

PLPT 4500: Democratic Theory

Daniel Henry
drh5zv@virginia.edu

Office Hours: by appointment



Demonstrators participating in the Poor People's March at Lafayette Park and Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D.C., June 18, 1968

The language of democracy is today as ubiquitous as it is underdetermined, used by states, NGOs, social movements, and even companies of enormous institutional and ideological variety. In political science, too, democracy is a contested concept, differing greatly between theoretical camps and its empirical operationalization. This course offers a broad survey of the dominant theoretical approaches to, and normative debates surrounding, familiar dimensions of democratic politics, including contrasting theories of freedom, equality, representation, “the people,” and political voice. Throughout the semester, students will place these concerns in conversation with a contemporary or historical social movement of their choice, introducing new considerations to our discussion based on the movements’ history, practices, and concerns.

Assignments and Exams

1. **Class Participation (20%)**

- a. Attendance is mandatory for every session, absent unavoidable scheduling conflicts. Students with more than one unexcused absence will receive a penalty to their class participation grade. Please email me if you will not be able to attend.
 - b. Each of the texts assigned deserve careful, respectful reading (I will offer some guidelines on effective reading practices on our first day). Students are expected to bring assigned readings to class.
 - c. Participants in this seminar are expected to come prepared with 4-5 questions and provocations to share with the class, 2 of which I will ask you to post to Collab (they can be in response to peers' posts as well!). When coming up with your thoughts, try to connect the day's readings to the themes of other texts we have explored, and to the overarching themes that have emerged for you in the course as a whole. Not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of a large group; if you are not, please feel free to email me your questions and comments (aside from your Collab submissions) instead.
2. **Op-Eds (20%)** I ask that students write two brief (~800 words) op-eds this semester. The essays are due by the beginning of class via email. They should bring at least two readings into conversation with a current event or controversy of the author's choice. These essays can also be an early way to consider the final paper topic!
 3. **Midterm Essay (25%)** The midterm is an opportunity to put into conversation readings from the first half of our course. You will write a brief (5-7 page) essay on themes, concepts, and arguments of at least four readings. I will hand out the questions on 10/5, and the exam is due 10/9, by 11:59pm.
 4. **Social Movements Research Paper (35%)** For the final paper, students will be asked to research a historical or contemporary movement reflecting the themes of our course. A successful project will offer a careful account of a social movement's history and democratic implications, while suggesting ways that movement allows us to think differently about some question, concept, or author covered in our readings. Examples of topics include:

- Protest against "broken windows" policing and racialized citizenship
- Concepts of political peoplehood and the movement against voter disenfranchisement
- Recent debates on tactics and ethics of nonviolence
- Critiques of the social contract tradition and the movement against cash bail
- The role of digital platforms in shaping deliberation

Students will sign up to present (around 10 minutes) their preliminary research throughout the semester. Each presentation will be followed by class discussion of the shared and divergent insights to be gained from the movements we cover.

Final papers are due December 9th by 11:59pm. Papers should be 10-12 pages, double-spaced.

Assistance and Access

If you require any additional assistance with the class's coursework and exams, please do not hesitate to contact me, or contact UVa Student Health service, SDAC@Virginia.edu.

Schedule:

8/24 Introduction

- a. Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, pp. 17-27, 58, 62, 98, 117-31
- b. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, pp. 4-19, 82-87

8/31 Freedom, Community, and the General Will I

- a. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, book 1, ch.'s 1-8; book 2, ch.'s 1-4, 6, 8-12; book 3, ch.'s 1, 4, 12-15; book 4, ch. 1
- b. Frederick Douglass, "The Work of the Future"; skim "Slavery and America's Bastard Republicanism"
- c. Mary Wollstonecraft, "Observations on the State of Degradation to Which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes"

9/7 Freedom, Community, and the General Will II: Communalism

- a. Kwasi Wiredu, "Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity" and "Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa: Some Preliminaries Concerning Communalism and Communitarianism"
- b. Kwame Gyekye, "Person and community in African thought"

9/14 Freedom, Community, and the General Will III: Elite Theory and Popular Power

- a. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, pp. 250-296
- b. Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, ch.'s 1 (skim pp. 6 to bottom of 13) and 2.

9/21 Liberal Democracy and Its Discontents I

- a. Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns"
- b. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume 1, Part One: ch. 4. Part Two: ch. 4 (up to p. 309), 6 (up to p. 395), 7 (pp. 410-415, 416-420), 10 (pp. 515-top of 520, 522 through first full para 526, third full para 531 to 538, 548 to second to last para 555, third full para 557 to third para 560, last para 571 to bottom 572)
- c. Federalist #10

9/28 Liberal Democracy and Its Discontents II: Beyond Formal Equality

- a. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question"
- b. Iris Marion Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression"

10/5 Representation (**Midterm Distributed**)

- a. Hannah Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*
- b. Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation"
- c. Olúfẹ́ mí Táíwò, "Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Difference"

10/12 The Public Sphere

- a. Jurgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy”
 - b. Amy Guttmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Ch. 1
 - c. Lisa Wedeen, “The Politics of Deliberation: Qat Chews as Public Spheres in Yemen”
- 10/19 The Public Sphere II: Who’s Speaking and How
- a. Audre Lorde, “The Transforming of Silence into Language and Action” and “On the Uses of Anger”
 - b. Charles Mills, “Body Politic, Bodies Impolitic”
 - c. Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?”
- 10/26 Democratic Citizenship
- a. Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, Prologue, ch. 1-4, 8, skim 9-10
- 11/2 Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence
- a. Mahatma Gandhi, *Essential Writings*, selections on *satyagraha*
 - b. Juliet Hooker, “Black Lives Matter and The Paradoxes Of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice To Democratic Repair”
- 11/9 Borders of Democracy
- a. Arash Abizadeh, “Democratic Theory and Border Coercion: No Right to Unilaterally Control Your Own Border”
 - b. Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others*, Introduction, Ch. 2.
- 11/16 Abolition Democracy I
- a. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, ch. 1-3, 7
- 11/30 Abolition Democracy II: Beyond the Carceral State
- a. Angela Davis, selections from *Are Prisons Obsolete?*; Allegra M. McLeod, “Envisioning Abolition Democracy”