

HCOL 185H
The Democratic Citizen
MWF 1:10-2:00
University Heights North 16
Fall 2015

Bob Pepperman Taylor
527 Old Mill
656 4289 (office)
Robert.Taylor@uvm.edu
Office Hours: MW 3:00-4:30

In this course we will discuss the nature of citizenship in a democracy – its character, values and obligations. Focusing primarily on the American example, we will ask questions such as: Do citizens in a democracy differ from citizens in other regimes? Does democratic citizenship produce unique obligations toward the government (or toward the world at large)? Do democratic citizens require special democratic virtues, or a special set of shared beliefs, in order to fulfill their obligations? These and related questions will be explored by studying mainly (but not exclusively) American texts by classic authors such as James Madison, Henry Thoreau, Frederick Douglass, Henry Adams, and John Dewey, and contemporary philosophers, social scientists, and political observers such as Richard Rorty, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and Kathy Roth-Douquet.

Course Texts

Links to the following texts can be found on the class Blackboard page (the Thoreau and Walzer material are electronic copies). I have made these public domain texts available here to save you some money. For those of you who would like to have a book in your hand when reading these works: many of these can be easily found in used bookstores, and they can all be found at Amazon. If enough of you would like hard copies, I can also request that the UVM bookstore order the number of copies we need.

Plato, The Apology
James Madison, Federalist 10
Henry Adams, Democracy
Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience
Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave
Michael Walzer, What It Means to Be an American (selections)

Selections from Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, are also available as a file on Blackboard.

The following texts are available for purchase at the UVM bookstore.

Judith Shklar, American Citizenship
John Dewey, A Common Faith
Richard Rorty, Achieving Our Country
Gertrude Himmelfarb, One Nation, Two Cultures
Kathy Roth-Douquet and Frank Schaeffer, AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes from Military Service and How it Hurts Our Country

Course Requirements

Students are expected to attend every class and have the week's reading prepared at the beginning of each week (for Monday's class, that is). There will be a (take home) mid-term examination, a final oral presentation in the last week of classes, and a cumulative (take home) final examination. Each of these will constitute 25% of your grade. The other 25% will grow from class preparation and participation (see below).

Homework, Class Participation and Oral Presentations

Four skills – reading, writing, research, and speaking – will be emphasized in your work in this course. In order to develop these skills (as well to facilitate thinking about the course material!) you will be expected to:

1. Have the week's reading prepared at the beginning of the week. This preparation means that you will not only have read the material, but will be prepared to discuss and offer (well informed!) opinions and questions about the material. All students will be expected to participate in class discussions.
2. Prepare weekly homework assignments. These are short weekly essays (less than two typed, double-spaced pages). At the end of this syllabus are writing prompts for each week's reading.
3. Prepare a semester research project. This will grow out of our course reading, homework assignments, class discussions, and conversations with me outside of class. Each student will be expected to:
 - a. Meet with me in my office before October 16 to discuss ideas for this project
 - b. Prepare a brief (one page) proposal by October 23
 - c. Research the topic, in light of your proposal and our conversations
 - d. Present a formal oral report at the end of the semester in which you share your research findings and reflections. More on this later in the semester
 - e. Submit a written copy (these will probably run 5-8 typed, double-spaced pages) of your research project no later than two days after your oral presentation

Reading and Course Schedule

Concerns About Democracy

August 31-September 4: Plato, The Apology (Blackboard)

Labor Day Holiday, Monday, September 7

September 9-11: Madison, Federalist 10 (Blackboard)

September 14-18: Adams, Democracy (Blackboard)

NOTE: Democracy is a novel; it reads quickly, but make sure to set aside time to read it all.

Democratic Citizens in the American Context

September 21-25: Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Blackboard)

September 28-October 2: Thoreau, Civil Disobedience (Blackboard)

October 5-9: Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (Blackboard)

October 12-16: Shklar, American Citizenship

October 19-23: Walzer, "Introduction," "What Does it Mean to be an 'American'?", "Pluralism: A Political Perspective," "Civility and Civic Virtue in Contemporary America" (Blackboard)

**NOTE: Mid-term examination due in class on Friday, October 23

Democratic Culture and Values

October 26-30: Dewey, A Common Faith

November 2-6: Rorty, Achieving our Country

November 9-13: Himmelfarb, One Nation, Two Cultures

Democratic Prospects

November 16-20: Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer, AWOL

NOTE: Thanksgiving holiday, November 23-27

November 30-December 9: Student oral presentations (5 class sessions)

**NOTE: Final Exam due in my office by noon, Tuesday, December 15

Weekly Homework/Journal Prompts

September 9: Madison considers “faction” to be the primary danger of free government. What does he mean by this? Why doesn’t he propose ways of minimizing the formation of factions?

September 14: Does Henry Adams believe that democracy has at least the possibility of becoming a virtuous, admirable form of government?

September 21: Does Tocqueville admire or dislike democratic citizens?

September 28: Was Thoreau a democratic citizen?

October 5: Why was literacy, the ability to read books, so important to Douglass’s conception and experience of freedom? Is reading equally important for your experience of freedom?

October 12: Explain why Shklar believes that voting and earning are the two key components of American citizenship.

October 19: What would you consider to be the primary agreements and disagreements between Shklar and Walzer?

October 26: Explain, in as much detail as space allows, what Dewey means by a “common faith.” How does this relate to more conventional religious faiths?

November 2: Is Rorty right to think that the political left is the only source of civic virtue and progress?

November 9: You are Gertrude Himmelfarb. Write a response to Rorty’s Achieving Our Country.

November 16: Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer argue that privileged citizens in the United States are increasingly unlikely to serve in the military. Why do they think this is a threat to our democracy? Do you agree with them?