

FREEDOM AND SOLIDARITY IN WESTERN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT
SISU-106-020 CB
American University, School of International Service

Spring 2015
Mondays 2:35 – 5:15 in Watkins G06
Course TA: Yoonbin Ha (yoonbin.ha@gmail.com)
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What is the role of the citizen in a democratic society? If leaders are temporary and laws are not really permanent, how do changing societies bestow legitimacy on them? What is the relationship between values and democratic resilience? What are the sources of such values? Can we reconcile the coexistence of freedom and inequality? What is government?

This course explores answers to such questions from classic works of philosophy. Through a “close reading” of major works of Alexis de Tocqueville and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, we will discuss great works in the Western tradition as texts and tools that have survived the test of time, and that offer possible paths to leading better lives in a society of our own making. Students will sharpen interpretive skills by utilizing language as a bridge between imagination and intellect. Lectures will provide some historical and biographical background but the course will primarily explore the meaning and structure of the text, parsing terms and extrapolating broader ideas they convey. Assignments will facilitate active reflection and creative, critical analysis. A community based learning requirement with low income Washington, DC residents will enable students to link experience to ideas such as solidarity and communitarianism. Class discussions will promote students’ participatory engagement with the material – and with each other. The final unit of the class will utilize ideas from philosophy to analyze how democracies fared during great crises of the last century, from World War I through the 2008 economic crash.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Demonstrate critical thinking through written and oral assignments
- Interpret issues and text from multiple cultural and philosophical perspectives
- Practice reading for constructive contemplation, rather than merely recall
- Enhance reading comprehension by learning how to disaggregate complex concepts
- Improve historical knowledge of the 20th Century’s tragedies and triumphs

Required readings:

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau. 2012. *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. (Translated and edited by John T. Scott). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Alexis de Tocqueville. 2000. *Democracy in America*. (Translated by Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- David Runciman. 2013. *The Confidence Trap: A History of Democracy in Crisis from World War I to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Recommended:

Putnam, Robert. 2015. *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Papers are graded on the following scale: 100 to 94 is an A, 93 to 90 is an A-; 89 to 87 is a B+, 86 to 84 is a B, 83 to 80 is a B-, etc. A passing grade will not be awarded without completion of all course requirements. If you anticipate missing an assignment deadline due to a medical or other emergency, *please notify the professor before the due date* and be sure to consult your adviser. Your course grade will be calculated based on the following distribution:

- In-class test on Rousseau (20%)
- Three short essays answering one of the discussion questions on the syllabus (10% each)
- A “Tocqueville in the neighborhood” essay, in two parts, related to a community based learning experience described below (20%)
- Final exam on May 4 (25%)
- Class participation (5%)

Short essays

For many of the discussion questions, it is difficult to explore them in isolation. In other words, the ideas relate to each other. Therefore be sure to keep the study questions in mind when you do each week’s reading. I strongly recommend finishing the week’s assigned readings before you pick a question to write about. Each essay should be 600-800 words long (about three pages), and submitted via Blackboard as an uploaded/attached file by noon on the day after class.

Tocqueville in the neighborhood

This course has a Community Based Learning requirement with several components. First, we will all volunteer for a local non-profit organization, We Are Family, based in the Columbia Heights neighborhood on two Saturday mornings. This neighborhood has experienced one of the swiftest rises in real estate values in Washington, DC over the last decade, yet there are still thousands of residents living below the poverty line there. Many of these people are elderly, and some have difficulty leaving their homes. The co-director of the organization, Mark Anderson, will meet with our class in advance to discuss what to expect. Second, on your own time, you will interview one individual who receive services from We Are Family. If you are not able to identify potential interview subjects after volunteering, consider volunteering again and/or contacting Mark. These interviews will contribute to the organization’s oral history project documenting the lives of ordinary people in neighborhoods undergoing rapid economic and social changes. *You are expected to bring your draft questions to class on February 23.* This will give you an opportunity to practice the interview process, and receive some feedback on your questions. Third, using material from interviews and your own personal reflections, you will submit an 8-10 page essay on April 6 exploring select themes from *Democracy in America*. Use one-inch margins, 12-point type, and double-spacing. Fourth, after receiving comments from the professor, you will submit a revised draft on April 20. This final version should be 10-12 pages, plus a transcript of the interview that will be given to We Are Family. The class will be divided into two groups, and each student will discuss his or her interview experience in class.

