

CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRATIC THEORY

course syllabus

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office hours: M 12:30-3pm, W 11am-12pm
and 1-2:30pm, and F 10:30am-12pm; by
appointment at professorferguson.youcanbook.me

PSCI 7124

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Ketchum 1B35

F 8:00-10:30am

“What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

– Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” (1992)

“Democracy has historically unparalleled global popularity today yet has never been more conceptually footloose or substantively hollow. Perhaps democracy's current popularity depends on the openness and even vacuity of its meaning and practice—like Barack Obama, it is an empty signifier to which any and all can attach their dreams and hopes. Or perhaps capitalism, modern democracy's non-identical birth twin and always the more robust and wily of the two, has finally reduced democracy to a “brand,” that late modern twist on commodity fetishism which wholly severs a product's saleable image from its content. Or perhaps, in the joke on Whiggish history wherein the twenty-first century features godheads warring with an intensity presumed vanquished by modernity, democracy has emerged as a new world religion—not a specific form of political power and culture but an altar before which the West and its admirers worship and the divine purpose through which Western imperial crusades are shaped and legitimated.”

– Wendy Brown, “We Are All Democrats Now” (2009)

“Tragically, democracy starts killing itself at birth, and the killing continues throughout its lifetime. These deaths, large and small, often go unrecognized – but not unfelt. Promises broken, possibilities obstructed, and injustices inflicted generate disaffection, anger, perhaps violence, each directed at democracy itself. In a sense, people must perpetually hope for and mourn the democracy (always being) taken from them. Political loss, in other words, necessarily shapes the democratic experience: power taken, sovereignty denied; values profaned; faith undermined. Democracy thus loses, on a regular basis, precisely what it can never lose, which means its legitimacy – and viability – always seems at stake.

– Steven Johnston, *American Dionysia* (2015)

course overview

In 1992, at the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama pronounced the triumph of the idea of liberal democracy. Communism as a way of organizing political and economic life had proven itself to be bankrupt. Monarchic and despotic forms of government had long been dismissed as illegitimate. What remained after millennia of experimentation and debate was a single, triumphant winner: Western liberal democracy.

To some extent, Fukuyama's announcement was prescient. Political leaders the world over attempt to establish their legitimacy through elections – however corrupt and one-sided – the lingua franca of democracies. Justice movements of all kinds use the rhetoric of (liberal) democracy to make their claims: human rights, self-determination, liberty and equality. Democracy is, we might say, the universal language of contemporary politics.

Yet, what is it that has triumphed? Democracy? Liberal democracy? Neoliberalism in the guise of democracy? Is the language of democracy just so much vacuous rhetoric? Is it even possible to achieve democracy today, given the power of corporate wealth in politics, the dominance of neoliberal market ideals, the undermining of state sovereignty with the spread of globalization, and the rise of right wing nationalism? Has democracy triumphed, or has it been vanquished? What, if anything, can democracy be in the contemporary world?

We will explore these questions by way of close readings of three canonical authors in various ways critical of democracy and its violences: Karl Marx, Simone de Beauvoir, and Frantz Fanon. With each of these authors, we will pair a contemporary work of political theory that engages and develops their work. These three contemporary works illuminate the wide range of work done today under the guise of democratic theory.

reading assignments & course schedule

You should get yourself a copy of the following books, if you do not already own them; they are available through the CU Bookstore. All other readings will be placed on the course Canvas site. When the edition of the book is important, it is specified in the list below.

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (2nd edition)
- Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party*
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Borde translation ONLY)
- Lori Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter*
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Philcox translation)
- Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*

Please note: the schedule that follows is preliminary, and may be revised in light of class conversations, emerging scholarship, current events, and/or professor discretion.

I. what is political theory?

T Aug 28, 8-10:30am in Ketchum IB35 (RESCHEDULED FOR APSA)

POLITICAL THEORY AS INTERPRETATION

- Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" in *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy (The Hogarth Press, 1978), 143-72
- Leo Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?" in *What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (The Free Press, 1959), 9-55
- Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton, 1988), 29-67

POLITICAL THEORY AS POLITICAL CRITICISM

- Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969): 1062-82
- James Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002): 533-55
- Tim Kaufman-Osborn, "Political Theory as Profession and as Subfield?" forthcoming in *Political Research Quarterly* 63, no. 3, (2010)
- Wendy Brown, "At the Edge," *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002): 566-76

