

DC Statehood Viewpoints: A Classroom Simulation

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Every year, during our unit on the New Nation, I teach about the founding of Washington, DC and have a basic discussion around the arguments for and against Statehood. Last year, I purposefully set out to teach my students the complexities of the perspectives surrounding DC Statehood. To do so, I created a lesson that provides students an opportunity to take on a role as an individual within the argument. Modeled off of some Zinn Education Project mixers that I have used, I created the attached lesson.

Prior to this lesson, my students spent a class period learning about the history of the creation of DC. Students do this through various secondary readings. I have students popcorn read a Xeroxed copy of the text and annotate as they read. Students are annotating for new facts, connections to their lives today, and a question they have and/or need further clarification on. At the end of the reading, students complete a simple 3-2-1:

- 3 new facts you learned about Washington DC's history today:
- 2 DIRECT connections you made between what you read today and your life:
- 1 question you still have about DC's History (you may not say that you don't have any).

This lays the historical foundation for the creation of DC.

The next day, students begin with an historical map of DC, comparing and contrasting it to modern day DC. Students are asked to share at least one difference and one similarity. They are also tasked with asking a question they have—either based off of our reading from yesterday, the map, or their current understanding/knowledge. After briefly sharing out on the warm up, students read the objectives for the day:

- We will look at the issue of DC Statehood by hearing different perspectives on the issue.
- Students will work both independently and collaboratively to come to conclusions about the issue of DC Statehood for themselves.

Students have already completed a unit on the Foundations of Government. They already know how Congress works and that DC does not have voting representation in Congress because we are not a state. I remind them of their prior knowledge and then share that the issue of statehood for Washingtonians offers three options:

- Statehood=DC becomes a state, cannot be taken away, 2 Senators in the Senate, at least 1 Representative in the House of Representatives.

- A voting rights amendment=DC would have full voting rights within Congress, but would not become a state, could be repealed by another amendment.
- Remain a federal city.

I do not answer any questions at this point.

Students are asked to take out the handout that they picked up at the door (my classroom routine). I ask them to silently and independently take one minute to answer the first questions: What do you believe about the issue of DC Statehood? Why? I want them to take a minute before starting to share what their personal belief is and to justify it. I do not ask them to share out at this time, but rather to record it on their paper.

While they are writing, I walk by each desk and give them a slip of paper that has a name on it and a viewpoint about DC Statehood (see attached handouts). I try to mix up the viewpoints and make sure that all sides are equally distributed and shared in the class. After they have finished their personal thoughts, they are instructed to write the name/role/perspective of their assigned person on their worksheet and then read their new role. I give them about a minute to do so. Then, I instruct students to write a two to three sentence introduction about the person they were assigned that will be shared with their classmates. The short introduction must

- be written in first person;
- be clear, to the point, and persuasive about the perspective on DC Statehood.
- introduce the person, your position/job if it is known, and the individual's feelings about DC Statehood.

I then explain that students will have approximately 10-15 minutes to circulate throughout the room in a meet and greet style, aiming to talk to at least five people. Students are reminded to use their worksheet to capture some of the viewpoints of others in the room. As they mingle, they are asked to

- Identify the name of the person/or how they are identified.
- For Perspective, write what they want—statehood, voting rights, remain a federal city, etc.
- For Reason, share why they have that perspective (evidence)

Students are generally eager to hear from each other. There is a variety of individuals, politically and geographically. While students are circulating, I also circulate and make sure that students are having meaningful and appropriate conversations. I often bring students over to other students who are shy and perhaps reticent, aiming to aid the start of the conversation.

After the time has elapsed for the meet and greet (and the time goes quickly in this class period!) I ask for a few individuals to share something they heard that surprised them. This is great because it allows yet another opportunity for students to hear another perspective and/or to ask a clarifying question if something was not clear to them about a particular perspective. Continuing to keep the lesson moving I ask students to reflect on the lesson by answering three questions:

- a. Did your beliefs change, or become stronger, as a result of what you heard today? (Review what you wrote in #1 on this paper.) Explain.

