



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2008 Volume III: Democracy in Theory and Practice

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## **Is America a Successful Democracy: A Critical Inquiry**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.03.08, published September 2008

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This unit is intended to introduce students to the concept of American democracy and the United States Constitution. The original audience for the unit is high school aged United States History students. Students at this level have previously studied United States History. The hope is that this unit will approach the idea of democracy from a few unique perspectives; first looking at what defines "democracy" and "successful democracies", second exploring the intentions of governments in general, third comparing possible democratic styles that America didn't adopt, and fourth rating the successfulness of our American democracy. In so doing, students will be given the opportunity to reflect upon the democracy in which they live. The key question posed is "are we a successful democracy?" The unit makes a comprehensive study of the question by recreating the conventional context in which our democratic system is studied, making it a global comparative study that addresses both past and present perspectives. In this way teachers may teach democracy outside of the bubble of the American past and appeal to the desires of students to create a relevant and present-focused discussion on topics previously considered as archaic and extraneous.

(Developed for U.S. History, grade 11; recommended for U.S. History and U.S. and Comparative Government, grades 10-12)

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