**
- **Any questions email me at mvieira@spellman.com**
- **HBF!!**

Book Option One: The Thirteen American Arguments: Enduring Debates That Define and Inspire Our Country by Howard Fineman

Summary:

“Howard Fineman, one of our most trusted political journalists, shows that every debate, from our nation’s founding to the present day, is rooted in one of thirteen arguments that—thankfully—defy resolution. It is the very process of never-ending argument, Fineman explains, that defines us, inspires us, and keeps us free. At a time when most public disagreement seems shrill and meaningless, Fineman makes a cogent case for nurturing the real American dialogue. *The Thirteen American Arguments* runs the gamut, including:

- Who Is a Person? The Declaration of Independence says “everyone,” but it took a Civil War, the Civil Rights Act, and other movements to make that a reality. Now, what about human embryos and prisoners in Guantanamo?
- The Role of Faith No country is more legally secular yet more avowedly prayerful. From Thomas Jefferson to James Dobson, the issue persists: Where does God fit in government?
- America in the World In Iraq and everywhere else, we ask ourselves whether we must change the world in order to survive and honor our values—or whether the best way to do both is to deal with the world as it is.

Whether it’s the nomination of judges or the limits of free speech, presidential power or public debt, the issues that galvanized the Founding Fathers should still inspire our leaders, thinkers, and fellow citizens. If we cease to argue about these things, we cease to be. ‘Argument is strength, not weakness,’ says Fineman. “As long as we argue, there is hope, and as long as there is hope, we will argue.”

Book Option Two: The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels by Jon Meacham

Summary:

“Our current climate of partisan fury is not new, and in *The Soul of America* Meacham shows us how what Abraham Lincoln called the ‘better angels of our nature’ have repeatedly won the day. Painting surprising portraits of Lincoln and other presidents, including Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson, and illuminating the courage of such influential citizen activists as Martin Luther King, Jr., early suffragettes Alice Paul and Carrie Chapman Catt, civil rights pioneers Rosa Parks and John Lewis, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and Army-McCarthy hearings lawyer Joseph N. Welch, Meacham brings vividly to life turning points in American history. He writes about the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the birth of the Lost Cause; the backlash against immigrants in the First World War and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s; the fight for women’s rights; the demagoguery of Huey Long and Father Coughlin and the isolationist work of America First in the years before World War II; the anti-Communist witch-hunts led by Senator Joseph McCarthy; and Lyndon Johnson’s crusade against Jim Crow. Each of these dramatic hours in our national life have been shaped by the contest to lead the country to look forward rather than back, to assert hope over fear—a struggle that continues even now.

While the American story has not always—or even often—been heroic, we have been sustained by a belief in progress even in the gloomiest of times. In this inspiring book, Meacham reassures us, ‘The good news is that we have come through such darkness before’—as, time and again, Lincoln’s better angels have found a way to prevail.”

Book Option Three: The Bill of Rights: The Fight to Secure America's Liberties
Paperback by Carol Berkin

Summary:

“Narrative, celebratory history at its purest” (*Publishers Weekly*)—the *real* story of how the Bill of Rights came to be: a vivid account of political strategy, big egos, and the partisan interests that set the terms of the ongoing contest between the federal government and the states.

Those who argue that the Bill of Rights reflects the founding fathers’ “original intent” are wrong. The Bill of Rights was actually a brilliant political act executed by James Madison to preserve the Constitution, the federal government, and the latter’s authority over the states. In the skilled hands of award-winning historian Carol Berkin, the story of the founders’ fight over the Bill of Rights comes alive in a drama full of partisanship, clashing egos, and cunning manipulation.

In 1789, the nation faced a great divide around a question still unanswered today: should broad power and authority reside in the federal government or should it reside in state governments? The Bill of Rights, from protecting religious freedom to the people’s right to bear arms, was a political ploy first and a matter of principle second. The truth of how and why Madison came to devise this plan, the debates it caused in the Congress, and its ultimate success is more engrossing than any of the myths that shroud our national beginnings.

The debate over the Bill of Rights still continues through many Supreme Court decisions. By pulling back the curtain on the short-sighted and self-interested intentions of the founding fathers, Berkin reveals the anxiety many felt that the new federal government might not survive—and shows that the true “original intent” of the Bill of Rights was simply to oppose the Antifederalists who hoped to diminish the government’s powers. This book is “a highly readable American history lesson that provides a deeper understanding of the Bill of Rights, the fears that generated it, and the miracle of the amendments” (*Kirkus Reviews*).”

Book Option Four: 100% Democracy: The Case For Universal Voting by E.J. Dionne and Miles Rapoport

Summary:

Americans are required to pay taxes, serve on juries, get their children vaccinated, get driver’s license, and sometimes go to war for their country. So why not ask – or require – every American to vote.

In *100% Democracy*, E.J. Dionne and Miles Rapoport argue that universal participation in our elections should be a cornerstone of our system. They argue that it would be the best and surest way to protect against voter suppression and the active disenfranchisement of a large share of our

citizens. They further argue that universal participation would create a system true to the Declaration of Independence's aspirations by calling for a government based on the consent of the governed.

Their idea/theory is not as radical or utopian as it sounds: in Australia, where everyone is required to vote (Australians can vote "none of the above," but they have to show up), 91/9% of Australians voted in the last major election in 2019, versus 60.1% in America's 2016 presidential election.

The authors present several ideas and strategies to implement universal participation in United States elections.

Book Option Five: One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy Paperback by Carol Anderson

Summary:

PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award Finalist, Longlisted for the National Book Award
Best Books of the Year--*Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *NPR*, *Bustle*, NYPL

"From the award-winning, *NYT* bestselling author of *White Rage*, the startling--and timely--history of voter suppression in America, with a foreword by Senator Dick Durbin, now with a new afterword by the author. In her *New York Times* bestseller *White Rage*, Carol Anderson laid bare an insidious history of policies that have systematically impeded black progress in America, from 1865 to our combustible present. With *One Person, No Vote*, she chronicles a related history: the rollbacks to African American participation in the vote since the 2013 Supreme Court decision that eviscerated the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Known as the *Shelby* ruling, this decision effectively allowed districts with a demonstrated history of racial discrimination to change voting requirements without approval from the Department of Justice.

Focusing on the aftermath of *Shelby*, Anderson follows the astonishing story of government-dictated racial discrimination unfolding before our very eyes as more and more states adopt voter suppression laws. In gripping, enlightening detail she explains how voter suppression works, from photo ID requirements to gerrymandering to poll closures. In a powerful new afterword, she examines the repercussions of the 2018 midterm elections. And with vivid characters, she explores the resistance: the organizing, activism, and court battles to restore the basic right to vote to all Americans."