

NINTH CIRCUIT CIVICS CONTEST

The Right to Vote: MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

In the wake of the 15th and 19th Amendments, barriers remained to prevent United States citizens from voting.

Do formal or informal barriers remain today?

What additional changes would you make, if any, to Americans' voting rights?

2020 CONTEST WINNERS

THE NINTH CIRCUIT'S PUBLIC INFORMATION AND
COMMUNITY OUTREACH (PICO) COMMITTEE THANKS
THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR SUPPORT:

U.S. COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF ALASKA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT AND U.S. BANKRUPTCY COURT
FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT AND U.S. BANKRUPTCY COURT FOR THE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN
DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN
DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF GUAM
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF HAWAII
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF IDAHO
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MONTANA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEVADA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN
DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
U.S. DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN
DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON

PRIZE MONEY AND OTHER CONTEST COSTS ARE FUNDED THROUGH ATTORNEY
ADMISSION FEES COLLECTED BY THE COURTS TO FUND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
FOR THE BAR AND COMMUNITY.

A Word About the Contest

The 2020 Ninth Circuit Civics Contest is a circuit-wide essay and video competition for high school students. The contest focused on the 150th anniversary of the 15th Amendment, which granted voting rights to persons of color, and the centennial of the 19th Amendment, which accorded those same rights to women. The goal is to inform young people about their constitutional rights in order to help them become knowledgeable citizens while giving them a chance to express themselves in a creative manner by writing an essay and/or producing a video.

Now in its fifth year, the contest is organized by the Ninth Circuit's Public Information and Community Outreach (PICO) Committee in collaboration with all of the federal courts in the circuit.

The theme of the 2020 contest was "The Right to Vote: Milestone Anniversaries." Students were challenged to write an essay or produce a short video with the questions presented: *"In the wake of the 15th and 19th Amendments, barriers remained to prevent United States citizens from voting. Do formal or informal barriers remain today? What additional changes would you make, if any, to Americans' voting rights?"*

The contest was open to young people in Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington, along with the United States Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The 2020 Civics Contest was uniquely



*District Judge
Janis L. Sammartino,
chair of the Ninth
Circuit Public
Information and
Community Outreach
Committee*

<https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest>

challenged because of the unprecedented Coronavirus that forced a world-wide “Shelter in Place” to counteract the world-wide pandemic. Distance learning programs throughout the Circuit’s high schools became the new “normal.” We are proud to report that nearly 1,000 essays and over 80 videos were submitted by students from across the circuit. Preliminary judging done at the district level narrowed the field to 38 essays and 27 videos. Final judging was completed by members of the PICO Committee and court executives, which selected the top three finishers in each competition.

We would like to thank all of the federal courts of the Ninth Circuit for their support of the contest. We could not have succeeded without the help of the many judges, lawyers, chambers staff, court and library staff from throughout the circuit who contributed their time.

July 2020

WINNING ESSAY CONTEST ENTRIES

1st
place

ELINOR AMIR-LOBEL
LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

FROM ANTI-DISCRIMINATION TO EQUAL ACCESS: THE RIGHT TO VOTE FOR ALL

“Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet.” – Justice Ginsburg

At the heart of democracy lies voting. 2020 not only brings milestone anniversaries of the 15th and 19th Amendments, but it is also an election year with monumental stakes. With the nation facing a colossal health and economic crisis, the issues that we are voting on will fundamentally determine our nation’s future. This election season therefore presents an opportunity and duty to achieve the goal of the amendments: true equality. A substantive approach pierces the veil of formality and considers the actual effects of facially neutral rules.

It’s been a long road for voting rights. At the country’s founding, most citizens were excluded from voting, because of race, gender, religion, property, and tax requirements. By the 1860s, the right to vote expanded to most white men but the exclusion of women and people of color



Elinor Amir-Lobel is a rising junior at La Jolla Country Day, where she is an editor of the school newspaper. She serves on the community service board as co-president of the Female Empowerment student organization. Elinor enjoys reading, kayaking, and taking her dog on long walks. She loves languages, exploring new cultures, and traveling the world (when there isn’t a pandemic). This summer, Elinor is working as a tutor and trying to do her part during these unsettling political times.

