

## **WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?**

### **PLPT 3500-001**

Tu/Th 9:30am-10:45am on Zoom

Professor Kevin Duong

Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom

What is democracy? What are its benefits and perils? Who ought to be included in “the people”? These questions have preoccupied political theorists since ancient times. This class introduces students to the study of democratic theory. We will examine classical accounts of democracy by canonical political theorists. We will also focus on the way American and European radicals redefined its scope, transforming democracy into a fighting creed for greater political inclusion, participatory citizenship, and economic equality. Our goal is to understand the rich, conflictual history of the concept, the better to understand what “the rule of the people” ought to mean today.

### **Required Materials**

The following textbooks will be made available at the bookstore. If you purchase copies of the book elsewhere, please endeavor to acquire the correct edition.

1. Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (Liveright)
2. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Vintage)
3. Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (Verso)
4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (Penguin)
5. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket)

Most of our readings will be posted online on Collab. Our Collab class can be accessed here: <https://collab.its.virginia.edu/portal/site/84363e4e-4fdb-46d1-8c61-7ec6610fb1e1>

### **Course Objectives and Expectations**

Assignments: In addition to weekly class participation, you will be responsible for a weekly forum post, a midterm reflection paper, and a final exam.

Attendance: Attendance is crucial for the success of a class, especially a virtual one. The expectation is that students will attend each class and have their cameras on. However, if for any reason circumstances conspire to make it difficult for a student to attend a class or leave their camera on, just let me know – the request will always be accommodated. A student’s participation grade will be in jeopardy if a student has more than 4 unexcused absences.

Class Participation: Please note that participation is a substantial component of the course’s overall evaluation. Students can ensure that they maximally receive participation points by attending class, participating in class discussion, and by showing general attentiveness towards, including thoughtful responses to, their fellow classmates. If for any reason a student is concerned about their ability to do the above listed, please feel free to discuss the matter with me early in the semester.

Course Evaluation:

In-Class Participation	20%
Forum Posts	20%
Midterm Reflection	25%
Final Exam	35%

COVID Grading Note:

As you all may know, there are alternative grading schemes available during COVID. According to the university, “Students have until the Add deadline (Feb. 16) to choose Graded (A-F grades) or the COVID Credit/General Credit/No Credit grading option for their Spring courses in SIS. Students will have an additional opportunity beginning on April 23 until April 30 to change the grading option for each of their courses. The deadline to make any changes to a course grading option is Friday, April 30, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.”

**Other Matters:**

Plagiarism: Each student is expected to abide by the code of academic integrity. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with college policies regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, which will be strictly observed in this class. If work is found to be plagiarized, the student will receive an automatic failing grade in the class, and depending on the situation additional sanctions may be imposed by the college.

Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability that may require assistance or accommodations, or if you have any questions related to any accommodation for testing, note taking, reading, etc., please speak with me as soon as possible. You may also contact the Student Disability Access Center at <https://studenthealth.virginia.edu/sdac-contactus>

## Schedule of Readings

Readings and assignments are to be completed by their corresponding date. ‘Optional’ readings are additional selections that may improve your mastery of the material, but aren’t required.

Readings required with asterisks (\*) are available on our Collab website. Please read the assigned texts in the order they are listed.

### WEEK 1-3: American Revolutionary Democracy

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- Feb 2:** Introduction
- Feb 4:** John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*\*
- Feb 9:** Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence,” “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom,” “Letter to James Madison”\*  
James Madison, “Federalist Paper #10”\*
- Feb 11:** Abigail Adams, “Letter to John Adams”\*  
Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”\*  
William Apess, “Eulogy on King Philip”\*
- Feb 16:** Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (pp. 31-35, 108-142, 202-232)
- Feb 18:** Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence* (pp. 257-273)  
Corey Robin, “The Tyranny of the Minority”\*
- Optional: Isaac Kramnick & Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State*  
Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*  
Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England & America*  
Simon Gilhooley, *The Antebellum Origins of the Modern Constitution: Slavery and the Spirit of the American Founding*\*