II. marx

F Sep 7: Marx, *Marx-Engels Reader*

M Sep 10: **Bibliography Scavenger Hunt due at 5pm**

F Sep 14: Marx, *Marx-Engels Reader*

F Sep 21: Marx, *Marx-Engels Reader*

F Sep 28: Dean, *Crowds and Party*
Book Review due in class

III. beauvoir

F Oct 5: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

F Oct 12: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

F Oct 19: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* **(TO BE RESCHEDULED - APT)**

F Oct 26: Guest: Lisa Ellis, Reading TBA

M Oct 29: **Annotated Bibliography due at 5pm**

F Nov 2: Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir*
Book Review due in class

IV. fanon

F Nov 9: Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

M Nov 12: **Paper Proposal due at 5pm**

F Nov 16: Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

F Nov 23: **FALL BREAK**

M Nov 26: **10 Pages due at 5pm**

F Nov 30: Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

M Dec 3: **Peer Review due at 5pm**

F Dec 7: Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*
Book Review due in class

V. conclusion

M Dec 10: **Critical Response due at 5pm**

F Dec 14: Writing Workshop

W Dec 19: **Final Seminar Paper and Narrative Reflection due at 5pm**

course requirements

class preparation

The discussions in this course will focus on the readings assigned for that day on the syllabus. I expect you to come to class having completed the reading assignment and prepared to discuss that reading critically, imaginatively, and insightfully. *Always bring the text with you to class.* It is in your best interest to use a *physical* copy of the text where possible, not an electronic version.

The material that we are studying in this course is challenging. To get the most out of this course, I encourage you to flag passages and ideas that remain difficult or confusing after seminar, and come to my office hours to talk about them.

participation

Participation includes participation in class discussions as well as participation in discussions with the professor outside of class. Only the first is required, but the latter is strongly encouraged and, if significant, can raise your overall participation grade.

Classes will consist primarily of discussion; there will be no formal lectures for this course. Students' participation in class discussion should include demonstrating both speaking and listening skills; in other words, students are encouraged to speak and to speak often, but also to listen to their peers & to respond thoughtfully to others' comments. Students should demonstrate familiarity and critical engagement with the course material, as well as intellectual curiosity. The point is not to have understood everything before coming to class – but to show up with questions, difficulties, and issues ready to explore the course material.

attendance

Regular attendance in class is essential for successful learning. In our class discussions we will not only discuss information not contained in the reading but we will also practice the critical analytic skills you are expected to develop. To reinforce the importance of attendance in this class, the maximum grade you can receive for participation is dependent upon your class attendance. Students may miss one seminar *for any reason*. Additional unexcused absences reduce the maximum possible class participation grade by one letter grade each. For example: a total of 3 absences reduces the maximum participation grade to a C; 4 to a D. This means that five or more unexcused absences result in a failing grade for class participation, and therefore in a failing course grade.

Excused absences include absences due to religious observances and documented personal, family, or medical emergencies. Whenever possible, students should inform the professor in advance of such absences in order to make necessary arrangements. Absences resulting from discretionary events (such

as non-emergency health care, non-essential travel, etc.) cannot qualify as excused. The professor reserves the right to distinguish excusable from non-excusable reasons for missing class or requiring an extension for written work. The professor recommends that students who require more than two excused absences (for a total of more than three absences) withdraw from the course, but she will work with students to assess each situation individually.

[Campus policy regarding religious observances](#) states requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. You must notify the professor of any such conflicts *by the end of the first week of classes* so we can work out alternatives.

a note on coffee (and other forms of sustenance)

Our seminar meets at an unusually early time of day. You should feel free to bring caffeinated beverages and food to seminar, especially if you believe these will help you to be on time, alert, and fully engaged in the course. If the group wishes, we can organize a coffee pool, and rotate responsibility for bringing coffee/snacks for the group. Food that is loud to unwrap or eat, noxious to others, or delicious-smelling is not allowed; an exception will be made for delicious-smelling food only when there is enough to share.

weekly writing assignments

Through weekly writing assignments, we will be focusing in this class on developing two important writing skills that are central to all good writing:

- pre-writing
- writing for an audience

Your task for each writing assignment is simple: in no more than 300 words, raise a problem or a question about the reading for that week that you would like to discuss in the seminar. You should presume that your readers have done the reading (as have you), but you may need to explain the context for the question or problem you wish to raise. This need not be a formal piece of writing, but it should be proofread for spelling and grammar issues. It also need not be a full 300 words; feel free to submit shorter assignments if you believe that you can express the question or problem in fewer words.