persisted. In 1870, the 15th Amendment brought hope that every citizen regardless of race will have the right to vote. Yet, many states implemented voting barriers, including literary tests and poll taxes, effectively excluding black voters. Moreover, in 1884 the Supreme Court upheld the disenfranchisement of Native Americans, narrowly defining citizenship.¹ Indeed, only in 2019 did the Ninth Circuit hold that Guam’s restricting voting to “Native Inhabitants of Guam” violated the 15th Amendment by using ancestry as a proxy for race, ruling that courts should “err on the side of inclusiveness” when interpreting the Amendment.²

The 15th Amendment also offered no protection to women and, ironically, the Court relied on the 15th Amendment to narrow the scope of the 14th Amendment Equal Protection Clause. In *Minor v. Happersett*, the Court held that women were not entitled to the right to vote, reasoning “if suffrage was one of these privileges or immunities [of the 14th Amendment], why amend the Constitution to prevent its being denied on account of race?”³

In 1920, the 19th Amendment directly overruled *Minor* by declaring that the right to vote shall not be denied “on account of sex”. Still, for decades after the passage of the 19th Amendment, *Minor* was relied upon by courts in upholding other voting restrictions. It was only decades later that the Supreme Court began applying the 14th Amendment to voting rights. In 1963, in *Gray v. Sanders*, Justice Douglas, finding that the separation of voters into different classes was a violation of the 14th Amendment wrote that “the concept of political equality...can mean only one thing—one person, one vote”. This robust interpretation of the 14th Amendment is significant because both the 15th and the 19th Amendments, like many of our constitutional rights, are phrased in the negative: they do not provide positive equality but bar discrimination. To reach full equality, the best judicial and legislative decisions have strived to develop a robust, integrated vision of equality.

For decades, courts were reluctant to adopt such a vision. For example, *Breedlove v. Suttles*, upheld the constitutionality of poll taxes.⁴ The 1960s brought a sea of change. The 24th Amendment was ratified, prohibiting poll taxes in federal elections. In *Reynolds v. Sims*, striking down Alabama’s apportionment scheme, giving rural votes disproportionate voting power, Chief Justice Warren wrote, “legislators represent people,

not trees or acres”⁵ A year later, in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*, the Court held that poll tax in state elections is also unconstitutional. The court explained that when interpreting the 15th Amendment, it will apply the highest standard of review – strict scrutiny – because the right to vote “is preservative of other basic civil and political rights.”⁶ In 1965, the Voting Rights Act established sweeping protections, including preclearance requirements, giving federal courts the power to oversee changes in voting requirements to protect minorities. A year later, *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* upheld its constitutionality. Chief Justice Warren wrote, “after enduring nearly a century of widespread resistance of the Fifteenth Amendment, Congress has marshalled an array of potent weapons against the evil.”⁷

In subsequent cases, the Court continued to protect of the Act.⁸ However, in 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Court struck down the Act’s preclearance sections, reasoning that data about voting discrimination was outdated.⁹ Justice Ginsburg’s dissent insightfully integrates the five voting rights constitutional amendments: “Each of these Amendments contains the same broad empowerment of Congress to enact ‘appropriate legislation’ to enforce the protected right.”¹⁰ Indeed, the five amendments provide powerful safeguards. However, the milestones anniversaries also reveal new forms of disenfranchisement.

Shelby made it easier for states to change their voting systems and requirements in ways that suppress minority voting. Voting locations were reduced in some states, leading to lower voter turnout and disparately impacting Blacks and Hispanics.¹¹ ID requirements and shorter mail-in ballots have also made it harder for non-English speaker, immigrants, the elderly, and the poor to vote. Several states have recently reformed their voting laws to increase participation. Colorado’s Voter Access and Modernized Elections Act mandates sending mail ballots to every registered voter, eliminates assigned polling places, reduces gerrymandering, and shortens state residency requirements for voter registration. Maryland, Michigan and Nevada simplified their voter registration. Florida recently restored voting rights to 1.4 million former felons, over one third of them African-American.

Courts and legislators must continue to actively seek ways to make the formal right to vote a reality to all. In April 2020, the Supreme Court upheld Wisconsin’s decision to hold elections during the coronavirus

pandemic without extending the timeline for absentee ballots, effectively disenfranchising thousands who cannot vote for safety issues.¹² The majority opinion relies on recent caselaw that has refrained from intervening in election rules. Yet, now more than ever, courts should take an active role in guarding our constitutional rights to voting equality. Transcending political lines, the principles the courts should follow are substantive voting equality and the participation of all citizens.

¹ *Elk v. Wilkins*, 112 U.S. 94 (1884).

² *Davis v. Guam*, 932 F.3d 822 (2019).