Additional tips and information for the writing assignments

If writing makes you nervous, you aren’t sure how to approach the assignments, or you want someone to simply proofread your essay, contact the AU Writing Center at www.american.edu/cas/writing/index.cfm. If you want them to review your assignment before

you hand it in, you will need to make an appointment before the due date. If English is not your first language, consider this a valuable resource. You may also visit the professor or the TA during office hours; I will not review essay drafts. (You do not need an appointment but I do appreciate advance notice.) Here are some other tips and suggestions:

- Rewrite your introduction after you've written your paper. It should state an argument and provide the reader with a concise "road map" for what to expect. Strive to be clear, but not pedantic. What is your central claim and how will you support it? What are the different elements of the main ideas you plan to explain?
- Think carefully about how you introduce concepts and terminology. Ask yourself if there are related concepts you need to mention. If there are, then stay open to reorganizing the presentation of ideas when you edit and revise your essay.
- Aim to explain and persuade, rather than to impress your reader. And if you choose to attack an idea or author, don't misrepresent his or her position to make your critique easy. Be fair then be tough.
- Be judicious in your use of quotations. Direct references are essential. But it is not always easy to use them effectively. Some pitfalls to avoid: (1) don't let the text "speak for itself" – make sure you explain the quotation. This means you need a smooth transition into it, and a logical connection to what follows; (2) avoid long quotations, especially in a short paper. You want to provide proper context and this might tempt you to quote more text, but this can also be a sign of lazy reading or writing; (3) when using short quotations or making multiple references within a single sentence, beware of fragmentation. Strive for integration and ultimately some elegance. This is rarely achieved in the first draft, so be prepared to revise your work and think carefully about the words you use to connect ideas and evidence.
- Practice reading your own work "from a distance." This will help you identify obtuse phrases or unclear exposition.

Late papers will be penalized. All papers must follow a standard formatting style such as Chicago, APSA or MLA. The library has examples posted at: <http://subjectguides.library.american.edu/citation/>. In-text (Author year, page) citations are preferred, but you still need to include a bibliography. I have posted tips and resources for writing on my website: <http://carllevan.com/teaching/student-resources/>. Papers will not be accepted by email without prior permission. The University's Academic Integrity Code will be strictly enforced. For information see: <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>

Class Participation

You are expected to participate during every class meeting. If you are not engaged, the instructor may call on you. Expressing your thoughts is an integral part of the learning process. It can help clarify what you do not understand, familiarize you with the language and terminology that you will use when writing, and it situates your education as an experience that is social and not just solitary. Students taking notes with computers are asked to sit close to the front. *Do not browse, email, text, etc. during class!* Not only is this rude, a fair amount of scientific research reports that we cannot multi-task as well as we think we can. I summarize some of this research on my webpage <http://carllevan.com/teaching/student-resources/>.

(1) **Introduction** (January 12)

No class – Martin Luther King Day (January 19)

(2) **Freedom, Sovereignty, Un/civil society** (January 26)

Discourse on Inequality, pages 61-117

- What is Rousseau’s view of the state of nature?
- How does the establishment of property impact our state of freedom?
- What are the origins of society and laws?

Class Guest: Mark Anderson, Co-Director, We Are Family – 4 pm

Optional event: Lecture on Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, by Professor Richard Wilson
Bender Library, first floor training room, 7-8:30 pm (Tuesday, January 27)

Required Community Service: Food deliveries with We Are Family
Meet at the Kelsey Apartments, 3322 14th Street NW
(One block north of the Columbia Heights Metro stop)
10 am on Saturday, January 31

(3) **From the First Societies to the Civil State** (February 2)

Social Contract, Books 1 and 2, pages 161-203

- What is the general will?
- Can force be the basis for legitimate authority?
- What does Rousseau mean by sovereignty?