Writing assignments are due by email to the professor and your classmates by **Thursday at 5pm**, the day before class. The intention with this deadline is to encourage you to think through the material in advance of class, leaving space for you to process and relax with the material before class on Friday morning. **Late assignments will receive a failing grade.** You are required to submit assignments on time for at least 11 of the 13 weeks of the semester for which we have assigned reading (excepting the final class and the session with Lisa Ellis), and you are encouraged to submit assignments for every week.

You are expected to read through the writing assignments shared by all members of the class in advance of our seminar on Friday, although you do not need to have worked out a response to your classmates' writing in advance.

The weekly writing assignments will be graded on a simple pass/fail scale. A failing grade will be awarded in those cases when the writing does not indicate a serious effort to respond to the assignment (e.g. a perfunctory question that shows no curiosity or imagination about the reading; a comment that does not demonstrate that you have done the reading; assignments that consistently demonstrate that you have *begun* but not *completed* the reading). A passing grade is an indication of serious engagement with the assignment.

If you are ever curious about how you are doing in the course, please do not hesitate to come and see me in office hours. I recognize that awarding only pass/fail grades can be disconcerting to students who want to know if they are on track to get an A or a B. If this is you, please come talk to me!

annotated bibliographies

At the beginning of the semester, students will be divided into three groups: Marx, Beauvoir, and Fanon. *Each student* will then conduct a Library Scavenger Hunt for their group's author, due to Canvas by 5pm Monday, September 10th. The Library Scavenger Hunt will be graded pass/fail: pass indicates successful completion of ALL elements of the hunt; fail indicates incomplete work. A passing grade is required to complete the course.

After completing the Library Scavenger Hunt, students will then work in a group to identify works they will review to produce a collective Annotated Bibliography, to be shared with the entire class. Annotated Bibliographies are due by 5pm Monday, October 29th. The Annotated Bibliography will be graded pass/fail: pass indicates successful completion of ALL elements of the assignment; fail indicates incomplete work. A passing grade is required to complete the course.

book reviews

By class on Friday, September 7th, each student must sign up to review one of the three "secondary" literature books (e.g. Dean, Marso, and Coulthard). Any number of students may write a review on the same book, but no student may write a review of a book that the student has previously read. See handout on Canvas for more details.

seminar papers

In preparation for the final seminar paper, students must meet the following deadlines:

- by 5pm on November 12, a 2-3 page proposal for the topic of the seminar paper
- by 5pm on November 26, at least 10 double-spaced pages of draft material for the seminar paper, plus a timetable indicating how you intend to break down the remaining work and complete it for the final deadline. These drafts will also be shared with two classmates.
- by 5pm on December 3, a peer review of the two classmates' draft work, submitted to the professor AND to the other students
- by 5pm on December 10, a critical response to the peer reviews and updated timeline for completion
- by 5pm on December 19, the final seminar paper, 20-25 pages in length (double-spaced, times new roman, normal margins, that sort of thing) AND a separate narrative reflection on the writing process explaining any choices the author made in the revision process that diverge from what was expected or planned earlier

Extensions may be granted for the intermediate deadlines at the professor's discretion, with the exception of the deadlines on December 3 and 10, which involve classmates' schedules. Extensions will not be granted for the final paper, except in the case of a documented medical or family emergency.

Late papers will not be accepted.

All seminar paper assignments must be submitted (1) on Canvas to the appropriate dropbox in .doc or .docx form ONLY, and (2) in paper form to my mailbox in Ketchum. This includes the intermediate assignments, as well as the final seminar paper.

auditors

I welcome auditors in this course, and I treat them as full participants in the seminar. Auditors are expected to attend regularly, to come prepared, and to participate in class discussions. I do not require auditors to submit written work, but I strongly encourage them to participate in the weekly writing assignments so as to deepen their engagement with the material. I reserve the right to ask auditors to leave the class if they are unable to meet these expectations.

grading

Final course grades will be calculated as follows:

25%	Participation
5%	Weekly Writing Assignments (at least 11)
10%	Annotated Bibliography
10%	Book Review
50%	Final Paper

N.B.: Failure to complete any single course requirement will result in failure of the entire course, regardless of whether other course requirements have been met.

