



VISITING
SCHOLAR
PROGRAM

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Public Lecture Offerings

The Illegitimate Opposition?

What is the line between legitimate opponents and enemies? What do we need to believe about our political opponents in order to make democracy work? What do we need to believe about ourselves? This talk touches on American history, especially the Election of 1800, as well as current events, especially the Election of 2020.

What the Constitution Whispers in Our Ears

The U.S. Constitution makes self-rule possible . . . but difficult. The people rule, but only when the people are constituted the way the Constitution insists: as a large, diverse, enduring, and geographically dispersed majority. The greatest leaders have made the Constitution work for the people: Jefferson and Jackson, Lincoln and FDR. But no one has succeeded at this since the decay of the New Deal coalition in the 1960s and 70s. Can we make the Constitution work? Can the People rule?

Polarization: How To Save Ourselves

Polarization can be ideological, political, and psychological – or worst, all three at once. What kind of polarization besets American politics? Can we save ourselves, as individuals and as a country?

Conspiracy and Democracy

Almost every news story now gives rise to a conspiracy theory: we are so enveloped in a whiteout blizzard of conspiratorial concoctions, many feel bewildered and disoriented. How did contemporary conspiracism get going? And what does it mean for democracy?

Classroom Discussion Topics

1. **Work and the Heart of American Democracy:** John Locke's republican vision assigns a particular kind of moral meaning to the working life. The Lockean citizen, and perhaps the modern citizen, is meant to be apolitical – busy not with politics, but with working, earning, saving, and consuming. Can the working life give democracy what it needs? Does work support democratic equality or undercut it? And can the life of work make for a meaningful life for modern citizens?
2. **The Strongman Versus the Party:** Modern democracy needs parties, yet no one likes them. Especially not the Strongman—the demagogue, the popular leader who promises to cut through institutional inertia and to disempower elites, for the sake of empowering the people. When parties fail to empower we the people, the Strongman steps in and says, in the words of political scientist Nadia Urbinati, “Me, the People!” Can parties work, or are they obsolete? And if parties cannot work, can democracy work?
3. **Ungovernability and Ungoverning:** To build low-income housing, to create fast and efficient rail connections to major airports from city centers, to spur the rebirth of a domestic semiconductor industry, the government needs to be able to get things done. But progressives as well as conservatives find themselves frustrated with the web of regulations and requirements that undermine state capacity and make it impossible to govern. This gives rise to a desire to tear it down – to destroy the gummed up administrative state. Ungovernability gives rise to ungoverning, both of which weaken the government's ability to do anything. Can the institutions of American democracy get things done? This class touches on a range of thinkers and do-ers, from Alexander Hamilton to Robert Moses.