Introduction

“Earlier today, we heard the beginning of the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States: We, the people.” It’s a very eloquent beginning. But when that document was completed on the seventeenth of September in 1787, I was not included in that “we, the People.” I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton just left me out by mistake. But through the process of amendment, interpretation, and court decision, I have finally been included in "We, the people."

- Barbara Jordan, the first African-American congresswoman elected from a southern state speaking at impeachment hearings for President Richard Nixon in July 1974.

How well are the United States, Colorado and Denver doing in making our “eloquent beginning,” “We, the People,” an inclusive reality? How are we addressing the interrelated issues of social justice such as inequality and environmental degradation? This course explores various modes of democratic participation—electoral politics, community activism, and lifestyle changes—in advancing social justice.

Overview

To fulfill its promise, democracy must meet challenges of equity, inclusion and accountability. How well are the United States, Colorado and Denver doing in addressing social justice issues such as inequality, discrimination and environmental degradation? How can we as citizens in a democracy contribute to advancing social justice and environmental sustainability? In the early 21st century we see a hopeful resurgence of community activism and an increase in conventional political participation as well as the persistence of urgent social problems that both modes of participation seek to address. While some people are engaged in political campaigns, others practice a new type of democratic citizenship, problem solving and building power at the grassroots. Some people are also trying to incorporate principles of social justice, democracy and sustainability into their daily lives. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these three approaches to achieving social justice? In what ways do they reinforce each other and in what ways do they undermine each other?

Through critical reflection on the reading, lectures, guest speaker presentations, films and class discussion, this course explores the intersections between democratic citizenship and social justice through the practices of electoral politics, community action, and personal lifestyle changes. This course
addresses the question: What individual and collective actions are most effective in making our communities into places in which each person can thrive?

This course is also designed to introduce students through reading to the study of community problems and strategies of change through reading and discussion of interdisciplinary social science literature focusing on such topics as economic inequality, environmental degradation and discrimination based on race, gender and sexual orientation. Students will have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, understanding and motivation for active and effective citizenship

**Student Learning Objectives**

1. To examine several conceptions of social justice and apply them to issues of inequality and environmental degradation.
2. To explore theoretical and practical approaches to democratic citizenship and community building.
3. To develop effective skills for active citizenship, including oral and written communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking and diversity awareness.
4. To formulate, examine and articulate one’s own commitment to democratic citizenship through electoral politics, community activism and ways in which one incorporates principles of social justice into daily life.

**Course Requirements**

1. Weekly journal in which you try to make sense of the week’s reading and class discussion in terms of your own personal experience. The journal must contain a reflective analysis component. One entry per week. Collected twice. 30%
2. Final Paper: Select one of the issues discussed in class and describe your plans for advancing social justice through one or more of the modes of democratic participation. Apply the mode(s) of democratic participation to the issue chosen and develop a cogent argument to defend your perspective. 6-8 pages. 30%
3. Short Issues Paper due at the end of the 7th week. Choose one of the issues discussed in weeks 7-9 and present a strategy to address this issue. The paper must include critical analysis/evaluation. 3-5 pages. 20%
4. Class Participation and Attendance. 20%

**Grading**

Written assignments are graded on the basis of the quality of written communication and the demonstration of critical thinking skills (information, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, use of research tools, and defense of a point of view).
**Topic Outline**

**Section 1: Visions of Social Justice and Democracy**  Weeks 1-3  
Reading:  
Frances Moore Lappe 2007 *Getting a Grip*

**Section II: Issues of Democracy and Social Justice in American Society**  
Reading:  
Global Oneness Project [http://www.linktv.org/programs/globaloneness](http://www.linktv.org/programs/globaloneness)

Week 4: Economic Inequality  
Week 5: Discrimination: Race  
Week 6: Discrimination: Gender and Sexual Orientation  
Week 7: Environmental Depletion and Degradation

**Section IV: Participatory Strategies to Advance Social Justice**  
Reading:  
Harry Boyte 2005 *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life*  
Craig Rimmerman 1997 *The New Citizenship: Unconventional Politics, Activism and Service*

Week 8 and 9: Electoral Politics—Candidates and Political Parties; Issue-based Activism  
Week 10 and 11: Community Activism  
Week 12: Promoting Democracy and Social Justice in Daily Life Practices

**Section V: Assessment and Reflection**  
Reading:  
Selections from the books listed above

Week 13: Achievements and Limitations of the Three Modes of Participation.  
How do the three modes of participation reinforce and/or undermine each other?  

Week 14: Civic Commitments. Students reflecting on what they are personally committed to and how they intend to act in the world to achieve it, going out of this class.