### Week 4-6: French Revolutionary Democracy

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- Feb 23:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*\*
- Feb 25:** “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen”\*  
Loi Le Chapelier\*  
Emmanuel Sieyès, “What is the Third Estate?”\*  
Olympe de Gouges, “Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Citoyenne”\*
- Mar 2:** **No Class**
- Mar 4:** Maximilien Robespierre, “Draft Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” “On the Principles of Revolutionary Government,” “On the Principles of Political Morality that Should Guide the National Convention in the Domestic Administration of the Republic”\*
- Mar 9:** **No Class, Break Day**
- Mar 11:** Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*\*
- Optional: Robert Nisbet, “Rousseau and Totalitarianism,” *The Journal of Politics* (1943)

- Alfred Cobban, "The Political Ideas of Maximilien Robespierre During the Period of the Convention," *The English Historical Review* (1946)
- Sophie Wahnich, *In Defense of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*
- Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*

WEEK 7-8: Haitian Revolutionary Democracy

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- Mar 16:** Toussaint L'Ouverture, "Letter to the General Assembly from Biassou, Jean-François and Toussaint L'Ouverture," "Toussaint L'Ouverture to His Brothers and Sisters in Varettes," "Haitian Constitution of 1801"\*
- Mar 18:** C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (pp. 6-47)
- Mar 23:** C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (pp. 62-70, 78-96, 137-62)  
Marlene L. Daut, "All the Devils are Here"\*
- Mar 25:** Adom Getachew, "Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution"\*  
Lorenzo Ravano, "The Borders of Citizenship in the Haitian Revolution"\*
- Optional: David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*  
Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*  
Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* (2000)

Week 9-10: From Political Democracy to Socialist Democracy

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- Mar 30:** *Le Peuple*, "Toast to the Revolution,"\* "Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*"\*  
Victor Considerant, "Principes du socialisme"\*
- Apr 1:** Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, "Solution of the Social Problem"\*
- Apr 2:** **Midterm Reflection Paper Due**
- Apr 6:** Flora Tristan, *The Workers' Union*\*  
Eugene V. Debs, "Unionism & Socialism"\*
- Apr 8:** Paris Commune, "A Craftmen's Letter," "Election Poster," "Declaration to the French People," "Proposal for the Organization of Women's Work," "*The Times* Describes a Women's Club" "Demand for Free Producers' Co-operatives," "Formation of an Artist's Federation"\*  
Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (pp. 1-9, 39-65)
- Optional: William Sewell, *Work & Revolution in France*  
Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century*  
Naomi Andrews, *Socialism's Muse: Gender in the Intellectual Landscape of French Romantic Socialism*  
K. Steven Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism*  
Pamela Pilbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx: Workers, Women, and the Social Question in France*

Week 11-12: Liberalism's Ambivalence

**Apr 13:** Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (pp. 11-26, 201-202, 209-227, 287-315, 587-600, 803-809)

**Apr 15:** **No Class, Break Day**

**Apr 20:** Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (pp. 370-478)

**Guest Lecture by Jennie Ikuta (University of Missouri)**

Optional: David Ciepley, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism*  
 Richard Flathman, *Pluralism & Liberal Democracy*  
 Duncan Bell, "What is Liberalism?" *Political Theory* (2014)  
 Jeremy Jennings, "Constitutional Liberalism in France," *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*

Week 12-14: The Return of Revolutionary Democracy

**Apr 22:** Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"\*

Stokely Carmichael, "Toward Black Liberation"\*

**Guest Lecture by Nolan Bennett (University of Wisconsin, Green-Bay)**

**Apr 27:** Students for a Democratic Society, "Port Huron Statement"\*

C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left"\*

**Apr 29:** Combahee River Collective Statement\*

Movement for Black Lives Platform\*

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (pp. 1-17, 51-73, 191-219)

**May 4:** Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy"\*

Sheldon Wolin, "What Revolutionary Action Means Today"\*

**May 6:** Astra Taylor, *What is Democracy?* (film)\*

**May 8:** **Final Exam**

Optional: Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought*

Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*

Nikhil Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*

Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*