

Do We Still Have Faith in Democracy?

Ethics & Difference

University of Virginia, Spring 2021

MW 12:30-1:45PM (Online)

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Image, [“Inside Out: The People’s Art Project, This is What Community Looks Like!”](#)

Charlottesville Downtown Mall, 2019

COURSE DESCRIPTION

On January 6, the nation witnessed a violent insurrection as the elected representatives of the US Congress attempted to carry out the expressed will of the country’s citizens. As has happened so many times in the last year, we are reminded that history is not only in the past; it is something that we are making right now. As the lyrics from *Hamilton* proclaim, “History has its eyes on you.” Future generations will look back on how the United States meets the challenges facing democracy today: the global pandemic, racial injustice, the erosion of institutions, and violent threats against free and fair elections. Asking whether we will have faith in democracy is a vital question for interrogating our current social, political, and cultural situation in relation to democracy.

“Democracy” is a frequently used word in our common lexicon. But how often do we reflect on what democracy really means? In this class, we will learn about the history of US democracy and its global influence. We will analyze how definitions of democracy have changed over time and the social, political, cultural, and intellectual struggles that animate these changes. Our course will ask how changing what we mean by democracy affects how we participate in civic life. We will apply this knowledge to our own situation in these trying times to ask:

- (1) Why do we think democracy is the best way to structure our politics?
- (2) What are the obligations of participants in US political life at this moment?
- (3) Do the circumstances of our times ask us to once again redefine democracy?

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THIS COURSE

This course counts toward both the *difference* and *ethical* engagements. The study of democracy allows us to develop habits for discussing how different communities pursue a “good life” within the context of a religiously, racially, culturally, and politically diverse society.

1. **Engaging Difference:** The study of democracy offers a unique opportunity to think about how we live together in society alongside people who are religiously, culturally, economically, and socially different from ourselves. Thinking about the definition and practice of democracy in specific contexts helps us think about how different communities negotiate the dynamics of pluralism and power that shape our common life.
2. **Engaging Ethics:** The study of democracy inevitably poses questions about how participants in pluralistic societies define and pursue conceptions of a good life. The challenges of democracy today compel us to think about what justice, participation, sacrifice, and the common good mean in a society constituted by difference and committed to political equality.

Habits of Mind: This class will help students develop specific habits of mind practice for thinking about difference and ethics. Practicing thinking about difference and ethics will equip you for your studies at UVA and for your participation in democracy as a citizen and/or a member of US society. We also hope the class will equip you to:

1. Critically examine your own assumptions and beliefs by testing them in ways that allow them to change in light of reliable new information.
2. Consider the ethical implications of competing definitions of democracy, citizenship, justice, and the common good for decisions you make as a participant in common life.
3. Regularly participate in US common life, especially within the distinct-but-overlapping communities to which we belong (UVA, Charlottesville, Virginia, the US, etc.).

Long Term Learning: We hope this class will help you begin the pursuit of these long-term learning goals:

1. Develop a sophisticated understanding of “citizenship” and apply this understanding to your own position within political systems (local, national, & global).
2. Critically evaluate political issues (and claims made about them) by using both historical method (i.e., how has this issue developed over time?) and comparative method (i.e., how does this issue look differently across cultures, religions, regions or countries?).
3. Analyze who participates—and who does not—in civic life and the ethical implications of these patterns.
4. Understand how social, political, and economic exclusions based on difference have informed protest and struggle to expand the meaning of citizenship.
5. Apply what you learn in this class to actual sites of democratic decision-making.
6. Learn to communicate what you have learned through speaking, writing, and multimedia formats.

MAKING THE MOST OF AN ONLINE CLASS

Thoughtful preparation will help you make the most of our time together online. The instructors will discuss our plan for the course during our first online meeting, but in general you will have the following responsibilities:

- **Before Class:** Complete the assigned materials (readings, videos, and/or podcasts). Then write your responses in your Encountering Democracy Journal (see additional details under “ASSIGNMENTS” below). Your ability to take part in class depends on the thoroughness of your preparation.
- **During Class:** We will regularly break into small groups (via Zoom breakout rooms) to discuss specific questions and topics emerging from the course material. You will begin each small group breakout session by writing in your Encountering Democracy Journal for 3-5 minutes about your own responses to the question. Then one student from each group will serve as a “deep listener” responsible for helping the discussion along. The deep listener will take good notes about the discussion and then give a brief report back to the whole class about what was discussed in the breakout room.
- **After Class:** Reflect on the class discussion, revising your pre-class Engaging Democracy Journal entries based on what you learned in class discussion. Write down any lingering questions, comments, or responses.

