

OPINION ESSAY PAPER or VIDEO ASSIGNMENT (120 Points Total)

TOPIC:

Democracy in the United States and the World

DUE DATES:

All Final Drafts Due Friday, June 7th (120 Points) - (Submit in the Submission link on Canvas.)

ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS:

You have the following two assignment options to choose from (*Only choose one option*):

OPTION #1

Listen to the podcast of NPR's *Fresh Air* show interviewing the two authors of *How Democracies Die*. I have embedded the interview in Canvas for easier access. However, you can also find the interview at <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=579670528>

After you have listened to the interview, type an essay answering the following prompts related to the radio interview:

- a. Summarize the main contention of the authors as it relates to how democracies die. Be sure to describe their theoretical model in detail.
- b. Summarize the historical examples that have fit their theoretical model.
- c. Describe how the United States fits, or does not fit, their model.
- d. Overall, do you agree with their conclusions? (Try not to use "first person".)
 - If you agree entirely, or in part, explain why.
 - If you disagree entirely, or in part, explain why.
- e. Regardless of your position, project the political, social and cultural future of the United States in a post-Trump America. How will government institutions function? How will the Presidency be transformed, if at all? Will democracy thrive? Has it ever in the U.S.? Essentially, you will conclude this paper by analyzing the institutions and society of the United States to determine its overall democratic health.

Presentation and Approach:

DO NOT list answers in your essay by prompt "a" then prompt "b" etc... Rather, I want you to incorporate your answers to the prompts into a fluid, seamless essay that uses topic sentences and paragraphs to transition from sub-topic to sub-topic.

This writing assignment combines different types of essay focus. It is in part a critique, almost a review, of the information from the podcast (i.e., the authors' theory from their book). It is also an opinion piece on your part. Most opinion pieces come in the form of OpEds (Opinion-Editorials) that are published daily in newspapers. I have provided you some OpEd examples in the Canvas module. Opinion pieces are meant to be compact and powerful. There should not be a wasted word. They are good exercises that train writers to be disciplined in how they construct sentences, paragraphs and thoughts. That is my intent and motive for assigning this essay for the semester; to have you develop your writing in a meaningful way. (Actually, published OpEds are much shorter than what I am assigning to you.)

Also, in this particular instance, I am forcing you to write about a particular topic. In most other cases, writers submit opinion pieces for publication based on the subject matter they are interested in writing about. However, for the purposes of this class, I want you to write about *democracy*, as analyzed by the authors being interviewed. It is essentially an opinion piece that evaluates their work and theory.

This is an analytical opinion/critique essay. Thus, you do not need a works cited page/bibliography, unless you use outside sources. If you do use outside sources, you will then need to provide a citation page. This is not a research paper, per se, but if you do not have an “informed” opinion, then your academic Op/Ed has little merit and value. Thus, background research is a case by case basis. ***That said, if your paper does not make clear to me that you listened to and understood the entirety of the podcast information you will not receive credit for your submission.***

Your opinion essay ***shall not*** be more than 1500 words. 1500 words equate to three pages single spaced or 6 pages double-spaced, approximately. However, you must have ***at least*** 1,200 words minimum. **The papers are to be single-spaced.** I require one-inch margins, page numbers, a title and your name at the top of the page. You must have an identifiable thesis statement within the essay.

Submission:

Papers will be turned in online via the submission window in Canvas. The instructor reserves the right to use “Turnitin” for paper submissions. Turnitin checks submissions for content legitimacy.

OPTION #2

For Option #2 you must also listen to the PodCast interview of the authors of *How Democracies Die*. Create a video/digital interview of one, two, or more individuals answering your questions related to issues raised in the podcast, as well as the overall current political climate in the United States. Your interviewees (subjects) may be friends, family etc... You should serve as the interviewer with a series of planned, well thought out questions related to the democratic structure of the United States. The goal of the interview can be up to you. *[To see if the individual’s objective political outlook aligns with their subjective political posture. To see if the two (or more) individuals have more in common (or not) than they thought. To determine how democratic they are as individuals. To determine if they see themselves clearly with their own adopted belief systems, etc...]*

Again, you shall determine the goal and questions for the interview. But, you must have a goal, strategy, and questions developed before you proceed with the interview. AND, importantly, you must have properly conveyed the specific issues and particular aspects of the authors’ theory to your interviewees. They cannot merely be asked what they think of President Trump, the political divide in the United States etc.. without forcing them to answer some questions specifically related to the authors’ theory. Asking your interviewees these related questions does no good unless you first explain to them what you have learned via the podcast and your research. You can explain the concepts to them either on camera, or off. But, either way, they must reflect on the theoretical issues. Beyond that, you are allowed and encouraged to ask your own related and unique questions regarding the current political climate in the United States. Feel free to confer with me on your approach if you want guidance.

The interview must be a minimum of 15 minutes long, but can exceed that. The purpose of this exercise is to ask questions of individuals who are members of our political culture and system and try to glean some conclusion from them as a case study. Videos will either be uploaded in Canvas, or they

will be embedded from YouTube with a password you create so that only the student and the instructor can view the video. (Or you can make it public with their permission. That is up to you.) Recording the interview can be conducted simply by using a cell phone. But, I have had students turn in higher-level production pieces. That is your choice. I prefer embedded or linked videos so that I do not have to upload the files to my computer. And, that way, only you have access to the video file itself. However, if uploading a file is your preferred, or only way of submitting the assignment, I understand.

Grading:

Students will be graded on the content of the video presentation and the organized structure, questions, focus and strategy of the interview itself. Also, every video should include a brief introduction of the interviewer and a brief explanation of the video's purpose. Although this is not a media class, a small percentage of the grade will be assigned for production value. This would equate to ensuring proper formal presentation if it were a written paper.