³ 88 U.S. 162 (1875).

⁴ 302 U.S. 277 (1937).

⁵ 377 U.S. 533.

⁶ *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*, 383 U.S. 663 (1966).

⁷ 86 U.S. 803 (1966).

⁸ *Georgia v. United States* 411 U.S. 526 (1973); *City of Rome v. United States* 446 U.S. 206. (1980); *Lopez v. Monterey County* 519 U.S. 9 (1996).

⁹ *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013)

¹⁰ *Shelby*, 570 U.S. at 567 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting).

¹¹ How Long It Took Different Groups to Vote, New York Times, February 4, 2013.

¹² *Republican National Committee v. Democratic National Committee*, 589 U.S. ____ (2020).

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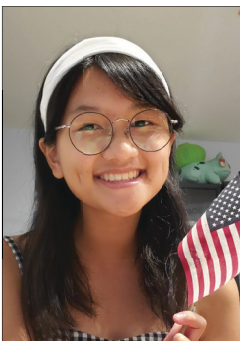


OLIVIA CHEN ARCADIA, CALIFORNIA

In today's turbulent political climate, the right to vote remains the most accessible way for citizens in a democracy to make their voices heard and advocate for change in their government. However, in America, formal and informal barriers against voting still exist today, and there is still work to be done to guarantee voter equality for all citizens.

America's past treatment of its minorities remains a dark stain on its otherwise glorious founding. After years of struggle, the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments was a step in the right direction, granting citizenship rights to African Americans and promising equal protection under the law. The Fifteenth Amendment especially prohibited the government from denying a citizen the right to vote based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."¹ However, soon after it was implemented, many states rushed to impose poll taxes, literary tests, and grandfather clauses to prevent African Americans from voting. White supremacist groups like the KKK also invoked scare tactics to frighten African Americans away from voting.

Many other minorities were excluded from the rights inherent in the 15th Amendment. The Fifteenth Amendment purposely excluded the word "sex," ostracizing women. In *Minor v. Happersett* (1874), the Supreme Court held that denying women the right to vote did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment since "constitutionally protected privileges of citizenship did not include the right to vote."² Native Americans were also



Olivia Chen has always been fascinated by the Constitution and the way our country works. Besides political and philosophical discussion, Olivia enjoys reading and going on long walks in nature. She is thankful for the opportunity to participate in the contest and write about her thoughts on such an important topic. Olivia hopes to stay politically active in the future.

denied the right to suffrage. In *Elk v. Wilkins* (1884), the Court held that Native Americans were not natural born citizens and did not have access to the rights in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments since they owed allegiance to their tribe rather than the United States.

With much struggle, minorities utilized both the legislative and judicial pathways to gain rights. Martin Luther King Jr's March on Washington and Malcolm X's "Ballot or the Bullet" helped result in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Similarly, the women's suffrage movement culminated in the Nineteenth Amendment, garnering voting rights and equality for women. Led by Lucy Burns and Alice Paul, brave women went on hunger strikes, picketed, and demonstrated outside the White House, pressuring President Woodrow Wilson to finally support the long-sought after amendment. The Nineteenth Amendment finally gave women the right to vote by barring the state and federal government from implementing restrictions on women suffrage.

The Supreme Court was instrumental in this struggle for equal rights. Throughout the 20th century, the Warren Court began interpreting the Reconstruction Amendments more broadly, passing legislation protecting individual rights and minorities. Through its judicial activism, the Court served as a catalyst for policy change — it was a place people could turn to when the other branches refused to listen. The unelected nature of the Court freed it from “the electoral and institutional constraints that pose barriers to change,”³ allowing justices the liberty of making controversial decisions without having to worry about public backlash. In *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966), the Court held that poll taxes were unconstitutional since “voter qualifications have no relation to wealth,” opening up opportunities for poor African Americans to vote.⁴ It deemed poll taxes an obstruction of the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, and recognized the use of these taxes to hinder poor minorities from voting. The Supreme Court also ruled in *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* (1966) that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was constitutional and protected under the Fifteenth Amendment. Chief Justice Earl Warren found that the act was essential in preventing voter suppression and to “remedy the evil of racism.”⁵ The United States is still making progress with suffrage today. In 2018, Florida, a state that disenfranchised 6.1 million adults due to felony disenfranchisement laws, passed the Florida Voting Rights Restoration for Felons Initiative of 2018. The act promised to restore felons' voting rights if they have completed their sentence and were not charged with murder or sexual offenses.

