

# Democratic Theory

Government 6645 (Spring 2021)  
Cornell University  
T 2:40-4:35 (Zoom)

Instructor: Jason Frank  
White Hall 202A  
jf273@cornell.edu  
Office Hours: W 2:00-4:00



## Course Description

Democracy is often invoked as the very ground of political legitimacy, but there is little agreement on what democracy means or how it is best embodied in state institutions and law. With democracy now entering a period of acute crisis, both in the United States and abroad, a focused reassessment of the meaning of democracy, and of the challenges it faces, is an urgent requirement for political scholars.

This seminar will attempt to bring these questions into conceptual focus by introducing students to select debates in contemporary democratic theory over the meaning of democracy, the scope and limitations of contemporary democratic practice, and the most serious dangers threatening democracy today. Beginning with the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the so-called “dreamer” of modern democracy, and ending with contemporary debates over the relationship between democracy and neoliberalism, on the one hand, and democracy and populism, on the other, we will explore (but not limit ourselves to) the following questions: How do democratic theorists and democratic actors negotiate the paradoxes of collective self-rule? Is democratic theory an empirical or normative inquiry, or does it destabilize this very opposition? Who is the agent of democratic politics? How should we understand the interaction between formal democratic institutions and political culture? What is the relationship between liberalism and democracy? Do rights (as protections of individual liberty not subject to revision by majority rule) suspend democracy or establish its necessary preconditions? Is democracy premised on a unitary

political identity and, if so, how does it accommodate or recognize difference? Is democracy best understood as a form of government or a practice of resistance to domination? What do we expect from democratic theory and how should we understand the relationship between democratic theory and democratic practice?

### **Course Requirements**

This is a political theory graduate seminar. Grades will be based on a research paper (20-25 pages) due at the semester's end (65% of the total), a short (7-8 page) written response to one week's reading (15%), a 10-15 minute oral discussion of another student's written response (10%), and general seminar participation (10%). Students must attend all seminar meetings, and more than two unexcused absences will count as a failing grade. Written responses will be circulated electronically *no later* than 5:00 pm on the Sunday before seminar meets. These papers should provide a close and critical account of the week's reading, focusing on one or two central arguments. Written responses are meant to provoke seminar discussion, so please avoid summary and feel free to be (thoughtfully) contentious. The papers must include direct citation (with footnotes) and engage some of the recommended literature. Each seminar will begin with another student's 10-15 minute discussion of *the written response*. These oral presentations should also avoid summary and instead pose a series of textually critical questions that can facilitate seminar discussion. A sign-up sheet for both presentations and discussions will be circulated the first week of class.

### **Zoom**

Since we will be meeting online this semester, please plan to join our Zoom classroom through our classroom link (provided by the Registrar's Office) at least a couple minutes in advance to make sure that there are no connection problems and that both your audio and video are working and enabled. I ask that everyone join the seminar by both audio and video (unless there is a technical issue). Please make sure that your full name is displayed (not just netID). We will do our best to mirror in-class interaction and discussion. If you have a question or a comment please 'raise your hand' through the "Manage Participants" option at the bottom of your screen. You can also raise your actual hand, which I should be able to see. You can also make "two-finger" comments or questions in this way (in effect, jumping the raised hand queue). Please keep comments in the chat function to a minimum. They are difficult to keep track of, distracting, and sometimes end up creating parallel discussions to the one happening by video. If you encounter technical problems during class (i.e. can't hear the audio), you can re-join the class meeting through the original link and select the 'Call Me' option, which will allow Zoom to call your phone so you can at least gain audio access. I am the wrong person to turn to for tech support.

## Books to purchase

Available at the University Bookstore:

Cristina Beltran, *Cruelty as Citizenship*  
Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*  
C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*  
Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*  
Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*  
John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Penguin)  
Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*  
Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics*

Material marked “\*” is available on Canvas.

## Weekly Readings

### Week 1 (February 9): Democratic Theory and the People

Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy”\*  
Claude Lefort, “The Question of Democracy”\*

Recommended:

Giorgio Agamben, “What is a People?”  
Margaret Canovan, *The People*  
Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence”  
Jacques Derrida, “The Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority”  
Jason Frank, “The People as Popular Manifestation”  
Jürgen Habermas, “What is a People?”  
William Hazlitt, “What is the People?”  
Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People*  
Frederick Whelan, “Democratic Theory and the Boundary Problem”

### Week 2 (February 16): Rousseau and Modern Democratic Legitimacy

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

Recommended:

Louis Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx*  
Seyla Benhabib, “Deliberative Rationality and Models of Democratic Legitimacy”  
Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*  
William Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, 41-67

Alan Keenan, *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure*, 1-75

Holger Ross Lauritsen and Mikkel Thorup, eds. *Rousseau and Revolution*

James Miller, *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy*

John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 191-250

Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory*

Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*

Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign*

Maurizio Viroli, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Well-Ordered Society*

Elizabeth Wingrove, *Rousseau's Republican Romance*

### **Week 3 (February 23): Democracy and Revolution**

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, vii-162

Sheldon Wolin, "Transgression, Equality, Voice"\*

Sheldon Wolin, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy"\*

Recommended:

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*

Martin Breugh, *The Plebian Experience*

Rachel Douglas, *Making the Black Jacobins*

Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsberg, eds., *The Black Jacobins Reader*

Kevin Olson, *Imagined Sovereignties*

David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*

Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality*

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*

### **Week 4 (March 2): Liberal Constitutionalism, Democracy, and Constituent Power**

Andreas Kalyvas, "Constituent Power"\*

Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory* (selection)\*

Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*

Recommended:

Bruce Ackerman, *We the People: Foundations*

Martin Loughlin and Neil Walker, eds., *The Paradox of Constitutionalism: Constituent Power and Constitutional Form*

Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt*, 66-115

David Dyzenhaus, ed., *Law as Politics: Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism*, 23-36, 109-58, 179-95

Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America*

Peter Hallward, "The Will of the People"

Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint*, 134-77

Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison September 6, 1789  
Andreas Kalyvas, "Popular Sovereignty, Democracy, and the Constituent Power"  
John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism*, 157-205  
Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 36-59  
Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*  
Joel Colón-Ríos, *Constituent Power and the Law*  
Lucia Rubinelli, *Constituent Power: A History*

**Week 5 (March 9): NO CLASS**

**Week 6 (March 16): Minimalist Democracy and Political Science**

Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (selection)\*  
Jeffrey C. Isaac, "The Return of the Repressed; or, the Limits of 'Democratic Theory'"\*  
Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (selection)\*  
Kyong Min Son, *The Eclipse of the Demos: The Cold War and the Crisis of Democracy Before Neoliberalism* (selection)\*

Recommended:

S.M. Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism*  
Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*  
John E. Elliott, "Joseph A. Schumpeter and the Theory of Democracy"  
Jeffrey E. Greene, *The Eyes of the People: Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship*  
John G. Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity: Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy*  
Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*  
Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*  
Edward A. Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value*  
William Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*  
Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory*

**Week 7 (March 23): Maximalist Democracy and Political Praxis**

Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics*

Recommended:

The Port Huron Statement  
Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*  
Rom Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*  
Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America*  
Karuna Mantena, "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence"

Carol Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*  
Vijay Phulwani, “The Poor Man’s Machiavelli: Saul Alinsky and the Morality of Power”  
Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*

### **Week 8 (March 30): Contemporary Political Liberalism**

John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xiii-xxxiv, 1-172

Recommended:

Katrina Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice*  
Raymond Guess, *Philosophy and Real Politics*  
Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*  
Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 17-35  
Sheldon Wolin, “The Liberal/Democratic Divide: On Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*,”  
*Political Theory* (February 1996)

### **Week 9 (April 6): Public Reason and Democratic Legitimacy**

John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 212-54, 435-90

Recommended:

Seyla Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” in  
*Democracy and Difference*, 67-94  
William E. Connolly, *Why I am not a Secularist*, 1-46  
Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”  
Robert Goodin, *Innovating Democracy: Democratic Theory and Practice after the  
Deliberative Turn*  
Jürgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy”  
Jürgen Habermas, “Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John  
Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 92 (3)  
Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”  
Thomas McCarthy, “Kantian Constructivism and Reconstructivism: Rawls and Habermas  
in Dialogue,” *Ethics* 105: 1 (1994)  
Joel Olson, “The Freshness of Fanaticism”  
John Rawls, “Reply to Habermas,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 92 (3)  
Lynn Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” *Political Theory* (June 1997)  
Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy & Tradition*, 63-91  
Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political  
Issues,” in *Religion in the Public Sphere: The Place of Religious Convictions in  
Political Debate*  
Iris Marion Young, “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy,” in  
*Democracy and Difference*, 120-35  
Iris Marion Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy,” *Political Theory*  
29:5 (2001)

## **Week 10 (April 13): Affect and Political Identification**

Patchen Markell, “Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On ‘Constitutional Patriotism’”\*

William Mazzarella, “Brand(ish)ing The Name”\*

Jan-Werner Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism*, 46-92.\*

Ernst Renan, “What is a Nation?”\*

Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (selection)\*

Recommended:

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

Seyla Benhabib, Danilo Petranovic, and Ian Shapiro, eds., *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*

Jason Frank, *The Democratic Sublime: On Aesthetics and Popular Assembly*

Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*

Abraham Lincoln, “The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions”

Martha Nussbaum, ed. *For Love of Country?*

Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership*

Jacqueline Stevens, *States without Nations*

Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*

Bernard Yack, *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community*

## **Week 11 (April 20): Race and Political Identity**

Cristina Beltran, *Cruelty as Citizenship*

Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (selections)\*

Recommended:

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Barbara J. Fields and Karen Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*

Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of DuBois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*

Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*

Thomas Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*

Mark M Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses*

## **Week 12 (April 27): Rancière: Democracy and Disidentification**

Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*

Jacques Rancière, “10 Theses on Politics,” *Theory & Event* 5:3 (2001), 1-10\*

Recommended:

Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*  
Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*  
Jacques Rancière, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” *South Atlantic Quarterly*  
103:2-3 (2004)

### **Week 13 (May 4): Dissolving the Demos: Neoliberalism**

Wendy Brown, *The Demos Undone: Neoliberalism, Democracy, Citizenship*

Recommended:

Thomas Biebricher, *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism*  
Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*  
Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*  
Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*  
Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*  
Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*

### **Week 14 (May 11): Democracy and “Populism”**

Jason Frank, “Populism and Praxis”\*  
Nazli Konya, “‘Making a People: Turkey's 'Democracy Watches' and Gezi-envy'”\*  
Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 65-172  
Nadia Urbinati, “Political Theory of Populism”\*  
Nadia Urbinati, “Populism and Democracy”\*

Recommended:

Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia, *Seven Essays on Populism*  
Partha Chatterjee, *I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty Today*  
Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, and Ostiguy, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Populism*  
Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*  
Chantal Mouffe, *For A Left Populism*  
Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?*  
Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*  
Johannes Voelz, “Toward an Aesthetic of Populism”

Final papers due by 12:00, June 1st.