- b. What is a new perspective you learned today in talking to people? Explain what was new to you.
- c. Who is another person who shared your want (statehood, rights, status quo) but for a different reason? What was their reason?
- d. Who was one person that you felt you would want to convince to your assigned perspective? Make a plea to them as to why they should follow YOUR rationale (from the point of your assigned perspective, not your personal opinion).

Their exit ticket is then to write a 25 word summary with the purpose of persuading someone to join their (the student's) PERSONAL belief about DC Statehood. In this way, it brings the lesson and the worksheet, full circle from where we started. Students may feel the same as when they started, or different, but hopefully they have (more) evidence to support their claim(s).

I find this lesson is powerful to the students because of the diverse perspectives presented. Students are eager to better understand the discussion viewpoints. While I usually don't have time in the lesson, I do think it would be worthwhile to ask students if their opinion of Statehood shifted as a result of this activity.

Roles

Here is an [online version of the roles](#) for access for remote instruction.

Perspective	Belief
Virginia Resident	If statehood is that important to DC residents, they should just move a mile or two away and live in Virginia. <u>Virginia has statehood and can offer full votes in Congress.</u>
Maryland Resident	Just retrocede back to us and DC residents will have, most likely, democratic votes and representation. Most of what is DC today was part of MD originally. <u>It's time to return to the state DC was created from.</u>
Mayor Muriel Bowser	<p>The 670,000 U.S. citizens who live in the nation's capital have no voting representation in Congress. (We can vote in presidential elections thanks to the 23rd Amendment, although that wasn't allowed until 1964.) D.C.'s population is greater than that of Wyoming and Vermont.</p> <p>We have a local city council, but every law it passes can be negated by Congress. In fact, Congress can do away with Washington, D.C.'s form of government anytime it so desires. <u>Statehood</u> grants true and complete autonomy and sovereignty.</p>
DC's Chief Financial Officer	D.C. residents paid the federal government \$26.4 billion in taxes in 2014. But the District's federal contribution amounted to more than 22 <i>other states</i> . DC is already paying its worth in taxes, we deserve representation in Congress through <u>Statehood.</u>

<p>Resident of Florida</p>	<p>Nearly 80 percent of Americans are unaware that DC is denied representation. The new state would exercise undue influence over the federal government which is what the creation of the District was trying to avoid. Furthermore, being a city, it would probably mainly represent urban, not rural or suburban, interests. And to top it all off, it would mess up the nifty-fifty stars on the flag. <u>DC should remain the federal city, just as it is!</u></p>
<p>DC Resident 1</p>	<p>Nothing should change—nothing is broken—what would representation mean anyway? Congress is already broken. DC’s representation can’t fix Congress. <u>DC should remain the federal city!</u></p>
<p>DC Resident 2</p>	<p>As a tax paying Washingtonian, I am tired of not having my voice, through my vote, heard. I should not give up my Constitutional right to vote because I chose to live in our nation’s capital. The disenfranchisement of Washingtonians should be illegal in the 21st century! <u>Statehood</u> would guarantee that Washingtonians are given the full rights we are entitled to as US citizens!</p>
<p>Republican Resident of Mississippi</p>	<p>Adding voting rights and/or statehood to DC would only mean more Democratic seats. There’s no way, as a resident of a Red (Republican) state, that I would want to add Blue (Democratic) seats to the legislature. <u>DC should remain the federal city!</u></p>