America has come a long way since Dred Scott, but there still exists room for improvement. In the status quo, the turnout gap between whites and racial minorities is large and unsettling — there is a 20-point gap between Latino and Asian-American voters and Whites.⁶ Restrictive voter ID laws and racially segregated gerrymandering exclude many from voting, and research has shown that states are closing polling places in historically Black communities.⁷

Because any obstruction for a natural born citizen to vote is unconstitutional, it is our duty as citizens to advocate for change to include equal suffrage for all. One such policy change is for the United States Federal Government to adopt Colorado's Voter Access and Modernized Elections Act to make voting more accessible for all. Passed in 2013, the act eliminated assigned polling places, mandated mail-in ballots for most elections, allowed for in-person registration, and shortened state residency requirements. It would also prevent states from passing id laws that disenfranchise the poor. I would also make voting a national holiday so that those who can't afford to skip a day of work can still make their voices heard. As part of my high school government class, I volunteered at a polling place for the March Midterm Elections in California. Near the end of the work day, people flooded the polling place; at one point, the line was over two hours long, and many people left without voting. By creating a federally mandated holiday, people would be able to exercise their constitutional right to a ballot without having to worry about missing work or long lines that deter individuals from voting — since people could come anytime in the day and in any polling place near them there wouldn't be a backlog of voters.

Since the needs of the minority are often different — even conflicting — with those of the majority, it is important that the voting rights of minorities are protected. By keeping the struggle for equal voting rights alive, we will finally realize a country where all men (and women) are created equal.”

¹ “Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution,” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 4 Apr. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifteenth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution.

² “Minor v. Happersett,” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, February 4, 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minor_v._Happersett.

³ PACELLE, RICHARD, *ROLE OF THE SUPREME COURT IN AMERICAN POLITICS: the Least Dangerous Branch?* ROUTLEDGE, 2019.

⁴ “Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections,” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, December 18, 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harper_v._Virginia_State_Board_of_Elections.

⁵ “South Carolina v. Katzenbach,” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, November 30, 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Carolina_v._Katzenbach.

⁶ Bernard L. Fraga, “Analysis | The Turnout Gap between Whites and Racial Minorities Is Larger than You Think - and Hard to Change.” *The Washington Post*, September 25, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/25/the-turnout-gap-between-whites-and-racial-minorities-is-larger-than-you-think-and-hard-to-change/.

⁷ Vasilogambros, Matt, “Polling Places in Black Communities Continue to Close Ahead of November Elections.” *Governing*, September 5, 2018, www.governing.com/topics/politics/sl-polling-place-close-ahead-of-november-elections-black-voters.html.

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The Facially Neutral Rules that Disenfranchise Our Most Vulnerable

The anniversaries of the 15th and 19th Amendments are reasons to celebrate, but there still remain barriers to full voting equality. Today, surveys are alarmingly finding that only half of Americans believe voting is conducted openly and fairly.¹ The growing mistrust in our electoral system stems from decades of disenfranchisement of some of the country's most vulnerable populations. While the 15th Amendment makes it unlawful to “deny” or “abridge” the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,” many contemporary voting rules have disparate impact on people of color. In 1965, Congress used its powers to enforce the constitutional amendments by enacting the Voting Rights Act (VRA) which prohibited using a “test or device” to deny voting rights and banned practices such as poll taxes and literacy tests. In *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* (1966), the Supreme Court extended the ban on poll tax to state elections explaining that “wealth, like race, creed, or color, is not germane to one’s ability to participate intelligently in the electoral process.” According to the Library of Congress, within four years of the VRA’s enactment, black voter registration rates increased from 35 percent to 65 percent.² Still, even decades later, minority voting has not yet risen to full equality and several recent cases represent a retreat from the progress that was made since the 1960s.



Danielle Amir-Lobel graduated recently as the valedictorian of La Jolla Country Day School. She is excited to attend Stanford University in the fall. Danielle enjoys traveling, writing, swimming, singing, playing the violin, conducting research, and engaging in civic activism. In college, she is planning on studying neuroscience and psychology with the goal of eventually becoming a researcher and professor.

