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I. Course Introduction

Did you, too, O friend, suppose democracy was only for elections, for politics, and for a party name? I say democracy is only of use there that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruit in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between people, and their beliefs – in religion, literature, colleges, and school – democracy in all public and private life...

— Walt Whitman

Recovering democracy presents a task that runs counter to the political dynamics of our times... The political environment is so hostile to the norms that govern ordinary life, so destructive of commonality, that for many citizens it requires an act of uncommon courage to become engaged.

— Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*

It's not dark yet, but it's getting there.

— Bob Dylan, "Not Dark Yet"

Democracy is in a weird place these days. On the one hand, democracy is often seen as the unassailable ground of political legitimacy. Even countries that are blatantly autocratic often describe their regimes as being committed to democratic procedures and institutions. Yet on the other hand, citizens in democratic countries (including the U.S.) seem disenchanted by the primary institutions of government and hesitant to participate in the political process. Oftentimes this disenchantment or apathy is interpreted as a rejection of democracy, but maybe we could see it as a rejection of the current, dominant *form* of democracy. Perhaps the idea of democracy is not exhausted by practices of representative government. Perhaps citizenship is not reducible to the act of voting. Perhaps there are other ways of acting, thinking, and being a democratic citizen.

In this course we are going to investigate these various possibilities. We will start by exploring the original, and quite radical understanding of democracy as "people power," or the capacity of "the people" (*demos*) to "act" in the world (*kratos*). We will then explore some of the traditional practices and problems associated with this broad and radical understanding of democracy, and we will investigate current political trends in light of those practices. Democracy is both traditional and radical. Or we might say that the democratic tradition is a *radical* tradition. In this course we're going to tease out democracy's radical implications and discover what remains of its ideals. Our goal is to think about how democratic citizenship might be practiced in a *variety* of locations—not simply in the voting booth—and in ways that might unwind some of the disenchantment or apathy surrounding political life. In doing so we will investigate all of the different ways in which citizens might gain power, and the kinds of practices and spaces through which this power can be wielded.

Democracy, in theory at least, requires the vibrant participation of citizens in public life. Our course will operate on the same principle. In fact, over half of your grade is connected to classroom participation in some form. In addition to individual participation during class sessions, in the first half of the semester you will be assigned to a "Deme" [Demes were the smallest units of administration in ancient Athens]. Each Deme will be responsible for leading classroom discussion during one class session. In the second half of the semester, you will be organized into different groups for a collaborative research project. These assignments will require collective effort and reciprocal responsibility. In short, in this course we will be attempting to learn about *and practice* democracy.

II. Required Books (available in the Lory Bookstore):

- Peter Levine, *We Are The Ones We've Been Waiting For* (Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (University of Chicago Press, 2006)
- Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed are the Organized* (Princeton University Press, 2012)

III. Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

- To explore the radical tradition of democracy
- To learn how to assess and critique current democratic practices in the U.S. and elsewhere
- To identify key problems facing democratic systems and citizens
- To develop civic skills in order to be more effective participants in public life

IV. Grading and Assignments

- Attendance (10%)
- Participation (10%)
- Deme Presentation (15%)

- Critical essay (25%)
- Action Research Project (40%)

Attendance/Participation

Attendance and participation are worth a combined 20% of a student's grade. Participation primarily involves being an active member of classroom discussions. There is more than one way to participate in class, however. Attentive listening, participating in small group discussions, talking to the professor during office hours, following up with the professor or other students about something discussed in class—all of these can “count” as participation. If you are uncomfortable speaking up in class, please contact the professor or come to office hours to discuss the issue.

“Deme” Presentation

During the second week of the semester, you will be assigned to a “Deme”—a small group of between three and five students. Each Deme will be responsible for introducing and leading discussion once during the first half of the semester. This presentation will be worth 15% of your grade (one grade will be assigned for each Deme, and all students within that Deme will receive the same grade). Demes will be evaluated based on how clearly they present the assigned material and on how effectively they answer student questions and lead discussion. Creativity is encouraged. For technology needs or other questions about Deme discussions, see the professor. For more information about Demes, see Section VIII below. Additional information about the evaluation of Deme discussions will be handed out early in the semester.