ASSIGNMENT GUIDE AND GRADING

We will utilize the standard UVA A&S grading scale. It is against college policy to award unearned “grade bumps” for marks on the cusp between two grades (alas, even if you are applying for med school someday). Assignment weights are listed next to each item below:

1. Classroom Participation (20%)

We have designed this class to be conversational and interpersonal. For this reason, classroom participation is essential to success in the course.

Participation Checklist:

- We expect students to make thoughtful contributions to the classroom conversation (both in the large group and small group meetings, serving as “deep listener” in their small group on occasion) while also allowing other classmates to speak (i.e., not taking up too much “airtime,” allowing or encouraging others to serve as “deep listeners”).
- All students are expected to keep their cameras on whenever possible—we will remind you of this policy on occasion, especially when we notice that many/most cameras have been turned off. Obviously, we understand that there are legitimate reasons for you to keep your camera off during a particular class meeting. We trust you to make this decision for yourself while honoring the interpersonal, conversation-based nature of this course.
- You are permitted one (1) absence for any reason; there is no need for instructor approval. We understand that there might be additional issues that prevent you

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from attending a class session (i.e., Internet issues, required Covid testing or quarantine travel, health emergencies, or family emergencies.) If you need to miss a class for any of these reasons, please let us know.

2. Encountering Democracy Journal (25%)

- Submission 1 is due **Wednesday, February 24 by 5pm**
- Submission 2 is due **Wednesday, March 24 by 5pm**
- Complete and Final Submission is due **Wednesday, May 5 by 5pm**

You will keep an Encountering Democracy Journal in a Microsoft Word document (**not** PDF or Pages). Use your journal to write your notes on the readings and other course materials, in-class assignments, and reflections on democracy:

- **Thoroughly summarize** the primary arguments and salient evidence of each reading, including questions you have about the content that we might discuss in class.
- After thoroughly summarizing the reading, we invite you to **respond** to the reading. While this response is personal, we still expect you to account for the argument and evidence presented by the reading and/or other sources in your response.
- Write down preliminary thoughts for small group discussions.
- Record encounters with democracy outside of class meetings (i.e., dorm meetings, student organization governance, attending a protest, etc.) Questions you might answer about these encounters include: (1) Where and when did this encounter take place?, (2) What questions does it raise for you about democracy?, (3) If the encounter occurred online, what difference did the virtual setting make to the experience? (4) If the encounter took place in person, what influence did the conditions of the pandemic have on the encounter? (i.e., social distancing, mask wearing, limited in door capacity, rejection of governmental orders and laws regulating pandemic)

Journal Submission Checklist:

- Make sure to include your name in the heading of the document. (i.e., Encountering Democracy Journal by First Name Last Name)
- Submit your journal as a Microsoft Word document with a file title that follows this format: LastName_FirstName_EngagingDemocracyJournal (i.e. Garcia_Lorena_EngagingDemocracyJournal)
- Upload journal to Collab Assignments by the appropriate deadline.

3. Democracy in Action Small Group Video Project (25%) – Presentation due in Week 11 or 12

Working in small groups, students will identify a “site of democracy” and analyze how the particular organization, group, or institution operates. Possible sites include school boards, city councils, UVA’s Board of Visitors, student organizations, etc. Draw on our course materials to analyze how democracy works (or doesn’t) in the particular context you are studying for your project. Given the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic, it is important for your group to identify how virtual democracy/socially distant democracy differs from in-person democracy. Each group will submit a 10-minute video project

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summarizing the outcome of their work. Each member of the group will receive the same grade on the project.

Video Submission Checklist:

- Final videos should not exceed 10-minutes in length (yes, even if you have lots of great material). This is to be fair to all groups by giving everyone the same amount of time for their videos. Your group grade will be penalized if you exceed this limit.
- Clearly identify the names of all group members (both first and last) in the video (i.e., on the opening slide, on a final credits slide, said out loud at the beginning, etc.)
- Have one member of your group upload your video to the Collab Media Gallery
- Submit your video with a file title that follows this format:
SmallGroupName_SmallGroupVideo (i.e.,
CharlottesvilleCityCouncil_SmallGroupVideo or
FreeSpeechCharlottesville_SmallGroupProject)

4. Director’s Commentary Essay (20%) – Due Monday, May 10 by 5pm

Each student will also submit a 5-page “director’s commentary” on their group video project. This essay will describe where the project might have fallen short and what one might have done differently if given expanded time and resources. Each student will receive an individual grade for this assignment.