Reforms that increase voting requirements, manipulate voting zones, and disenfranchise certain populations often disproportionately harm those who have historically been excluded. One of the most pressing issues today is felony disenfranchisement. Felony disenfranchisement laws have denied the basic right to vote for over six million citizens in recent years.³ A third of these citizens are not incarcerated but live in the majority of states which have laws prohibiting voting by those on parole, probation, or who have served their sentence, even if convicted for a relatively small one-time offense. Continuing disparities in wealth and education as well as ongoing racial biases have led to stronger law enforcement and criminal prosecution against African Americans. Therefore, disenfranchised felons or former felons are disproportionately people of color, which, in my opinion, violates the 15th Amendment.

The courts, however, have been reluctant to adopt this expansive interpretation. In 2010, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down Washington State's felony disenfranchisement, finding that racial discrimination in Washington's criminal justice system in turn causes racial discrimination in voting rights. The victory was short lived. The holding was reversed in an en banc rehearing.⁴ Still, recent state legislative reforms are promising and should be emulated. Notably, Florida's Amendment 4 ended lifetime disenfranchisement for most residents, Colorado passed a law expanding voting rights to residents on parole, and Nevada and New Jersey enacted laws restoring voting rights for anyone released from prison.

Even beyond disenfranchisement, a major impediment to full democratic participation is low political participation among those who have been historically marginalized. In other words, even when, for example, a state passes a felony disenfranchisement reform, more needs to be done bring these newly enfranchised citizens to the ballot. Educational programs to increase the number of actual voters are therefore no less important than the removal of formal barriers. California has a proactive initiative, A New Way of Life Reentry Project, promoting voter engagement of women who are released from prison. This effort is important to fulfill the mandates of both the 15th Amendment and the 19th Amendment. Similar initiatives include Louisiana's Voice of the Experienced (VOTE) and Maine's NAACP State Prison chapter, which educates incarcerated voters about the political questions of the day.

Voter suppression has also taken the form of reforms such as ID requirements, cutting voting time, limiting voting locations, redistricting, registration requirements, and limits on mail-in ballots which disproportionately suppress voting by minorities and the poor.⁵ While the VRA increased minority participation immediately after its enactment, recent decisions reveal a reluctance by the courts to intervene in voting reforms. In 2013, *Shelby County v. Holder* vacated the sections of the VRA that required federal approval of voting restrictions. Chief Justice Roberts wrote the majority opinion, holding that the law undermined “the fundamental principle of equal sovereignty” among the states. According to the Chief Justice, minority voting has seen “dramatic progress” and therefore supervision is no longer needed. Justice Ginsburg strongly dissented, writing that “the Court makes no genuine attempt to engage with the massive legislative record that Congress assembled. Instead, it relies on increases in voter registration and turnout as if that were the whole story. One would expect more from an opinion striking at the heart of the Nation’s signal piece of civil-rights legislation.”⁶

In 2018, the Supreme Court in *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute* upheld Ohio’s voter purge law, which allowed the state to disenfranchise voters if they did not vote in three consecutive elections. Ohio purged over two million voters from the rolls since 2011, with black voters over twice as likely to be purged as white voters. As Justice Sotomayor explained in her dissent, “language-access problems, mail delivery issues, inflexible work issues, among other obstacles, make it more difficult for many minority, low-income, disabled, homeless, and veteran voters to cast a ballot or return a notice, rendering them particularly vulnerable to unwarranted removal.”⁷ These recent cases have moved away from the spirit of the 15th and 19th Amendments. In 1966, in *South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, the Court emphasized the importance of ongoing judicial intervention to prevent election manipulation and disenfranchisement. This need for judicial oversight continues today. Left to their own devices, political parties continue to reform voting processes to deliberately impact political outcomes. Democracy is based on checks and balances, and the judiciary is charged with the apolitical role of protecting access for everyone. Courts must continue to recognize that facially neutral rules can be discriminatory. To protect our democratic process, the American electorate must reflect who we all are regardless of race, gender, class, background, history, or privilege.

¹ Wilson, Reid. “New Poll Shows ‘Crisis of Confidence’ in US Elections.” *The Hill*, 10 Oct. 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/465060-new-poll-shows-crisis-of-confidence-in-us-elections>.

² “The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom Immediate Impact of the Civil Rights Act.” *Library of Congress*, 10 Oct. 2014, www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/immediate-impact.html.

³ Uggen, Christopher, and Nazgol Ghandnoosh. “6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016.” *The Sentencing Project*, 6 Oct. 2016, www.sentencingproject.org/publications/6-million-lost-voters-state-level-estimates-felony-disenfranchisement-2016/.

⁴ *Farrakhan v. Gregoire*, 623 F.3d 990 (9th Cir. 2010).

