

Graduate Project: Connecting Civil Rights to the AP Government Exam  
Megan Thompson

Note: Advanced Placement U.S. Government & Politics written exam questions are fairly proscribed; though the ideas, research, and questions below are my own, they intentionally mimic the College Board's language in directions and question format to best prepare students for the exam. While assessments are aligned with a particular lesson, they would be given as a summative assessment at the end of the unit in order to integrate all three lessons into their responses. Additionally, this mimics the exam, where, the essays and short-answer questions are given in one sitting.

### **Lesson**

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)

### **Standards**

PMI-3: Public policy promoting civil rights is influenced by citizen-state interactions and constitutional interpretation over time. PMI-3.A.1: The government can respond to social movements through court rulings and/or policies, as in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which declared that race-based school segregation violates the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.

Free-Response Questions: SCOTUS Comparison: Compare a nonrequired Supreme Court case with a required Supreme Court case, explaining how information from the required case is relevant to that in the nonrequired case.

### **Materials**

1. Class set of "Brown v. Board: An American Legacy" from *Teaching Tolerance*
2. John Robert's 2018 Stein Lecture at the University of Minnesota 8:22-12:07, 36:25-38:40
3. Socratic Seminar Scorecards

### **Procedures**

1. Anticipatory set: Brainstorm a list of the cases students would argue are some of the most influential in U.S. history. How should we evaluate which courses are the most influential?
2. Direct instruction and discussion: Play the clips from Robert's 2018 Stein Lecture (I was there!). In the lecture, he mentions *Brown* multiple times as well as *Youngstown Steel*, and *Korematsu*. What do these cases have in common with one another? How does Roberts use *Brown* to illustrate its importance in its time and in the modern Court?
3. Individual Activity: Distribute "Brown v. Board: An American Legacy." As students read, they should annotate for the Constitutional issues at the center of the case as well as arguments for both sides.

4. Group activity: split students into three groups, including Supreme Court decisions, legislative actions, and social movements. Each group should brainstorm a list of actions within their category that promoted and/or hindered the Civil Rights Movement. Lead a Socratic Seminar initiated by the question “Which actions were most effective at advancing the Civil Rights Movement?” and “Which actions were most effective at pushing back against the Civil Rights Movement?” Student are well-versed with the Socratic Seminar and evaluate each other on the rubric below as they share their evidence.

## Assessment

### SCOTUS Comparison Question

Ending a 157-year tradition of state-supported, all-male education, the Supreme Court ruled yesterday that Virginia Military Institute's exclusion of women is unconstitutional.

The 7 to 1 decision constitutes the strongest endorsement of sexual equality by the court in recent years. Written by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the ruling means that the venerable military school must admit women or go private. While Virginia "serves the state's sons, it makes no provision whatever for her daughters..." Ginsburg said. The court found that neither VMI's goal of producing "citizen-soldiers" nor its physically and mentally grueling program make the school inherently unsuitable to women...

Observing the state had sought to justify VMI on grounds of diversity (offering some coeducational programs and a single-sex one), Rehnquist said, "The difficulty with its position is that the diversity benefited only one sex; there was single-sex public education available for men at VMI, but no corresponding single-sex public education available for women."

Rehnquist agreed with the majority that the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership, at nearby Mary Baldwin women's college, was "distinctly inferior." Ginsburg noted the VWIL program, established in response to a lower court ruling against VMI, offers a faculty with "significantly fewer Ph.D.'s" than at VMI and enrolls students with SAT scores about 100 points lower than the score for VMI freshmen.

Source: Joan Biskupic, “Supreme Court Invalidates Exclusion of Women by VMI,” *Washington Post*, June 27, 1996.

- A) Identify the Constitutional clause being debated in both *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *U.S. v. Virginia* (1996).
- B) Based on the Constitutional clause identified in part A, explain how *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) serves as a precedent for the arguments presented in *U.S. v. Virginia* (1996).

C) Describe a way that states could use their power to limit the impact of the decision in *U.S. v. Virginia* (1996).