

PLPT 3500: Democratic Theory

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Office Hours: 10am-12pm, Tuesdays
(or 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 ubiquitous, 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. In this course, we will explore themes in democratic thought from Rousseau to the present, observing a landscape of claims concerning what democracy involves and what it means for those striving to enact it. This course moves from considering the various ideas of liberty, equality, and representation that have structured democracy's liberal and republican forms, to the ways such concepts are shaped continually by contestation over the groups and spheres of activity to which they apply. In particular, we will consider the various internal and external borders of the "people," shifting on the basis of race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and other identities; and the closely related questions as to the state and non-state institutions which shape democratic contestation, including divisions of public and private, the prison, the colony, Jim Crow (past and present), and labor.

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. 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 which 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 instead.

2. **Group Presentations (15%)**

- a. Students are expected to conduct joint-presentations on the readings of a specific date (I will pass around a sign-up sheet on the first day of class). Group size will depend on the number of students enrolled.
- b. Groups should offer an overview of the central arguments and themes from the day's readings (around 12-15 minutes), as well as a set of questions and provocations to guide class discussion.
- c. Importantly, I ask that each group offer a comparison of the texts at hand to readings from at least one other session.

3. **Midterm Exam (20%)** The midterm is an open-note, open-book take-home exam on the readings of the course's first half. I will hand out the questions on ____, and the exam is due ____.

4. **Quizzes (15%)** There will be three short quizzes (worth 5% each) on the readings assigned for the day of the quiz. Quizzes will not be announced in advance. I will let students drop their lowest quiz grade.

5. **Social Movements Research Paper (30%)** 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:

- The prison abolition movement and abolition democracy
- The CIO and Du Bois's reflections on the challenges to an interracial working class movement
- Citizen-police oversight boards and deliberative democracy
- The DREAMers movement and "constituent moments"
- A recent protest movement (Hong Kong, Taksim Square, #BLM) and Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence

Students will present their preliminary work on the last day of class, followed by discussion of the shared and divergent insights to be gained from the movements we cover.

Final papers are due one week after the final day of class. Papers should be 7 pages, double-spaced. A brief, one page project proposal is due ____.

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:

6/10 Introductions

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, pp. 4-19, 82-87

6/11 Liberal Democracy

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)

6/12 Liberal Democracy II

Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration*, Prologue, Declaration, ch.'s 14-18, skim ch.'s 31 and 44

In-class: tour of the Declaration of Independence exhibit at the Special Collections Library

6/13 Republicanism

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (selections)

Maximilien Robespierre, "[On Political Morality](#)"

6/14 Representations

Hanna F. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (selections)

Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'"

6/17 Whos(e) People?

Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments*, Introduction

Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

6/18 Body Politic

Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, ch. 2, "The Five Faces of Oppression"

6/19 Body Politic II

Judith Butler, *Notes on the Performative Assembly* (selections)
Audre Lorde, “The Transforming of Silence into Language and Action”
In-class: screening of *Paris is Burning* (1990)

6/20 Citizenship and Domination
Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, Prologue, ch. 1-4

Midterm exam handed out

6/21 Disenfranchisement, Past and Present
Carol Anderson, *One Person, No Vote*, ch. 1
Stacey Abrams, “We Cannot Resign Ourselves to Dismay and Disenfranchisement”
In-class: Rev. William Barber on “Moral Mondays” protests

6/24 Talking Democracy
Guttman and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* pp. 1-40

6/25 Talking Democracy II
Lisa Wedeen, “The Politics of Deliberation: Qat Chews as Public Spheres in Yemen”
Audre Lorde, “On the Uses of Anger”

Social Movements research proposals due

6/26 The Capital of Democracy
Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto”

6/27 The Capital of Democracy II
W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, ch. 1-2, selections from 7

6/28 Democracy’s Borders
Paul Apostolidis, *Breaks in the Chain: What Immigrant Workers Can Teach America about Democracy*, Introduction and ch. 1
In-class: clips from the documentary, “The Fight in the Fields” (1997)

7/1 Founding (Non-)Violence
Mahatma Gandhi, *Essential Writings*, selections

7/2 Founding (Non-)Violence II
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, “On Violence”

7/3 Abolition Democracy
Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* ch. 1, 2, and 6

7/4

Final paper presentations