



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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

Introduction

by Ian Shapiro, Sterling Professor of Political Science and Henry R. Luce Director of the MacMillan Center

The twelve units comprising this volume were all completed during 2008. They range from concerns with electoral politics in the U.S. (partly prompted by this being an election year), to constitutional politics and the founding, to the impact of the media (including the internet) on US democracy, to democratic politics as viewed through and influenced by literature, to the enfranchisement of marginalized groups, and specific policy issues such as the distribution of income and wealth and terrorism and civil liberties. Most of the units are aimed at high school students in courses in history and social studies, but two are designed for literature courses, and one is designed for fourth graders.

Units by **Adam Kubey**, **Lisa Lee**, and **Ralph Russo** are primarily concerned with American electoral politics. In addition to primaries, conventions, and the general election, Kubey explores debates about electoral reform and different electoral systems. Lee focuses centrally on political parties and the Presidency in light of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Russo uses the lens of two knife-edge elections two centuries apart (1800 and 2000) to illuminate such institutions as the Electoral College and the ways in which the system responds to political crises.

Units by **Jesse Senechal**, **Art Concordia**, and **Elouise White-Beck** look at democracy through literature and political theory. Senechal explores early twentieth century African-American literature to illuminate the tensions between the ideals spelled out in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, on the one hand, and the realities of racial injustice on the other. Concordia uses a variety of historical sources to explore these same tensions, with a focus on excluded minorities and mechanisms for their empowerment. White Beck deploys an intensive study of Bryce Courtney's novel set in mid-twentieth century South Africa, *The Power of One*, to illuminate the tensions among democratic and other values, and the ways in which leadership operates in democratic settings.

Three units attend to the nature and adequacy of American political institutions from the time of their design down through the present. **Sarah Pooner** focuses on a systematic comparison between the U.S. and the Roman Empire, with an eye to whether there are lessons from the decline and fall of Rome for the contemporary U.S. **Megan McGowan** and **Valerie Schwarz** focus on the mechanics and fairness of the system of representation created at the Constitutional Convention. Schwarz's unit spans the period between the Revolutionary War and the adoption of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and deploys simulation activities to get students to grapple with the problems the founders were trying to solve. McGowan's unit is intended to get students to evaluate U.S. constitutional arrangements in the light of evidence from other democracies concerning federalism, the separation of powers, an independent judiciary, and different electoral systems—illuminating the pluses and minuses of different institutional arrangements.

Units by **Samuel Reed**, **Christine Shaub**, and **Meredith Tilp** deal with particular policy issues confronting U.S. democracy. Reed's concern is with the internet, focused on getting students to understand how the proliferation of new media outlets, networking sites, search engines, and electronic media shapes democratic practices. Attention is also paid to the ways in which these new media can be abused or operate as instruments of responsible democratic empowerment. Shaub deals with the challenge to U.S. democracy posed by the War on Terror since 9/11, with a particular focus on court cases and how the pursuit and prosecution of terrorist suspects affects civil liberties. Tilp's concern is with the economic inequalities that persist despite the democratic institutions that many, since Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in the early nineteenth century, have thought would erode inequality. Tilp's focus is on New Mexico, and features a contrast between the ways in which distributive politics are made in the New Mexico legislature and by the tribal system deployed by the Pueblo of Pojoaque.

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