[It] seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force. If there be any truth to the remark, the crisis at which we have arrived may with propriety be regarded as the era in which that decision is to be made; and a wrong decision of the part we shall act may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind. (Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Papers, #1)

Course Description:

This course examines American democracy by reviewing current critiques, key historical periods in its development, and central philosophical principles. Democracy as a form of government is currently being questioned and even challenged. Interpreting and responding to those challenges are central objectives of the course. The course begins with an overview of the current condition of democracy. We then step back to study key stages in its development and important statements that frame its central features, such as the rule of law, accountability, citizenship, equality, freedom, and rights. This is fundamentally a course in American democratic theory—past and present—as revealed through the statements and actions of key individuals during critical periods, including our own. We conclude with a close look at a few specific challenges and one contemporary theoretical assessment. Underlying the main theme is the question of what kind of leadership is necessary and appropriate in such a complex system.

Course Objectives and Overview:

The goals are to acquire a deep understanding of what we mean by democracy, to assess its present condition and, ultimately, to arrive at an informed and knowledgeable judgment about its future prospects. That requires a critical understanding of current critiques but also the historical and philosophical underpinnings of American political thought. Students may arrive at different conclusions. Some may be pessimistic and concerned. Others may be optimistic and hopeful. But all should be knowledgeable and capable of raising the level of debate on these subjects beyond the classroom.

The course is divided into three parts.

First is an assessment of democracy today. We will review important current studies, and analyses. The goal is to gain insight into the questions others are asking and start to formulate our own questions.

In the second part, we will develop a foundation for answering those questions by stepping away from the contemporary scene. We will review primary documents and statements from key individuals at critical times in the development of
American democracy. This will necessarily be a selective review not with the intention of covering every aspect but to gain an appreciation for democracy’s values, norms, and institutional structures.

Finally, we return to modern times and a different set of critiques. The goal here is to arrive at our own assessment, to look to the future and identify the reasons why we are hopeful or concerned, reassured by what we studied or worried about the path we are on.

**Required Texts and Readings:**

There are five books required for the course.

4. *Democracy in America*. Alexis deTocqueville. (There are many editions, but strongly recommended is the Mansfield-Winthrop translation, University of Chicago Press, paperback, 2002)

In addition to the assigned books, there will be several articles, reports, and documents available on Blackboard and/or through links provided by the instructor.

I also strongly recommend a daily reading of a main newspaper—*The Wall St Journal; or the New York Times; or The Washington Post; or The Financial Times*. We will always reserve the option of using class time to discuss an important development that reflects some of the key questions of the course. Those will be occurring on a daily basis. If you have a story you’d like to have us discuss, you should always feel free to let me know in advance of class, even if it is just a few minutes in advance. That would be considered a strong indication of “class engagement” (see below.)

**Grading:**

The assignments are designed to help you understand, interpret and critique the material.

20% Class Engagement: *active* attendance; evidence that you have read carefully the assigned material; and weekly reactions to our discussions and readings or just general observations about the material we cover. The weekly reactions must be submitted by email by noon on Friday of each week. These need not be lengthy but they should be thoughtful and reflective. They will not be individually graded but I will usually (almost always) offer comments and reactions.

15% Group Report: Early in the semester, we will divide the class into four groups. Each will be assigned a recent major study on the state of democracy. The group will make a 30-minute presentation in class, summarizing the report and highlighting the key findings. A brief written summary will also be made available to the class.

20% Quiz #1: This will be an essay/short answer exam based on the material covered in the first part of the course.

20% Quiz #2: Another essay/short answer exam based on material covered in the second part of the course.

25% An Interpretative Paper/Final “exam”: For the third part of the course, we will explore the prospects for democracy in your lifetime. In this paper, which will also serve as a kind of final exam, you will provide your own assessment about democracy’s prospects, drawing from our work throughout the semester.

Each of these will be explained in more detail.
The Format of Class Sessions and “rules of the road:”

Because this is a class heavily dependent on discussion and mutual efforts to educate each other, I ask that you minimize in-class distractions, such as cell phones, and that you guard against prolonged eye-contact with your laptop screen rather than with classmates.

If you cannot attend a class because of illness or an unavoidable conflict, you must let me know ahead of time. If you do not let me know in such cases, it will adversely affect your grade for class engagement.

When you are in class, I will assume you have read the material. That doesn’t mean you always understand it, but it will be unfair to your classmates if you come to class intending to “free-ride” on the efforts of others. If for some reason you have not been able to read the material, you should let me know ahead of time to avoid those awkward moments when I turn to you and ask what you think and you have no idea.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments:

Jan. 11 Introduction—First Day of Class

Part I: Democracy Today

Jan. 13 Prologue

- Stephens, “The West is The Author of its own Weakness,” Financial Times, Sept 28, 2021

Jan. 18 Democracy in the World Today

- Applebaum, Twilight of Democracy, Chps 1-3, pp. 1-104

Jan. 20 Continued...

- Applebaum, Twilight of Democracy, Chps 4-6, pp. 105-190

Jan. 25 Does Democracy Work?

Jan. 27  Interlude: Revisiting January 6, 2021

- (Suggested) “The Attack: Before, During and After,” Washington Post Staff
  https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2021/jan-6-insurrection-capitol/
- Statement by Vice-President Michael Pence, January 6, 2021.

Feb 1 and 3  Group Reports: The Condition of Democracy

- Freedom in the World 2020: A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy (Freedom House)
- Centre for the Future of Democracy “Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy.” 2020
  https://www.bennettsinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/youth-and-satisfaction-democracy/

Feb 8  The Norms and Institutions of Modern Democracy

- Levitsky and Ziblatt: How Democracies Die, chapters 1, 2, and 4

Feb 10  Continued...

