Democracy and Its Enemies

This Honors course considers the struggle between democracy and its critics from ancient Athens to today and the meaning of democracy as a political ideal. Tocqueville famously argued that democracy is central to America’s identity. Yet the meaning of the word is anything but simple. In the modern era, nearly everyone claims to be a democrat, but who are its true friends? The class begins with a meditation on the nature of political power. The course then examines the multiple definitions of democracy in the modern world and concludes with a consideration of possible reforms to improve American democracy in the twenty-first century.

Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes

• Ask cogent, though-provoking questions based on critical reading of texts.
• Think critically about democracy and guardianship both historically and in the modern context.
• Increase ability to do close reading and analysis and to recognize foundational political claims.
• Increase appreciation of democracy as a political ideal central to the American experience as well as a political method for choosing winners and losers.
• Participate in vigorous class discussion and work collaboratively in groups

Books: Core Texts for the Course (only some require purchase)

• John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley
• Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death
• Machiavelli, The Discourses
• John McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy
• Kevin O’Leary, Saving Democracy
• Rousseau, The Social Contract
• John Stuart Mill, Considerations on Representative Government
• John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems
• Robert Dahl, After the Revolution?
• Richard Rorty, Achieving Our Country

Instructional Strategies:

1. The class will largely be a group discussion of the week’s reading assignments. Lectures will be included to establish context and background in order to enhance in-class discussion.
2. Students are expected to think critically about the readings and the issues on which the class is focused. Students are encouraged to arrive at their own interpretations and conclusions and be willing to strike out in new, interesting directions and to give reasons for their conclusions.

3. Students are expected to engage in conversation that respects both the listener and speaker. In true communication, both the speaker and listener are shaped by the experience. Students are encouraged to learn how to disagree with others and engage in vigorous back-and-forth without being disrespectful.

Methods of Evaluation

1. Class Attendance – required. More than three (unexcused) absences or three index cards not turned in will result in zero points for class participation.

2. Class participation means engaging in verbal discussion and being part the intellectual debate. Just being present is not sufficient in a small seminar class.

3. Laptops should only be brought and used only on review days.

4. Reading Assignments. For the class to work, reading must be done before class and with enough preparation so that the student has time to think about what he or she has read and to think critically about the issues raised.

5. Index cards. In order to aid class discussion, you are required to submit an index card to me at the beginning of each class. On one side of the card, you are to write two important questions that you have about the assigned reading for the day. Asking a good question is harder than providing a good answer. Your questions should show that you are engaged with the author being read and wrestling with the material. One the other side, you are to write a response to the prior class – something you learned or thought of, your critical reaction to something that was said, an issue that did not receive sufficient attention, a provocative or critical point skipped over in class, an issue you want to revisit. Cards are to be turned in at the beginning of class.

6. Journal – Students are asked to keep a journal where they can record their thoughts and thinking over the course of the semester. This is your mental sounding board where you can jot notes, take note of juxtapositions and generate questions for class discussion. You will be asked to turn in your journal several times during the semester so keep it current. Both the journal and index cards count as part of your participation score.

7. Papers – Two or three 3-5 page papers will be assigned during the semester.

8. Quizzes - unannounced and will cover the reading material of the day. There are no makeup quizzes.

9. Final Exam

Course Requirements
In-class participation (50%)
Papers (30%)
Final Exam (20%)
Students with Disabilities
In compliance with ADA Guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the professor at the beginning of the term. Upon recommendation of the campus Disabilities Specialist, adaptations of teaching methods, class materials, including text and reading materials or testing, may be made as needed to provide for equitable participation.

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy
Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated anywhere in the university. In accordance with university guidelines, plagiarism of any kind (including unacknowledged paraphrase of others’ ideas) will result in a failing grade for the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART ONE: POWER
Week One – Feb. 2 and 4
John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness
Steven Lukes, The “three faces” of power
Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless”

Week Two – Feb. 9 and 11
Charles Lindblom and Robert Dahl on modern American democracy and polyarchy
Charles Lindblom, Politics and Markets

Week Three – Feb. 16 and 18
What has modern entertainment and communication done to politics?
Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death

Week Four – Feb. 23 and 25
The eternal contest between the elite and the masses
Machiavelli, The Discourses
John McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy

PART TWO: DEMOCRACY
Week Five – March 1 and 3
Guardianship vs. the Assembly
Plato, The Republic

Week Six – March 8 and 10
Athenian Democracy
M.I. Finley, Democracy, Ancient and Modern, Ch. 1
Paul Woodruff, First Democracy, Ch. 2

Week Seven – March 15 and 17
American Revolution: Civic Republican and Liberal Ideas
O’Leary, Saving Democracy, Ch. 3
James Madison, Federalist No. 10

Week Eight – Spring Break (March 22 and 24)

Week Nine – March 29 and 31
Direct Democracy vs. Representative Govt.
Rousseau, The Social Contract
John Stuart Mill, Considerations on Representative Government

Week Ten – April 5 and 7
The Elite Theorists and Democracy as a “Method”
Roberto Michels, Political Parties, “the iron law of oligarchy”
Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, Chs. 20-22.
David Beetham, Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics

PART THREE: DEMOCRACY IN MODERN AMERICA
Week Eleven – April 12 and 14
The Modern World and the Lippmann-Dewey Debate
Walter Lippmann, The Phantom Public (1925)
Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962)

Week Twelve – April 19 and 21
Cold War Democracy vs. Participation
Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, Chs. 20-22.
Robert Dahl, After the Revolution?
Barber, Strong Democracy
Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory

Week Thirteen – April 26 and 28
Beyond the Democratic Process: Democracy and American Identity
Dewey, Democracy and Education
Richard Rorty, Achieving Our Country
Herbert Croly, The Promise of American Life

Week Fourteen – May 3 and 5
21st Century Democracy, Scale and Inequality
Larry Bartels, Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age
O’Leary, *Saving Democracy*
McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*

Week Fifteen – May 10 and 12
21st Century Democracy and the Citizen Assembly
O’Leary, *Saving Democracy*
McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*

FINALS