

PSCI 207W-01 - Democratic Visions: Tocqueville and W.E.B. Du Bois

Instructor: Nathan Feldman (Office: Harkness: 323)

Email: nfeldma4@ur.rochester.edu

Class meeting time: Monday, Wednesday: 4:50 - 6:05 PM

Class location: Frederick Douglass Room 420

Course format: Seminar

Office hours: Tuesday 10 AM-12 PM; 2-4 PM. (Book using this link:

<https://calendly.com/nhf2109/office-hours>)

Credit hours: 4.0

COURSE DESCRIPTION, OBJECTIVES, AND OUTCOMES

This seminar explores two key texts of American democracy – W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* (1935) and Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840). Throughout the semester, we will consider and compare Du Bois’s and Tocqueville’s analyses of the nature of democracy and its promises, challenges, and contradictions. Issues and questions we address will include the meanings of equality; the relationship of social to political democracy; the threat of democratic despotism and tyranny; and the ways that race, empire, and emancipation reshape the theory and practice of democracy. We will also explore these works as texts of political theory—specifically, we will attend to their intellectual contexts, historical and sociological methodologies, literary and political strategies, and normative and philosophical ambitions.

This course has no prerequisites. It will be evaluated on the basis of one piece of writing—a 15-page (double-spaced) essay that discusses the following question: “What, for Tocqueville and Du Bois, does democracy require?”

This essay is due **May 10 at 10 PM**.

Students can find a large essay daunting. Consequently, I will read as many drafts as you send me. When you send me the piece, book an office hour slot or two (N.B. please give me 24 hours to read your

work). The last opportunity to discuss work will be on **May 3**. After that, you'll be much better off focusing on your own work instead of waiting for my feedback.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (LOA edition)

Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (Free Press edition)

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory; however, needless to say, you can have an excused absence for reasons of illness, religious obligation, and/or emergency.

Four (4) unexcused absences will result in the student's failing the semester.

Class Etiquette

This tackles some of the most intractable, enduring, and provocative questions of American politics. I encourage you to "try on" new ideas and new arguments. Come prepared to think complex, challenging thoughts. Please be kind and respectful in class discussions. Speak on the basis of your own experience and let others do the same. Expect your peers to disagree. Do as Justice Ginsburg counselled: Disagree without being disagreeable. Assume that your peers are well-intentioned, but if classroom dynamics don't feel right, let me know. I will do my level best to foster an inclusive classroom, and I count on your cooperation in achieving this goal.

Seek my help when you need it

In addition to the support resources available to you through the university, I am also here to help. You are always welcome to contact me with questions about our coursework, as well as to express your concerns about our learning environment. I welcome suggestions about how to meet your

learning needs and to improve the classroom experience. You can always email me or visit my office hours. Please allow up to 2 days for email responses, although I will try to get back to you sooner.

Generative AI

I strongly encourage you not to use generative AI to either summarize readings or write your papers. It's a way of ensuring you learn nothing. More stringently, you are responsible for the accuracy of everything you write. You are required to disclose if your work was created, whole or in part (and, if so, what part), with a GenAI tool. Failure to disclose this constitutes a violation of academic honesty.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic honesty means acting with truthfulness and sincerity in carrying out all aspects of our individual and collaborative work, maintaining ownership over our work and acknowledging our debt to the work of others.

Students can best meet their obligation to academic honesty by adhering to the Academic Honesty Policy in all academic matters. This includes completing their work through their own honest efforts and expecting and encouraging honesty among their peers.

The text above is an excerpt taken from <https://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/>, where students may – and should! – also find the full policy.

STUDENT RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Please feel comfortable speaking with me about challenges you are experiencing within and outside of the classroom so that I may submit a CARE Referral on your behalf. A CARE Referral is submitted when the level of concern for a student necessitates inclusive, multi-layered support from the campus community. The CARE network administrator only shares information with staff who need to know it to help you. I care about your success and am committed to my role in helping you get connected to appropriate campus resources.

If there are accommodations of any sort that would make the class work better for you, please come talk to me about it.

If you think you may need to seek accommodations due to a disability, the Office of Disability Resources (<http://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/index.html>) can help you figure out your options. Speaking with faculty about disability-related accommodations is strictly confidential; I encourage you to come see me with concerns or requests. Other resources that may prove helpful during your time at the University of Rochester:

-**CARE** (<https://www.rochester.edu/care/about.html>)

-**The Writing & Speaking Center** (<http://writing.rochester.edu/index.html>)

-**Tutoring** (<http://www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/undergraduate/tutoring.html>)

-**University Counseling Center** (<http://www.rochester.edu/uhs/ucc/>)

-**David T. Kearns Center** (<https://www.rochester.edu/college/kearnscenter/>)

-**Office of Minority Student Affairs** (<http://www.rochester.edu/College/OMSA/>)

Wednesday, January 21, 2026.

- No readings.

Friday, January 23, 2026

- Du Bois, "Of the Ruling of Men," *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 134-159. (on Blackboard)
- Du Bois, "The African Roots of War," *The Atlantic Monthly* 115:5 (1915), 707-714

Monday, January 26, 2026

- Chad Williams, "In the Shadow of World War: Revisiting Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* (2022), 1-13. (on Blackboard)
- David Runciman, *The Confidence Trap: A History of Democracy in Crisis from World War I to the Present*, Introduction (on Blackboard).

Wednesday, January 28, 2026

- Tocqueville, "The Emancipation of Slaves," *Writings on Empire and Slavery. Alexis De Tocqueville*, edited/translated by Jennifer Pitts (Johns Hopkins, 2001), 199-226. (on Blackboard)
- Cheryl Welch, "Tocqueville on Democracy after Abolition: Slaves, Souls, Subjects, Citizens," *The Tocqueville Review* 27:2 (2006), 227-254. (on Blackboard)

Monday, February 2, 2026

- Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol I, Part I: "Introduction"

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

- *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Part I, Chapters 1-3

Monday, February 9, 2026

- *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Part I, Chapters 4-5

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

- *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 7

Monday, February 16, 2026

- *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 8 -9

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

- *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Part II, Chapter 10

Monday, February 23, 2026

- *Democracy in America* Volume II, Part I, Foreword, Chapters 1-2.

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

- *Democracy in America* Volume II, Part I, Chapters 5, 7-8

Monday, March 2, 2026

- *Democracy in America* Volume II, Part I, Chapters 9-11

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

- *Democracy in America* Volume II, Part I, Chapters 16-21

Monday, March 16, 2026

- *Democracy in America* Volume II, Part II, Chapters 1-16, 20

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

- *Democracy in America* Volume II, Part III, Chapters 1, 4-5.

Monday, March 23, 2026

- *Democracy in America* Volume II, Part III, Chapters 8-14, 17, 19, 21; Part IV, Chapters 6-7

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction*, Note to Reader, Chapter 1
- Stanford Encyclopedia on Du Bois, Sections 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dubois/#ScieHumaActiSociRefo>

Monday, March 30, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapters 2-3

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapter 4

Monday, April 6, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapters 4-7

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapter 8

Monday, April 13, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapters 9-10

Wednesday, April 15, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapter 11

Monday, April 20, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapters 12-13

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapter 14

Monday, April 27, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Chapters 15-16

Wednesday, April 29, 2026

- *Black Reconstruction* Black Reconstruction, Chapter 17