⁵ Newkirk, Vann R. “Voter Suppression Is Warping Democracy.” *The Atlantic*, 17 July 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/07/poll-prri-voter-suppression/565355/>.

⁶ *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013).

⁷ *Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute*, No. 16-980, 584 U.S. (2018).

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WINNING VIDEO CONTEST ENTRIES

Winning video entries can be viewed by visiting the 2020 Civics Contest website: <https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest>



MANDY JIANG, MICHELLE JIANG AND CATHLEEN LIANG LAS VEGAS, NEVADA



Mandy Jiang graduated recently from West Career and Technical Academy in Las Vegas. In the next school year, she will be attending Emory University to major in nursing and minor in human health. In high school, Mandy enjoyed volunteering as she was a member of HOSA Future Health Professionals and National Honor Society. This year, she participated in the “We the People” program, a government class that promotes civic responsibility through speech-writing and simulated congressional hearings. Apart from

learning more about politics and the U.S. government, Mandy enjoys baking and cooking—although she claims that she’s not very good at it—drawing, and swimming. She loves watching all kinds of movies and TV shows!



Michelle Jiang graduated recently from West Career and Technical Academy in Las Vegas. In high school, she was enrolled in the nursing assistant program and now, plans to attend New York University to pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing. She is very passionate about helping others, particularly in the fields of health care and social justice. She volunteers locally through clubs, such as HOSA Future Health Professionals and National Honor Society, and she can't wait to seek out greater

opportunities to give back in New York City. In her free time, she likes to cook, listen to music, and eat. She enjoys traveling, exploring cities, learning new languages, and participating in new experiences.



Cathleen Liang is a senior at West Career and Technical Academy in Las Vegas. She will be attending Yale University next year, majoring in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology with an emphasis in pre-med. In her free time, Cathleen enjoys reading, hiking, and playing the piano. She always enjoys trying something new and hope to one day write her own book.



DIVYA GANESAN

PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA



Divya Ganesan is a junior at Castilleja School in Palo Alto, California, with a passion for history and public policy. As a “National History Day” state champion and competitor, she has enjoyed exploring the relationship between the news and the government as well as women’s rights. Divya’s passion for history motivates her efforts in her local community to engage more teens in politics. As president of the Palo Alto Youth Council and founder of Real Talk, a student led organization with the mission of teaching youth civil discourse, she shares her vision with the teen community. In addition to her policy endeavors, Divya has intensively practiced Bharatanatyam, an Indian classical dance form for the last 10 years. In the future, she hopes to use her platform in college and beyond to bridge connections between those with different political views, especially in a time like this of increased political polarity.



SANDAR AUNG, AMINA BOULAKHRAS AND NESRINE MAIDI LAS VEGAS, NEVADA



Sandar Aung is 18 years old and was born in Guam. She graduated recently from West Career and Technical Academy in Las Vegas and plans to attend the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, next year majoring in pre-nursing. Recently, Sandar finished her clinical and class hours in order to become a CNA and is currently waiting for an opportunity to take the test and hopefully work as a CNA at a care facility. After college, Sandar hopes to graduate with a bachelor's degree in nursing and fulfill the requirements to become a pediatric nurse. During her free time, she enjoys painting and baking all sorts of pastries. She paints on shoes, vinyls, flasks, and canvases and sell most of her artwork to those who are interested. Every summer, she volunteers at a monthly monastery food fair and a daycare center. She also works part-time as a server at a restaurant to help pay for her college tuition. Sandar believes that her job and volunteering opportunities have helped improve her communication skills, with both adults and children, and being able to be up and about on her feet for long periods of time preparing her to become a pediatric nurse.



Amina Boulakhras is a senior nursing student at West Career and Technical Academy in Las Vegas. She will be going to college at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, to pursue a nurse practitioner career. Her favorite hobbies include swimming as well as spending time with friends and family. Government was one of her favorite classes due to her amazing teacher as well as having the ability to understand how the United States operates. Participating in the video contest allowed her to comprehend the efforts made for equal voting rights as well as shed a light on the wonderful democracy in the U.S.



Nesrine Maida graduated valedictorian from West Career and Technical Academy in Las Vegas. In addition to playing varsity soccer, Nesrine was founder and president of the engineering club and a member of both Mu Alpha Theta and the American Sign Language Club. Nesrine plans to major in mechanical engineering at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and eventually pursue a master's degree in aerospace engineering. Outside of school, Nesrine enjoys rock climbing, baking, and spending time with family.