Critical Essay

In lieu of a mid-term exam, students are required to submit a five- to six-page critical essay (typed and doubled-spaced) on the Friday before Spring Break. Topics for the critical essay will be distributed in class at least ten days in advance of the due date. For advice on how to write a critical essay, see Section IX below.

Action Research Project

In the second half of the semester (after Spring Break), you will sign up for a DART (Democratic Action Research Team). Each team (of 2-4 students) will conduct research on a particular topic related to democratic theory or practice. Each team will present their findings to the class twice during the semester. In addition each individual student will submit a short reflection paper on their DART experience, in lieu of a final exam. Topics for DARTs will include (but will not be limited to): public deliberation, workplace democracy, democratic consumerism, civic education, civic associations, and grassroots organizing. Additional information about the Action Research Teams will be handed out early in the semester.

V. Expectations for Outside Work

Students should expect to do a *bare minimum* of 2 hours of outside work for each class hour.

VI. Academic Integrity:

This course adheres to the Academic Integrity Policy of the Colorado State University General Catalog and the Student Conduct Code. Colorado State University has long upheld values of academic and scholastic integrity. The General Catalog's “Policies and Guiding Principles” asserts that CSU “expects students to maintain standards of personal integrity that are in harmony with the educational goals of the institution” – citing “principles of academic honesty” as the first example. (1.6 Page 1).

VII. Course Outline and Readings [Note: readings marked with ** are available on EReserves through the CSU Library]

January 19th: Course Introduction

January 21st: What Does Democracy Mean?

Reading: Josiah Ober, “The Original Meaning of Democracy”**
Sheldon Wolin, “What Revolutionary Action Means Today”**

January 26th: The Motivation Question: Freedom is an Endless Meeting? Happiness is a Protest March?

Reading: Hannah Arendt, “The Revolutionary Tradition and Its Lost Treasure”**
Peter Levine, *We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (Chapter 2)

January 28th: Democracy in America: Alexis de Tocqueville

Reading: *Democracy in America*, “Author’s Introduction” and readings #1**

February 2nd: Tocqueville: Associations and Public Discourse

Reading: *Democracy in America*, readings #2**

February 4th: Tocqueville: Reasons for Pessimism: Individualism and Inequality

Reading: *Democracy in America*, readings #3**

February 9th: Tocqueville: Reasons for Pessimism – American Democracy and the Color Line

Reading: *Democracy in America*, readings #4**

February 11th: Social Capital or Group Style: How Should We Read Tocqueville Today?

Deme Presentations:

Deme #1: Robert Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America"***

Deme #2: Paul Lichterman, "Social Capital or Group Style?"***

February 16th: Associations and Power: Broad-based organizing

Reading: Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized* (pgs. 1-69)

February 18th: Associations and Power: Broad-based Organizing

Reading: Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, (pgs. 93-164)

Deme Presentation:

Deme #3: *Blessed Are the Organized*, (pgs. 148-164)

February 23rd: Public Discourse and Democracy

Reading: Peter Levine, *We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (Chapters 1, 3, & pgs. 120-124)

February 25th: Public Discourse and Democracy: CSU's Center for Public Deliberation

Martin Carcasson and Leah Sprain "Deliberative Inquiry: Re-conceptualizing the Work of Public Deliberation"***

March 1st: Democracy and the Economy

Reading: Gar Alperovitz, "Democracy: Inequality and Giant Corporations" and "A Direct Stake in Economic Life: Worker-Owned Firms"****

March 3rd: Democracy and the Economy

Deme Presentation:

Deme #4: Nicholas Iuviene et al., "Sustainable Economic Democracy"***

Deme #5: Wilson Majee and Ann Hoyt, "Are Worker-Owned Cooperatives the Brewing Pots for Social Capital?"***

March 8th: Democracy and Distrust: Danielle Allen's *Talking to Strangers*

Reading: *Talking to Strangers*, Chapters 1-4

March 10th: Democracy and Sacrifice: Danielle Allen's *Talking to Strangers*

Reading: *Talking to Strangers*, Chapters 8-11

Deme Presentation:

Deme #6: *Talking to Strangers*, Chapters 8&11

March 12th – March 20th: Spring Break

March 22nd and March 24th – No class; begin DART research

March 29th and March 31st – Documentary viewings: "We The Owners" and "The Democratic Promise"

April 5th and April 7th: First DART presentations

April 12th and April 14th – No class; DART conferences with Professor

April 19th and April 21st – No class; DART conferences with Professor

April 26th and April 28th: Final DART presentations

May 3rd and May 5th: Final DART presentations

May 12th: DART reflection due.

