Course description
To paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, we all think we know democracy when we see it. But when it comes to defining democracy, we are immediately confronted with a wide array of perplexing questions: how should citizens participate? Does representation fulfill the aims of democracy or corrupt them? Should we be concerned that the ‘tyranny of the majority’ may stifle dissenting voices? And how can democratic decisions be reached in a pluralist society, composed of members with irreconcilable beliefs, interests, and values? This course will examine these questions through a sustained engagement with the complex relationship between democracy and race in the United States from the founding to the present.

The academic literatures on democratic theory and race and politics are both enormous. We will read a small but significant selection of works at the intersection of these two concerns, beginning with two examinations of the seminar’s overarching themes and conceptual vocabularies (Dahl and Mills). From there, we will read foundational texts in the history of political thought (Jefferson, DuBois, Baldwin, King, and Malcolm X) that grapple with the legacies of racial inequality in a nation nonetheless premised on a belief in universal equality.

In the second half of the class, we will read contemporary works in history, philosophy, and political theory on a variety of thematic concerns, from representation to increased grassroots activism representation (Alcoff, Mansbridge, Young, Rogers, Hooker, and Lebron). Throughout the semester, we will pay particular attention to the persistent shadow of slavery and focus on the ways in which American democracy has both combatted and sustained racial inequality. In the final weeks, we will broaden our focus to consider the experiences of other racialized groups in the contemporary United States, focusing on identity, immigration, and citizenship (Beltrán and Ngai).

There will be approximately 100 to 150 pages of reading per week.

Reading schedule
Week 1 - June 10 - Introduction
Robert A. Dahl, On Democracy (1998), chapters 2 and 4-6, pp. 7-25 and 35-68*
Week 2 - June 17 - Foundational debates

Week 3 - June 24 - The problem of the color line

Week 4 - July 1 - Emancipation(s)
James Baldwin, “Nobody Knows My Name: A Letter from the South,” in *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (1961)*
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963)*
Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)*

In-class film screening: *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016), dir. Raoul Peck

Week 5 - July 8 - Representation
*skim:* Suzanne Dovi, “Political Representation,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
Iris Marion Young, “Representation and Social Perspective,” in *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000), pp. 121-153*

Week 6 - July 15 - Identity
Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (2010), introduction and chapters 1-5, pp. 3-156

Week 7 - July 22 - Citizenship

Week 8 - July 29 - Looking ahead
Melvin Rogers, ed., *Theory & Event* 17.3 (2014): Supplement on Ferguson*
The class will not meet on August 5.

**Required texts**
Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (978-0195375916)

*All other readings (marked with an asterisk) will be available on the class site.*

**Assignments**
Attendance and participation (50%): While I will introduce the readings and suggest avenues for discussion, the class relies on everyone participating. This entails doing the assigned reading beforehand, coming to class prepared to discuss it, and engaging others’ comments. Attendance is expected every week, barring illness or emergency. One unexcused absence is permitted.

Weekly discussion posts (25%): Five weekly discussion posts, approximately 250-300 words each, are due by 10 pm on the Sunday before class. These may be questions the readings have raised for you, comments on a particular theme or passage, or thoughts about a single reading or several of them. They may look back to readings already done or ahead to the coming week’s. They must contain some question you wish to discuss in class.

There are seven possible dates to submit a discussion post: June 16, June 23, June 30, July 7, July 14, July 21, and July 28. They are graded with a checkmark (if they meet the stated requirements) or a minus (if they do not, or are not submitted).

Final paper (25%): A final paper will be due on Monday, August 5. More details will be distributed on July 15, including possible prompts, though I encourage you to develop your own in accordance with your own interests. You might construct a topic from one of your discussion posts, though you do not need to.

**Further reading**
Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (1996)
Christopher Bertram, *Do States Have the Right to Exclude Immigrants?* (2018)
Hannah Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (1967)
Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry, eds., *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (2018)