Essay #1 due on Tuesday, February 3.

(4) **Forms and Operations of Government** (February 9)

Social Contract, Books 3 and 4, pages 205-272

- Must yesterday’s laws bind us today?
- What about women?
- What is government?

(5) **Test on Rousseau** (February 16)

(6) **First Impressions: Equality of Social Conditions, Power and the Nation** (February 23)

Runciman, Introduction, pages 1-34

Tocqueville, Introduction, pages 3-15

Tocqueville, Volume 1, Part 1: Chapters 3-5, pages 45-93

- What roles do government centralization and administrative decentralization play?
- What are some of the positive and potentially negative effects of equality? What are the sources of equality in America?
- How would you compare Tocqueville’s “national will” to Rousseau’s “general will”?
- Are the people “sovereign” in America?

Assignment: Bring to class a draft of 5-10 questions for your oral history interviews.

Required Community Service: Food deliveries with We Are Family
Meet at the Kelsey Apartments, 3322 14th Street NW
(One block north of the Columbia Heights Metro stop)
10 am on Saturday, February 28

(7) **Civil Society, Parties, Laws, Rights** (March 2)

Tocqueville, Volume 1, Part 2: Chapters 1-6, pages 165-235

- Explain Tocqueville's idea of political associations and why they are important.
- What role does the press play in America? What are the sources of its freedom?
- How is American democracy different from governments with aristocratic origins?
- Given the "often defective and incomplete" laws of American democracy (page 221), how does democracy benefit American society and culture?

Essay #2 due on Tuesday, March 3

No class – spring break (March 9)

(8) **Majoritarianism, Mores, and Matters of Race** (March 16)

Tocqueville, Volume 1, Part 2: Chapters 7-9, pages 235-302

Tocqueville, Volume 1, Part 2: Chapter 10, only pages 302-307 and 348-384

- Why are majorities prone to tyranny? What makes this less dangerous in America?
- What effects have habits, laws, and religion had on American democracy?
- How does Tocqueville sum up his views on the greatest threats to United States, and the factors impacting whether the union will last?

Optional: Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3C meeting at 7:30 pm
D.C. Police Station at 3220 Idaho Avenue NW

(9) **Equality, Individualism, Associational Life** (March 23)

Tocqueville, Volume 2, Part 1: Chapters 1-2, pages 403-410

Tocqueville, Volume 2, Part 2: Chapters 1-9, pages 479-506

Tocqueville, Volume 2, Part 2: Chapters 15, pages 517-532

Tocqueville, Volume 2, Part 3: Chapters 1, 2 and 5, pages 535-541 and 546-553

- How do different voluntary associations benefit civil life? Why does a free press matter?
- What restrains individualism from becoming harmful to society and politics?
- How is aristocracy limited among democratic peoples? How might such a class arise?

Essay #3 due on Tuesday, March 24

(10) **War, Women, and Equality's Complications** (March 30)

Tocqueville, Volume 2, Part 3, Chapters 9-12, pages 563-576

Tocqueville, Volume 2, Part 3: Chapters 21-26, pages 606-635

Tocqueville, Volume 2, Part 4: Chapters 1-8, pages 639-676

- How are American women different?

- Why are many of the potential pitfalls of equality less pernicious in America?
- How does America's democratic culture impact matters of war?

(11) **“Tocqueville in the Neighborhood,” first draft due** (April 6)
Activity to be announced.

(12) **World War I, Hitler and the Economics of 1933, The Cold War Begins** (April 13)
Runciman, Chapters 1-3, pages 35-144

(13) **Cuban Missiles, 1974's Economic and Political Perils, The End of History** (April 20)
Runciman, Chapters 4-6, pages 145-262

Tocqueville in the Neighborhood, final draft due.

Group 1: Class presentations

(14) **The 2008 Economic Crash, Democratic Confidence in Times of Crisis** (April 27)
Runciman, Chapter 7 and Epilogue

Group 2: Class presentations

In-class final exam (May 4)

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/ college-specific information.