DISTRICT WINNERS WHO ADVANCED TO THE CIRCUIT AS FINALISTS

District of Alaska

The essay winner is Joseph Wittrock of King Tech High School in Anchorage.

District of Arizona

Essay winners are: 1st place, Avneet Kaur of Arizona School for the Arts in Phoenix; 2nd place, Hannah Cluroe of Hamilton High School in Chandler; and 3rd place, Jen Ham of Desert Vista High School in Phoenix.

Video winners are: 1st place, the team of Kaylee Johanson and Jordan Wiener of Arizona School for the Arts in Phoenix; 2nd place, the team of Theodore Lowell, Abrielle Millet and Christian Vasquez of Walden Grove High School in Sahuarita; and 3rd place, the team of Marc Garba and Jiatian Yin of Desert Mountain High School in Scottsdale.

Central District of California

Essay winners are: 1st place, Olivia Chen of Arcadia High School in Arcadia; 2nd place, Elizabeth Yeh, also of Arcadia High School; and 3rd place, Genna Gams of Agoura High School in Agoura Hills.

Video winners are: 1st place, the team of Fatima Laureano, Karina Patel and Yadira Garcia of Rubidoux High School in Jurupa Valley; 2nd place, the team of Justine Fisher and Riley Fisher of La Cañada High School in La Cañada Flintridge; and 3rd place, the team of Celine Yang, Maria Solis and Karen Patel, also of Rubidoux High School.

Eastern District of California

Essay winners are: 1st place, Krishna Mandal; 2nd place, Gabrielle Malte; and 3rd place, Zachary Green. All students are from Benicia High School in Benicia.

The winner of the video competition is Trista Galli of The Met Sacramento High School in Sacramento.

Northern District of California

The three essay winners, in no particular order, are: Amanda Cheng of Castilleja School in Palo Alto; Matt Hsu of San Francisco University High School in San Francisco; and Sahil Venkatesan of Homestead High School in Cupertino.

The winner of the video competition is Divya Ganesan, also of Castilleja School.

Southern District of California

Essay winners are: 1st place, Danielle Amir-Lobel; 2nd place, Yubeen “Amy” Cho; and 3rd place, Elinor Amir-Lobel. All students are from La Jolla Country Day School in La Jolla.

The two winners of the video competition are: 1st place, the team of Taylor Rickert and Jeremy Byrd of Foothills Christian High School in El Cajon; and 2nd place, Angel Zepeda of San Ysidro High School in San Diego.

District of Guam

Essay winners are: 1st place, Jenny Mann, of St. Johns School in Tumon; 2nd place, Raemier Javelosa of the Academy of Our Lady of Guam in Hagåtña; and 3rd place, Lian Tsiao, also of the Academy of Our Lady of Guam.

Video winners are: 1st place, the team of Putra Sani and James Tabunar of George Washington High School in Mangilao; 2nd place, Shawn Gatchell of Guam High School in Hagåtña; and 3rd place, Joseph Vinch, also of Guam High School.

District of Hawaii

The two winners of the essay competition are: 1st place, Carson Oakley of Kaiser High School in Honolulu, and 2nd place, Alyssa Young of Hawaii Baptist Academy in Honolulu.

Video winners are: 1st place, Emma Ching of Punahou School in Honolulu; 2nd place, the team of Koapono Garcia and Gabriel Compos of Kihei Charter School in Kihei; and 3rd place, Jacob Chmeleck, also of Kihei Charter School.

District of Idaho

Essay winners are: 1st place, Kimball Godfrey of Rocky Mountain High School in Meridian; 2nd place, Andras Britschgi of Sage International School of Boise; and 3rd place, James Giffen of Timberline High School in Boise.

The winners of the video competition are: 1st place, Bella Hall of Boise High School in Boise, and 2nd place, the team of Liam Neupert and Piper Myers Poppay of One Stone in Boise.

District of Montana

Essay winners are: 1st place, Zach Mangels, of Skyview High School in Billings; 2nd place, Zander Opperman of Gardiner Public School in Gardiner; and 3rd place, Hannah Martin of Corvallis High School in Corvallis.

Video winners are: 1st place, Nathaniel Broch, also of Corvallis High School; 2nd place, Abigail Clark of Fort Benton High School in Fort Benton; and 3rd place, Monse Arvayo, also of Fort Benton High School.