VIII: Group Assignments

Deme Presentations

While it is pointless to try and identify the moment when democracy was *invented*, there is little doubt that the reforms undertaken in Athens by Cleisthenes in 508 B.C. marked a significant turning point in the history of democracy. One of Cleisthenes's key reforms was the re-organization of the "Demes"—the neighborhood organizations within Attica. Demes at this time were given additional civic powers and responsibilities. For instance, in order to be recognized as a citizen of Athens, one first had to be recognized by one's Deme. Previously, citizenship in Attica had been connected to one's tribal or familial affiliation, but as a result of Cleisthenes's reforms *civic* membership came to be seen as more important than *tribal* membership (in fact, Cleisthenes reformed the tribal system at this time as well, rearranging the four traditional tribes of Attica into ten new tribes, each associated with a mythological Greek hero). Demes, then, can be seen as an institution of both local *participation* and democratic *identification*.

In this class we will recreate, on a very different scale, the politics of the Athenian Demes. Each student will be assigned to one of six Demes, ranging in size from 3-5 students. During the first half of the semester, each Deme will be responsible for initiating and facilitating class discussion on an assigned reading. Demes will be evaluated based on how clearly they present the material and on how well they manage student questions and class discussion. In preparation for each of these "Deme-discussion"

sessions, students should meet collectively as a Deme to identify key ideas or concepts within the assigned material and to discuss how you will present the information to your fellow classmates. Creativity is encouraged. If you have questions or concerns about these presentations, please see the professor.

Democratic Action Research Teams

In the second half of the semester, you will be organized into small teams (2-4 students), for the purpose of engaging in focused collaborative research on an issue area related to democratic theory and practice. Suggested topics will be distributed early in the semester, along with more information about expectations and evaluation. Each research team will present their findings to the class twice during the final weeks of the semester. In addition each student will be required to submit a short reflection on their DART experience, which is due during finals week.

IX. Advice for preparing and completing your assignments this semester

A. How to write critical essays

In lieu of a final exam, you will be required to write a 5 or 6-page critical essay due during finals week. Below are some guidelines that will help you to prepare for this assignment:

- 1) **Begin with critical and responsive reading:** before you can write on an author, you must read the text thoroughly, jotting down notes in the margins in response to passages that seem persuasive, provocative or problematic. Where appropriate, you should record more extensive comments on a separate sheet of paper.
- 2) **Begin to clarify the work:** After receiving the questions, you need to grasp the author's ideas on their own terms before you can engage in a critical interpretation. It is not enough to summarize the author's claims and then declare one's admiration or skepticism. Rather, you need to specify exactly what passages or ideas you are responding to, and explain your response in a coherent discussion. In order to do so, however, you need to get a good sense of what the theorist is saying. You may wish to ask the following questions:
 - a) What is the author's stated purpose in his work?
 - b) What is the main issue being explored?
 - c) What conclusion does the author come to?
- 3) **Begin to analyze the text:** to do so you need to switch from summary to examining how the author develops and substantiates his/her argument. The following questions may be helpful:
 - a) Are there any flaws in the reasoning?
 - b) What are the main premises of the argument, and do you agree with them?
 - c) Has the author avoided any important issues?
- 4) **Begin to organize your essay:** After probing the meaning of the work, and asking critical/analytical questions, you can then develop an argument. Using your notes, begin to formulate a thesis statement, which is your critical judgment of the author's central ideas—it might affirm, qualify or dispute an aspect of the author's argument.
 - Put your thesis statement in the introduction (i.e. summarize the central point of the theorist and your position with regard to it).
 - Develop your position more fully in the body of the paper, drawing upon relevant passages and aspects of the text to clarify your position and critical position.
 - In your conclusion, draw any loose ends together, and raise implications about your ideas.

