

Call for Papers

“Contesting Black Citizenship from the American Revolution to the Present”

Annual Conference
Middelburg, Netherlands
12-13 December 2024

This conference, hosted by the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies (RIAS) in Middelburg, Netherlands, will explore Black citizenship as a site of contestation throughout US history, from the revolutionary period to the present. It will examine practices and institutionalized manifestations of exclusion from citizenship rights for African Americans, as well as resistance to exclusion, at both the federal and state levels. We welcome paper submissions from established and early career scholars, including PhD researchers, that deal with the conference theme from any angle.

Questions concerning the inclusion and exclusion of (free) African Americans from political participation, constitutional rights, and even legal personhood have constituted sites of contestation since the American Revolution, both at the federal and state levels. Even before the Dred Scott decision (1857) denied citizenship rights to all African Americans and long before the 14th Amendment (1868) guaranteed federal citizenship to all freedpeople in the wake of emancipation, free Black communities in both the northern and southern states faced—and often pushed back against—a wide spectrum of legal statuses that varied from near full citizenship rights in parts of northern New England to non-citizenship in the southern slave states.

The slavery and fugitive slave issues of antebellum America revealed fundamental fissures in Americans’ understandings of to whom constitutional rights and democracy should apply. Contested visions and understandings of Black citizenship at both the federal and state levels lay at the heart of the Reconstruction project and the subsequent backlash against it. They constituted the foundational justifications for Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights Movement that ultimately led to its abolition. More recently, they inform present-day gerrymandering and voter suppression in various states across the country.

The tensions arising from conflicting visions of Black citizenship have been a driving force in American history and have had a profound effect on the country’s politics and legal justice system. The purpose of this conference is to shed new light on issues concerning Black citizenship as sites of contestation from the origins of the republic to the present day.

Submit a proposal

The deadline for submissions is **Friday, 15 December 2023**. To submit a paper proposal, please send a short abstract (250 words max) and curriculum vitae with your contact information to info@roosevelt.nl. Accepted conference participants will be asked to pre-circulate their draft papers (roughly 5,000-7,000 words) by 2 December 2024.

Please note that the RIAS has funding to cover accommodation and meals for conference presenters.

For more information, please contact Damian Pargas at da.pargas@roosevelt.nl or d.a.pargas@hum.leidenuniv.nl.

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