District of Nevada

Essay winners are: 1st place, Sophia Socha; 2nd place, Kate Wong; and 3rd place, Alyssa Marie Laguna. All students are from West Career & Technical Academy in Las Vegas.

Video winners are: 1st place, the team of Sandar Aung, Amina Boulakhras and Nesrine Maldi, also of West Career & Technical Academy; 2nd place, the team of Mandy Jiang, Cathleen Liang and Michelle Jiang, also of West Career & Technical Academy; and 3rd place, the team of Trevor Smerz and Austin Phelps of Faith Lutheran High School in Las Vegas.

District of Northern Mariana Islands

The winner of the video competition is Richard Baleares of Saipan Southern High School in Saipan.

District of Oregon

Essay winners are: 1st place, Katlyn Kenney, of Lincoln High School in Portland; 2nd place, Aishiki Nag of Tigard High School in Tigard; and 3rd place, Kyra Allen of Wilsonville High School in Wilsonville.

Eastern District of Washington

The winners are: 1st place for essay, Conor Lincoln of A.C. Davis High School in Yakima; 2nd place for video, the team of Katarina Kenlein and Kaden Kenlein of Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane; and 3rd place, Kira Baum, of Delta High School in West Richland.

Western District of Washington

The essay winners are: 1st place, Maple Moody of Lakeside School in Seattle; 2nd place, Elizabeth Prater of Columbia River High School in Vancouver; and 3rd place, Anabel Lee of The Downtown School in Seattle.

The winner of the video competition is Jacob Olson of North Thurston High School in Lacey.

2020 CIVICS CONTEST JUDGES

Essay Winner Selection:

Bankruptcy Judge Roger L. Efremsky, *Public Information and Community Outreach (PICO) Committee Member, Northern District of California*; Robyn Lipsky, *Executive Director, Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society, Liaison to PICO Committee*; Renée S. Lorda, *Assistant Circuit Executive for Public Information, Conference and Education, Office of the Circuit Executive (OCE)*; Chief Bankruptcy Judge Margaret M. Mann, *PICO Committee Member, Southern District of California*; Martha Sheehy, Esq., *PICO Committee Member, District of Montana*

Video Winner Selection:

Bev A. Benka, *Bankruptcy Court Clerk, PICO Committee Member, Eastern District of Washington*; Circuit Judge Morgan Christen, *PICO Committee Member, Anchorage, Alaska*; Stephen Liacouras, *Chief Circuit Mediator, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, San Francisco*; District Judge John A. Kronstadt, *PICO Committee Member, Central District of California*; Eric Wade, *Circuit Librarian, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Library, San Francisco*

Preliminary Judging of Essay and Video Entries:

Sandy Andrews, *Policy and Research Analyst, OCE*; Denise Asper, *Prison Litigation Project Director, OCE*; Alex Clausen, *Audio and Visual Specialist for Public Information, OCE*; Kristine Fox, *CJA Supervising Attorney, OCE*; Tyler P. Gilman, *District Court Clerk, Conference Executive Committee (CEC) Member, District of Montana*; District Judge Sharon Gleason, *District of Alaska*; Doreen Spear Hartwell, Esq., *Lawyer Representatives Coordinating Committee (LRCC) Chair & CEC Member, District of Nevada*; Julie Horst, *Librarian, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Library, San Francisco*; Stella Huynh, *Workplace Relations Specialist, OCE*; Misty Perry Isaacson, *LRCC Chair-Elect, Central District of California*; Nicholas Jackson, *Staff Attorney and Communications Officer, Northern District of California*; Kari Kelso, *Public Education and Community Outreach Administrator of the Kennedy Learning Center, Sacramento, OCE*; Rob Leung, *Operations Specialist, OCE*; Sandy Li, *Librarian, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Library, Santa Ana*; Shannon Lynch, *Librarian, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Library, Reno, Nevada*; Chief District Judge Kimberly J. Mueller, *Eastern District of California*; Tom Phinney, Esq., *Conference Executive Committee Member, Eastern District of California*; Julia Seiter, *Librarian, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Library, Los Angeles*; Rebecca Sherman, *Assistant Librarian, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Library, Portland, Oregon*; District Judge Michael H. Simon, *District of Oregon*; Ruth Thom, *Law Clerk, District of Alaska*; and Chandan Toor, *Web Developer/Administrator, OCE*.

We offer our special thanks to the judges, attorneys, court staff and educators from throughout the Ninth Circuit who contributed to the success of the civics contest.



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