<p>Edward H. Smitty, Native Washingtonian</p>	<p>As a third-generation Washingtonian whose family has lived in the district since 1943 and has never had a voting representative in Congress I believe “As Americans, under no conditions should issues of political convenience or expedience dictate fundamental rights. The fact that [D.C. statehood] might prove politically inconvenient for either party is not a just reason for continuing to deny citizens those rights.” <u>DC should become a state!</u></p>
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<p>Retired Representative from the 1960s from Alabama</p>	<p>The overwhelmingly white Congress has traditionally been hesitant to grant the District's African American majority a vote in the House and Senate. Before DC residents could elect a city council or mayor, Washington was controlled by a Board of Commissioners, three men appointed by the President to run the city. These men were often white pro-segregation Southern "Dixiecrats." Inequality and racial tension racked the city while under their control. Many consider ensuring equal rights for District residents the last hurdle of the Civil Rights Movement. <u>DC should remain a federal city.</u></p>
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<p>Eleanor Holmes Norton, DC’s non- voting delegate to the House of Representatives</p>	<p>As a delegate, and not a representative, I have a vote in committee, but not on the House floor. “In the 21st century, Congress simply cannot ask our residents to continue to be voyeurs of democracy, as Congress votes on matters that affect them—how much in federal taxes they must pay, whether their sons and daughters will go to war, and even their local budget and laws—without the vote in the House and Senate required for consent of the governed.” <u>DC needs Statehood now!</u></p>
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<p>Historian</p>	<p>First, it's worth remembering that Washington, D.C. was not always the capital. George Washington first took office in New York City, and then the capital was moved to Philadelphia, where it remained for a decade. Washington, D.C. was founded as the capital in 1790 as a result of a compromise between Alexander Hamilton and northern states, and Thomas Jefferson and southern states. Hamilton's economic policies consolidated power in the bankers and financiers who primarily lived in the North, so the compromise moved the capital physically more South, to appease Jefferson and southern leaders who feared northern control of the nation. The District was created to be a home for our federal government and not meant to be the home of residents. History tells us that DC was created as a federal district, but that was in 1790. Today there are 700,000+ residents of the District.</p>
<p>Constitution Scholar 1</p>	<p>The <u><i>lack of statehood for the capital</i></u> is enshrined in the Constitution. Article 1, Section 8, Clause 17 of the document reads, "The Congress shall have Power To ...exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of particular States, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the Seat of the Government of the United States."</p>

<p>Constitution Scholar 2</p>	<p>James Madison outlined the reasoning behind this provision in Federalist 43, calling the arrangement an “indispensable necessity.” He wrote, “The indispensable necessity of complete authority at the seat of government, carries its own evidence with it... Without it, not only the public authority might be insulted and its proceedings interrupted with impunity; but a dependence of the members of the general government on the State comprehending the seat of the government, for protection in the exercise of their duty, might bring on the national councils an imputation of awe or influence, equally dishonorable to the government and dissatisfactory to the other members of the Confederacy.” In other words, the founders worried that if the capital were to be a state, the members of the government would be unduly beholden to it. Madison envisioned that voting members of a D.C. state would be able to ‘insult’ or ‘interrupt’ the proceedings of government to get their way, simply by virtue of physical proximity (closeness) to the halls of power. According to this rationale, <u>DC should remain a federal district.</u></p>
<p>DC Voting Rights Activist (but not for Statehood)</p>	<p>Members of the District won a victory in 1961 with the passage of the 23rd amendment to the Constitution, which granted them votes in the electoral college. DC residents, including me as a resident, get to vote in presidential elections thanks to this amendment. <u>Now it’s time to pass an amendment for voting rights in Congress so that DC residents are not disenfranchised any longer!</u></p>

<p>Mike Brown (Shadow US Senator)</p>	<p>The offices of shadow U.S. Senator and shadow U.S. Representative are elective offices in the District of Columbia and other US territories. As a shadow Senator I am not seated in either house of the United States Congress but I promote efforts by both the District as well as unincorporated territories <u>to gain full voting rights.</u></p>
<p>Paul Strauss (Shadow US Senator)</p>	<p>The offices of shadow U.S. Senator and shadow U.S. Representative are elective offices in DC and other US territories. As a shadow Senator I am not seated in either house of the United States Congress, but I promote efforts by both the District as well as unincorporated territories <u>to gain full voting rights.</u></p>