Director’s Commentary Submission Checklist:

- Make sure to include your name in the heading of the document. (i.e., Encountering Democracy Journal by First Name Last Name)
- Submit as a Word Document with a file title that follows this format:
LastName_FirstName_DirectorsCommentary (i.e.,
Muhammad_Asim_DirectorsCommentary)

5. Engagement Experience or “EE” (10%)

- Ethics (3rd Quarter) Assignments due **Wednesday, March 17 by 5pm**
- Difference (4th Quarter) Assignments due **Wednesday, May 5 by 5pm**

For the Engagement Experience (EE), students make their way through the EE “bucket list” each quarter. Last semester, you completed the EE requirements for the Aesthetic and Empirical engagements. This semester, you will complete the requirements for the Ethics and Difference engagements.

- Ethics (3rd Quarter)
 - Attend a Scholar Speak-qualifying event and get a “ticket stub” (selfie in front of screen, screen shot of event, etc.).
 - Attend a TA Talk and get a “ticket stub.”
 - Write a 250-word (1 page double-spaced) reflection on the Enslaved African American at UVA Self-Guided Tour that responds to this prompt: Briefly define justice as discussed in course readings and class discussions. Then reflect on what justice means in a democracy predicated on the enslavement of human beings at UVA and in the United States.

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- Difference (4th Quarter)
 - Attend a Scholar Speak-qualifying event and get a “ticket stub” (selfie in front of screen, screen shot of event, etc.).
 - Attend a TA Talk and get a “ticket stub.”
 - Write a 250-word (1 page double-spaced) reflecting on the Enslaved African American at UVA Self-Guided Tour that responds to this prompt: What does the Enslaved African-Americans at UVA Self-Guided Tour suggest about the role of false perceptions of inherent racial differences in the University’s founding? How do these racist notions that shaped Mr. Jefferson’s University continue to challenge the UVA’s contemporary efforts to serve people (students, staff, faculty, community members) of all racial backgrounds, especially Black people and communities?

EE Submission Checklist:

- Compile Ticket Stubs and Essay in a single Microsoft Word document.
- Make sure to include your name in the heading of the document. (i.e., Encountering Democracy Journal by First Name Last Name)
- Submit as a Word Document with a file title that follows this format: LastName_FirstName_EthicsEE or LastName_FirstName_DifferenceEE (i.e., Bell_Terrence_EthicsEE or Bell_Terrence_DifferenceEE).

ADDITIONAL STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

- **You are expected to submit assignments by their deadline.** We understand, however, that the logistical challenges of this semester may interfere with your ability to complete and/or submit your assignment on time. If that is the case, please consult with one of us about your situation and we will find a workable solution.
- **Students with documented needs for learning accommodations can expect them to be provided as appropriate.** All students requiring accommodation should present the appropriate paperwork from the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC). It is the student’s responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and to follow up with the instructor about the accommodations being offered. The SDAC is located in the Department of Student Health and can be contacted at (434)243-5180/5181.
- **We ask that you email both Dr. Flores and Dr. Williams with questions, comments, or concerns.** Emailing both of us keeps both instructors abreast of any issues or questions while also allowing for quicker responses back to you.

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND TEXTS

All readings are available in Collab Resources or via website links found in the syllabus. Several of our videos and podcasts have regional viewing restrictions (meaning they might not be available outside of the United States). Please let the instructors know if an assignment is unavailable to you and she can give you an alternative one. Additionally, you will need access to the following programs for this class:

- Zoom

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- Microsoft Word (this is the standard word processing program for university & academic settings).

HONOR CODE

Please consult the instructors if you have any questions regarding the course honor policy.