B. Frequent Issues Raised in Writing Critical Essays

While the above points should help you, and we will make sure to discuss these issues in class, over the many years of teaching this course I have been asked frequent questions related to writing these papers.

- I. If I am writing on a particular issue do I need to summarize the whole text?** Not necessarily. You can assume that I have read the text, and I am familiar with the theorist. What I am not familiar with is your position on the theorist, nor may I agree with your position. You should ask yourself: Do I need to discuss this aspect of the theorist to make my argument? If you answer "no", then leave it out.
- II. Do I need to quote from the text, or can I just summarize?** In these types of essays, you should really do both. You do not want to quote the theorist every sentence of your paper, but you want to use quotations to clarify particular aspects of your argument. I want to see that you are engaging the text, and can use it for your paper.
- III. How should I reference the texts in my essay?** If you use the texts we have ordered for the class, you should—after a summarization or quote—put the author's name and page number in parentheses afterward. If you use a different text (either primary or secondary text) you must put the whole citation. Either way, you must make sure to put all relevant information after you cite the text. In particular, do not forget the page number (even when you use the texts ordered for the class).

X. Extra credit: Everyday Theory Moments (ETMs)

“And do not take what I say as if I were merely playing, for you see the subject of our discussion—and on what subject should even a person of slight intelligence be more serious?—namely, what kind of life one should live.”

--Socrates

Political theory is often seen as esoteric or anachronistic (possibly because political theorists frequently use words such as “esoteric” and “anachronistic”). In other words, political theorists are often accused of “having their heads in the clouds,” or being concerned only with abstract ideas or utopian ideals. These accusations have a long history, but they are misleading. Political theory—as the quote above from Socrates puts it—is concerned above all else with the question of what constitutes a meaningful life (the “good” life). This is a question that applies not only to the individual who is asking it (“what is the good or meaningful life for *me*?”) but also to the community of which that individual is a member (“what is the good or meaningful life for *us*?”). All the other big questions that political theory deals with—What is freedom? What is justice? What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens?—connect at some level to this more basic question. And as long as we keep this larger question (Socrates’s question) in mind, then political theory cannot be seen as esoteric or irrelevant. Instead we have to see it for what it is: an essential part of our everyday lives.

“Everyday Theory Moments” (ETMs) are one way we can demonstrate the relevance or importance of political theory. ETMs are the moments during your day that remind you of something that we have read or discussed in this course. It can be something as basic as a story in the newspaper, or a conversation with your roommate, a movie that you are watching, or just a passing thought while you are walking across campus. Whatever the trigger, ETMs are when you brush upon these “deeper” or “bigger” questions that political theory attempts to answer. For instance, an opinion article in the newspaper might make reference to Tocqueville, or a friend of yours might say something that reminds you of something we discussed in class. Regardless of what it is, an Everyday Theory Moment is an instance when something either (a) in the assigned texts or (b) something in your everyday life makes more sense to you, or takes on a different perspective. ETMs are moments of insight or reflection in which you get a little closer to answering Socrates’s question (or at least thinking about it more deeply).

Ok, so how do you get credit—*extra* credit, in fact—for these Everyday Theory Moments? First, be on the lookout for them: start, as best as you are able, to approach the world and your interactions with it through the lens of the ideas that we will be discussing in class. If you are doing this, then ETMs are destined to happen. Second, when they do happen, come to the next class session, raise your hand, and describe what happened. If the class agrees that this was indeed an Everyday Theory Moment, then you will get one point of extra credit (up to three points total for the semester). Alternatively you can send the professor an email or stop by office hours to discuss your Everyday Theory Moment. If the professor feels that your ETM will add to the class discussion, he will ask you to bring it up during the next class session and you will get one point of extra credit (up to three total throughout the semester). It’s that simple.

So, in summary, Everyday Theory Moments (ETMs):

- Are moments of insight or reflection
- Are connected to ideas or concepts that you have read or discussed in this class
- Help you to understand (a) the assigned texts or (b) the world around you in a way that you hadn’t understood it before