<p>James Jones, Communications Director of DC Vote, a non-profit organization devoted to voting equality</p>	<p>The mission of DC Vote—grassroots activism—is to create education programs, canvassing, and <i>spreading the word out about DC’s disenfranchisement and to get the District votes in Congress.</i></p> <p>As communications director of DC Vote—a non-profit organization devoted to voting equality—I want people to know that there’s more to the District than just the federal government and its monuments. D.C.’s population is greater than those of two states—Wyoming and Vermont—and is denied a degree of self-determination because the feds control too much of the city’s budget. “We still live in a situation where members of Congress whom we did not elect hold ultimate sway over our budget and our legislative agenda. Most Americans would find that abhorrent.”</p>
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<p>DC resident serving in the US Army</p>	<p>“We serve in our armed forces but have no vote on going to war.” DC has 3400 residents enlisted in the National Guard. We can volunteer to fight, defend, and die for our country, but have no vote. <u>We deserve at least a vote in Congress.</u></p>
<p>Senator Orrin Hatch, Republican from Utah</p>	<p>As Senator I coauthored the District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act, which would have provided a House vote for the citizens of the District and an additional House vote for the citizens of Utah, which had narrowly missed getting a new House seat after the 2000 census. In 2008, I published an essay, entitled ““No Right is More Precious in a Free Country’: Allowing Americans in the District of Columbia to Participate in National Self-Government,”” in the Harvard Journal on Legislation, arguing the bill was constitutional and that Congress should pass it. <u>DC should have a vote in Congress!</u></p>

<p>Supporter of New Columbia Admissions Act</p>	<p>New Columbia Admission Act, a bill that would incorporate the lion’s share of D.C. as the 51st state in the Union, preserves a federal enclave of monuments and buildings within the new state, and grants the district’s nearly 700,000 residents full representation in Congress. <u>DC should become the 51st state!</u></p>
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<p>R. Hewitt Pate, Heritage Foundation employee (a very conservative DC think tank)</p>	<p>“There is no indication that the Constitution contemplates a district expandable and contractible at Congress’s whim. Making the district a full state would be an abrogation of power that the Constitution explicitly assigns to Congress alone.”</p> <p>DC was created as a federal district. We cannot just add to Congress at a whim. If DC were meant to be a state, the Founding Fathers would have written its contingency into the Constitution. But they did not. <u>DC should remain a federal district.</u></p>
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<p>Peter Raven-Hansen, a law professor at George Washington University</p>	<p>I believe the strongest argument against D.C. statehood is that it would create a “redundancy” with the 23rd Amendment, since residents already have three electoral votes in presidential races. Accordingly, it would be “tidier” to rescind that amendment and <u>give D.C. statehood.</u></p>
<p>Civil Rights Activist</p>	<p>The issue of statehood is a civil rights issue. It’s a racially charged question as well, informed by D.C.’s historical identity as the “Chocolate City”—a home to African Americans since the capital was cleaved from two slaveholding states (Virginia and Maryland) in 1791. Though the district’s demographics are changing rapidly, with blacks now composing just less than half of the population, the status quo has left all D.C. residents partially disenfranchised.</p>

<p>DC Resident 1</p>	<p>I've lived in DC for several years. Honestly, I don't think Statehood for DC is a top priority. We have other issues, homelessness, jobs, fair living wage....is Statehood really as important as these other issues? I mean, I'm not against it but just think that we have bigger issues on our table that Statehood.</p>
<p>DC Resident 2</p>	<p>I'm indifferent. As a DC resident. I don't think about it...I see it on some yard signs. To be honest, I know a little bit about it but I don't see it as important or something that I focus my time, energy, or thoughts on. I'm fine with or without Statehood.</p>
<p>Jason Chaffetz, Utah Congressman</p>	<p>I support D.C. getting a seat in Congress (which means voting rights), but through <u><i>the process of a constitutional amendment</i></u>. DC doesn't need to become a state to have the seats/representation and voting rights in Congress.</p>
<p>A woman who lives in Puerto Rico</p>	<p>Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, doesn't have representation in Congress, nor do they pay federal taxes. As a Puerto Rican citizen myself I cannot vote for the president except in local party primaries; and I receive lesser Social Security benefits and tax credits compared to residents of U.S. states. Politically, the rights of U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico are even more limited than those of U.S. citizens abroad, as expatriate citizens are allowed to vote remotely for federal office candidates.</p> <p><u><i>A vote for DC statehood could help Puerto Rico receive statehood as well.</i></u></p>

Suggested scaffolding for assignments of roles:

Please note that the categorization below is just a suggestion. Mild denotes readings that are shorter and most accessible in vocabulary and content; Medium is generally for on-grade level readers; Spicy is more of a challenge, due to lexile levels and/or concepts.