- Levitsky and Ziblatt: How Democracies Die, chapters 5, 6, and 9

Feb 15  Guest Speaker (Zoom session): The Honorable J. Michael Luttig

Feb 17  Quiz #1

Part II: The Tradition of Liberal Democracy in America

Feb. 22  The Liberal Tradition: John Locke and The Function and Purpose of Government

- The Second Treatise
  - Chapter II “Of the State of Nature,” sections 4-8
  - Chapter V, “Of Property,” sections 25-30
  - Chapter IX “Of the Ends of Political Society and Government,” sections 123-130
- Note: Many versions may be found online or in readily available texts. This is one option:
  - https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm

Feb 22  Anne Applebaum Lecture as part of Jepson Forum
Feb. 24 The Jeffersonian Tradition

- Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge https://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/bill-more-general-diffusion-knowledge
- Declaration of Independence https://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/transcript-declaration-independence-final
- First Inaugural Address https://jeffersonpapers.princeton.edu/selected-documents/first-inaugural-address-0

March 1 The Madisonian (and Hamiltonian) Tradition

- *The Federalist Papers* #1, 2, 10, 48

March 3 Continued...

- *The Federalist Papers* #51, 55, and 78

March 8, 10 Spring Break

March 15 “Democracy in America”

- De Tocqueville: pp. 165-231 (volume I, Part 2, chapters 1-6)
- Recommended: Mansfield-Winthrop Introduction to *Democracy in America*

March 17 “Democracy in America”

- De Tocqueville: pp. 479-504 (volume II, Part 2, chapters 1-8)
- De Tocqueville: pp. 661-666 (volume II, Part 6, chapter 6)

March 22 Confronting the Contradictions

- Lincoln: First Inaugural Address http://144.208.79.222/~abraha21/alolinc/speeches/1inaug.htm
- Lincoln: Gettysburg Address http://144.208.79.222/~abraha21/alolinc/speeches/gettysburg.htm
- Lincoln: Second Inaugural http://144.208.79.222/~abraha21/alolinc/speeches/inaug2.htm
- Frederick Douglass: “Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln”

**March 24**  Extending Democracy Abroad

- Woodrow Wilson Speech to Congress, April 2, 2017

**March 29**  Widening Democracy at Home


**March 29**  Lecture by Jonathan Rauch sponsored by the McDowell Institute

**March 31**  Widening Democracy, continued


**April 5**  The Freedom of the Press in a Democracy

- New York Times v. United States (1971) (Pentagon Papers Case) [https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=17571244799664973711&q=new+york+times+v.+u.s.+{(1971}&hl=en&as_sdt=6,47&as_vis=1](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=17571244799664973711&q=new+york+times+v.+u.s.+{(1971}&hl=en&as_sdt=6,47&as_vis=1)

**April 7**  Quiz #2

**Part III: The Democratic Prospect**

**April 12**  Liberal Democracy Today

April 12  The Challenge of Sectarianism

- Lepore, “A New Americanism,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2018

April 19  “The Narrow Corridor”

- Acemoglu and Robinson, preface and chps 1 and 2

April 21  Continued....

- Acemoglu and Robinson, chp 11, chp 13 (pp. 390-406), chp. 15
Jepson School of Leadership Studies  
Common Syllabus Insert

Awarding of Credit
To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.
registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Disability Accommodations
Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.
disability.richmond.edu/

Honor System
The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”
studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html

Religious Observance
Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.
registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html

Addressing Microaggressions on Campus
Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.¹ Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups.² Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world).³ A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.⁴

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the Student Center for Equity and Inclusion (SCEI) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.⁵ With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

---


⁵https://inclusion.richmond.edu/
SYLLABUS INSERT REGARDING ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL SUPPORT SERVICES
Hope N. Walton, Director Academic Skills Center

Below is a boxed statement that describes the services available from a myriad of resources. We recommend that you consider including this boxed statement in your course syllabus, on Blackboard, or perhaps on a separate handout. Of course, other support services that relate specifically to your course can also be added.

Staff members from the resources below are available for consultations about concerns related to students as well as issues related to services.

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

**Academic Skills Center** ([asc.richmond.edu](http://asc.richmond.edu)): Academic coaches assist students in assessing and developing their academic and life-skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, etc.). Peer tutors offer assistance in specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.) and will be available for appointments in-person and virtually. Peer tutors are listed on the ASC website. Email Roger Mancastroppa (rmancast@richmond.edu) and Hope Walton (hwalton@richmond.edu) for coaching appointments in academic and life skills.

**Boatwright Library Research Librarians:** ([library.richmond.edu/help/ask/ or 289-8876](http://library.richmond.edu/help/ask/)): Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic, to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum and provide individual appointments, class library instruction, tutorials, and research guides (libguides.richmond.edu). Students can contact an individual librarian ([library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html](http://library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html)) or ASK a librarian for help via email ([library@richmond.edu](mailto:library@richmond.edu)), text (804-277-9ASK), or chat ([library.richmond.edu/chat.html](http://library.richmond.edu/chat.html)).

**Career Services:** ([careerservices.richmond.edu or 289-8547](http://careerservices.richmond.edu)): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

**Counseling and Psychological Services** ([caps.richmond.edu or 289-8119](http://caps.richmond.edu)): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

**Disability Services** ([disability.richmond.edu](http://disability.richmond.edu)) The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable students to participate fully in activities, programs, services and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

**Speech Center** ([speech.richmond.edu or 287-6409](http://speech.richmond.edu)): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations. Remote practice sessions can be arranged; we look forward to meeting your public speaking needs.

**Writing Center** ([writing.richmond.edu or 289-8263](http://writing.richmond.edu)): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.