If you believe you may have committed an Honor offense, you may wish to file a Conscientious Retraction by calling the Honor Offices at (434) 924-7602. For your retraction to be considered valid, it must be filed with the Honor Committee before you are aware that the act in question has come under suspicion by anyone. More information can be found at

<http://www.virginia.edu/honor>. Your Honor representatives can be found at:

<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/2016-2017-representatives/>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: February 1 & 3

#Charlottesville, January 6, and the Challenge of Democracy at our Doorstep

- Jalane Schmidt, [“Excuse me, America, your house is on fire: Lessons from Charlottesville on the KKK and ‘alt-right.’”](#) *Medium*, 27 July 2017. (8 pages)
- [“American Idols,”](#) *Sacred & Profane*, 20 July 2020 (25-minute podcast)
- Bryan N. Massingale, [“The Racist Attack on Our Nation’s Capitol,”](#) *America*, 6 January 2021. (1 page)
- Greg Weiner, [“How Do We Get to Herd Immunity for Fake News?,”](#) *The New York Times*, 14 December 2020. (3 pages)

Week 2: February 8 & 10

Defining and Debating Democracy

- Danielle S. Allen, “Prologue” and “Origins,” *Our Declaration* (21 Pages)
- Jill Lepore, “Liberalism and Nationalism” and “A New Nation,” *This is America: The Case for the Nation* (6 Pages)
- Thomas B. Edsall, [“The Capitol Insurrection Was as Christian Nationalist as It Gets,”](#) *The New York Times*, 28 January 2021. (8 pages)

Week 3: February 15 (No Class on February 17)

Faith and the Foundations of Democracy

- Robert Bellah, et. al., “The National Society,” *Habits of the Heart* (Chapter 10) (16 Pages)
- Barack Obama, [“The President Honors the Life of Reverend Clementa Pickney,”](#) *The Obama White House* (37-minute video)
- Nathan Schneider, [“How to Survive Trump: End the cult of the presidency,”](#) *America*, 30 May 2018. (10 Pages)

Week 4: February 22 & 24

Challenges to Democracy: Who Counts as a Citizen?

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- Seyla Benhabib, “Democratic Iterations,” *Another Cosmopolitanism* (30 Pages)
- Frederick Douglass, “Woman Suffrage Movement,” *The Portable Frederick Douglass* (2 Pages)
- Nikole Hannah Jones, [“Our democracy’s founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true.”](#) *The 1619 Project*, 14 August 2019. (22 Pages)

Week 5: March 1 & 3

Challenges to Democracy: Expertise or Participation?

- Tony DeCesare, “The Lippmann-Dewey ‘Debate’ Revisited: The Problem of Knowledge and the Role of Experts in Modern Democratic Theory” (11 Pages)
- Walter Lippmann, “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads,” and “News, Truth, and a Conclusion,” *Public Opinion*. (23 Pages)
- Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States*, pp. 411-420. (10 Pages)

Week 6: March 8 & 10

Challenges to Democracy: Is a Common Good Possible?

- Danielle S. Allen, “Sacrifice and Citizenship,” *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (13 Pages)
- [“The View From a Republican Who Voted to Impeach.”](#) *The Daily* (50-minute podcast)

Week 7: March 15 & 17

Challenges to Democracy: Is Equality Possible?

- Jacob Hacker and Paul Peterson, “The Winner-Take-All Economy,” *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer--and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (30 pages)
- Anand Giridharadas, “But How is the World Changed?,” *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World* (13 Pages)

Week 8: March 22 & 24

Democracies in Crisis: Post-Reconstruction US South & Weimar, Germany

- Reconstruction, PBS Special (2019) (4 hours, available on UVA Library Website)
- James Q. Whitman, “Introduction,” *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (16 Pages)

Week 9: March 31 (No Class on March 29)

Democracies in Crisis: The Politics of Inevitability

- Timothy Snyder, “Individualism or Totalitarianism,” *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, and America* (13 Pages)

Week 10: April 5 & 7

Cultivating Thriving Democracies: Media

- *The Social Dilemma* (94-minute video, available on Netflix)
- Steven Lewvitsky and Daniel Zilblatt, “The Unwritten Rules of American Politics,” *How Democracies Die* (14 Pages)

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- Recommended: Jonathan Rauch, [“The Constitution of Knowledge,”](#) *National Affairs*, Fall 2020. (29 Pages)

Week 11: April 12 & 14

Cultivating Thriving Democracies: Faith and Protest

- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (9 Pages)
- Nichole M. Flores, [“Theology in the Streets: What is the Role of a Public Theologian?,”](#) *America*, 12 July 2019. (10 Pages)

Week 12: April 19 & 21

Cultivating Thriving Democracies: Education

- Amy Guttmann, “Introduction: Back to Basics,” *Democratic Education* (16 Pages)
- [“The Book of Statues,”](#) *Nice White Parents*, 31 July 2020 (60-minute podcast)

Week 13: April 26 & 28

Small Group Presentations

Week 14: May 3 & 5

So, Do We Have Faith in Democracy?