Mild	Medium	Spicy
Virginia resident	Mayor Muriel Bowser	Edward H. Smitty, Native Washingtonian
Maryland resident	Resident of Florida	Retired Representative from the 1960s from Alabama
DC's Chief Financial Officer	DC Resident 2	Historian
DC Resident 1	Republican Resident of Mississippi	Constitution Scholar 1
DC resident serving in the US Army	Eleanor Holmes Norton, DC's non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives	Constitution Scholar 2
DC Resident 1	DC Voting Rights Activist (but not for Statehood)	James Jones, Communications Director of DC Vote, a non-profit organization devoted to voting equality
DC Resident 2	Mike Brown (Shadow US Senator)	Senator Orrin Hatch, Republican from Utah
Jason Chaffetz, Utah Congressman	Paul Strauss (Shadow US Senator)	Supporter of New Columbia Admissions Act
	Peter Raven-Hansen, a law professor at George Washington University	R. Hewitt Pate, Heritage Foundation employee (a very conservative DC think tank)
	Civil Rights Activist	
	A woman who lives in Puerto Rico	

4. Mingle in the room, introducing yourself to others and also hearing who they are and their perspective.

Person	Perspective	Reason

5. Reflection: After hearing these different perspectives answer the following questions:

a. Did your beliefs change, or become stronger, as a result of what you heard today? (Review what you wrote in #1 on this paper.) Explain.

b. What is a new perspective you learned today in talking to people? Explain what was new to you.

c. Who is another person who shared your want (statehood, rights, status quo) but for a different reason? What was their reason?

d. Who was one person that you felt you would want to convince to your assigned perspective? Make a plea to them as to why they should follow YOUR rationale (from the point of your assigned perspective, not your personal opinion).

6. Closure: Write 25 words to persuade someone to join your PERSONAL belief about DC Statehood.

Word Count: _____

Sources for the roles.

<http://time.com/4296175/washington-dc-statehood-history/>

<http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/state-local-politics/323368-dont-be-fooled-carper-and-norton-dont-fight-for-dc>

<https://www.dcvote.org/about-dc-vote>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/09/what-would-a-51st-state-look-like/380586/>

dcist.com/2014/09/statehood_hearing.php

http://dcist.com/2016/04/infuriating_tax_figure_time.php

<https://ggwash.org/view/62303/a-utah-congressman-wants-dc-to-become-part-of-maryland.-lets-examine-that-i>

<https://norton.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/norton-grateful-to-senator-hatch-for-invaluable-help-on-dc-voting-rights>

https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/politics-jan-june09-dcvote_02-24

<https://ggwash.org/view/35968/two-maps-that-explain-what-dc-might-look-like-as-a-state>

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-dc-statehood-20161108-story.html>

<https://www.vox.com/2014/11/12/7173895/dc-statehood-new-columbia>

<https://thehill.com/latino/436304-statehood-bill-could-make-puerto-rico-a-state-before-2020>

Resources for Teachers:

Texts:

<https://washington.org/DC-information/washington-dc-history>

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/states/article/washington-dc>

[https://www.history.com/topics/us-states/washington-dc \](https://www.history.com/topics/us-states/washington-dc)

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/washington-dc-history-and-heritage-179311951/>

Videos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khsSb_2DXsI

Podcast:

<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/709949580/51st-from-what-s-with-washington>

DC Historical Society:

<https://dchistory.org/fighting-the-good-fight/>

Film from Arena Stage “The 51st State”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKFLEgyB6MQ>