COURSE POLICIES

CONTACTING THE PROFESSOR

I encourage you to drop by during my office hours as often as you like to ask questions, to discuss the course material in more depth, or to address concerns you may have about your performance in the class. You do not need to make an appointment to see me during office hours – just come by, or walk over with me after class. However, if you want to guarantee a particular time slot for office hours, please go to **professorferguson.youcanbook.me** to book an appointment. If I get the sense that additional time is needed at intensive parts of the semester, I will add more time slots that can be booked through the website. And of course, if my office hours do not fit with your schedule, I am happy to arrange an appointment at a mutually convenient time.

The best way to contact me outside of office hours is by email. I promise to respond to your email within one business day.

IN CLASS EXPECTATIONS

I want everyone in the class to learn as much as they can by grappling successfully with important – and sometimes challenging – texts and ideas. To make this possible, we need to cultivate and maintain a classroom environment that is respectful of others and conducive to learning, and we need to be able to take full advantage of the time available to us. In order to create a professional atmosphere within the classroom, you are expected to:

- Arrive to class on time
- Turn off your cell phone (talk **and** text)
- Refrain from using electronic devices during class (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.)
- Put away newspapers and magazines
- Refrain from having disruptive conversations during class
- Remain for the whole class; if you must leave early, do so without disrupting others
- Display professional courtesy and respect in all interactions related to this class

Compliance with these expectations will assist all of us in creating a learning community and a high quality educational experience. The University of Colorado Classroom Behavior Policy compliments these classroom expectations:

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran's status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I

may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the campus policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [student code](#).

OUT OF CLASS EXPECTATIONS

As a member of the CU community, you are expected to consistently demonstrate integrity and honor through your everyday actions. Faculty are very willing to assist you with your academic needs. However, multiple professional obligations make it necessary for us to schedule our availability. Suggestions specific to interactions with instructors include:

- *Respect posted office hours.* Plan your weekly schedule to align with scheduled office hours. If you cannot make office hours due to schedule conflicts, contact your instructor by email to set up an appointment at another time.
- *Avoid disrupting ongoing meetings within faculty offices.* If the professor is expecting you, or if you have been waiting for longer than five minutes, knock politely to let your instructor know you are there. Please wait until the meeting concludes before seeking assistance.
- *Respect faculty policies regarding email, and note that instructors are not expected to respond to email outside of business hours.* Send email to professors using a professional format. Tips for a professional email include:
 - Always fill in the subject line with a topic that indicates the reason for your email to your reader.
 - Respectfully address the individual to whom you are sending the email (e.g., Dear Professor Smith).
 - Avoid email, chat room, or text message abbreviations.
 - Be brief and polite.
 - Add a signature block with appropriate contact information.
 - Reply to emails with the previously sent message. This will allow your reader to quickly recall the questions and previous conversation.

GRADE APPEALS

Grade appeals must be submitted no earlier than 24 hours after, and no later than 7 days after receipt of the grade. Students' concerns should be presented **in writing**, with detailed reasons explaining why the student believes the grade is unfair or incorrect. Be advised that in all cases of grade appeals, the professor reserves the right to raise, maintain, or lower the grade upon review.

Students dissatisfied with the result of an appeal to the professor may appeal to the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Political Science, in accordance with the Department's grade appeals policy.

ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to the professor your accommodation letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.

DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, exploitation, harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking), discrimination, and harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

HONOR CODE

I take the principles of academic honesty seriously. Your continued presence in this class indicates that your work for this course will comply with [the academic integrity policy](#) and the [Honor Code](#) of this institution, which all students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior.

Dishonesty of any kind with respect to examinations, course assignments, alteration of records, or illegal possession of examinations is considered cheating. Students are responsible not only to abstain from cheating, but also to avoid making it possible for others to cheat. Submitting someone else's work as your own constitutes plagiarism. Academic honesty requires the full acknowledgement of ideas taken from another source for use in a course paper or project. You must include citations for material that you quote or paraphrase from another text; in general, *it is better to overcite than to undercite*.

All work that you submit for this course may be submitted only to this course and should be based upon work and thought undertaken only for this course – unless the professor has given you explicit permission to do otherwise. Written assignments will be submitted to turnitin.com to evaluate them for plagiarism. All incidents of academic misconduct will lead to an automatic academic sanction in the course (up to and including failing the course), and will be reported to the Director of Graduate Studies.