Even though there is widespread agreement, these days, that democracy is an ideal ultimate goal of political justice, there are deep disagreements about the nature of this ideal and its current implications. There are also widespread anxieties in the United States about the country's future, often connected with concerns about the state of American democracy. The seminar will discuss both of these vital, interacting topics. The first topic, democratic values, will mostly be investigated through discussions of leading controversies in political philosophy concerning when and why political institutions should be democratic, what form political democracy should take, and what the case for political democracy implies for economic, interpersonal and international relations. The second topic, America's prospects, will be discussed in six sessions of the seminar led by eminent scholars who will come to Cornell as part of the Ethics and Public Life series, "After the American Century: Fears and Hopes for America’s Future." They are Thomas Mann (Brookings Institution), Marilyn Young (History, NYU), Richard Freeman (Economics, Harvard), Daniel Rodgers (History, Princeton), Lisa Lynch (Economics, Brandeis), and Madawi al-Rasheed (Middle East Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science). There is a detailed schedule of topics, readings, and visitor-led sessions at the end of this syllabus.

Readings:
All assigned readings and some optional ones as well will be either posted in the Contents section of the course Blackboard site or sent by e-mail in a message conveying the readings and specific topic that each visitor will supply.

Course Requirements:
1. Discussion Board contributions: Every week, I will ask two or three people to take on the task of each contributing two or three questions or brief comments about next week’s readings to the Discussion Board on the course website. Of course, everyone is welcome to contribute. The contributions must be posted by 8:00 PM on Monday, so that everyone has a chance to read them.
2. Attendance and participation: Everyone is expected to take part in discussions at each meeting of the seminar on the basis of knowledge of the readings and the Discussion Board contributions. I may ask for volunteers to make brief presentations on a topic or to present brief comments on a visitor’s presentation.
3. **Short paper**: A short paper, of from six to eight pages double spaced, will be due at class on October 22. I will hand out a list of topics, concerned with debates about the assessment of forms of government, the value of democratic government, the nature of political equality and the moral status of equal political influence discussed in the course so far, on October 1. If you would like to work on a topic not on the list, let’s talk about it. But this is not meant as a major project, just as a help in getting a sound grasp of these fundamental controversies and of the kinds of arguments and explanations called for in the term paper.

4. **Term paper**: A term paper, 12-15 pages long, will be due December 13. I will distribute a list of possible term paper topics on November 12. People are welcome to write a paper on any topic connected with our readings or with visitors’ presentations concerning American democracy. But please consult with me about manageability and relevant readings if you are thinking of writing on a topic far removed from the list.

The weight of factors contributing to the final grade will be, approximately: term paper 60%; participation (including Discussion Board postings), 20%; short paper, 20%.

**Course schedule:**
In this schedule, the brief descriptions of visitor-led sessions only indicate the general topic that I expect to be addressed. By the week before each visitor-led session, I will send out a description of the specific topic and assigned readings, which each visitor will provide. The non-visitor-led sessions, on democratic values, have an over-all progression in which later classes will address questions and make use of insights arising in earlier ones. The visitor-led sessions will often be directly relevant to these themes and will otherwise be indirectly relevant, by addressing problems that challenge the capabilities of present-day American democracy.

September 3: Introduction: Problems of Democracy. A survey of pressing current questions about democracy and their role in the course. How democratic is governance in the United States today? To what extent are current limitations in American democracy moral flaws? Is political democracy the best basis for governance in all countries? a good model for just economic relationships? for respectful interpersonal attitudes? **Readings**: none due for this class, but in the course of September, if not by this class, please read these largely empirical discussions, by Larry Bartels, of aspects of American politics that some find very troubling: "The Irrational Electorate" and “Economic Inequality and Political Representation” (chapter 9 of *Unequal Democracy*).

September 10: Thomas Mann (Brookings Institution) on the causes, nature and future of polarization in American politics

September 17: Debating Democracy. Edmund Burke's classic anti-democratic arguments (1791) in response to the French Revolution, John Stuart Mill's classic defense of representative government (1861), and Robert Dahl's brief statement of the contemporary case for democracy offer competing views of virtues and defects in governance that play a central role in current debates about political processes and institutions. **Readings**: Burke, “Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs” (excerpt); Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, chapter 3 and part of chapter 8; Dahl, *On Democracy*, chapter 5.
September 24: Marilyn Young (History, NYU) on the exercise of American power abroad and the future of the American way of war


October 8: Richard Freeman (Economics, Harvard) on American labor in the new global economy

[No class October 15 – Fall Break]

October 22: Daniel Rodgers (History, Princeton) on the recent history and prospects for change of moral presuppositions of American politics


November 5: Lisa Lynch (Economics, Brandeis) on economic security and the search for good jobs


November 19: Madawi al-Rasheed (Middle East Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science) on American power and democratic aspirations in the Middle East


December 3: Democracy and National Self-Determination. Does the absence of democratic rights make a government subject to humanitarian intervention, or is such intrusion limited by values of self-determination that underlie democracy? Is the transnational influence of great powers such as the United States undemocratic? Does this matter, for U.S. responsibilities? Readings: Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars (excerpt); Richard Miller, Globalizing Justice (excerpt).