*Preparation for the November 9 Topical Seminar at the Lewes Library at 3 pm*

*Topic – The Great Experiment: Can the United States govern itself as a Diverse Democracy?*

Instructions

To prepare for the seminar, read the following materials and watch one or more of the suggested videos. After considering what you’ve read and watched, write a response of between 200 and 400 words. Some writing prompts found at the end. It is strongly suggested that we put our thoughts into words BEFORE November 8, the date of the 2022 General Election

Email your written response to lewesseminar@gmail.com no later than Monday, November 7. Participants are asked to read these responses prior to the seminar meeting on November 9.

Introduction

Continuing in the thread of the core ideas and questions covered in our two previous Seminars (Conservatism in September and Constitutional interpretation in October), November’s topic provides the opportunity to evaluate our nation’s history and continuing attempt to sustain a governmental structure that both engages and reflects the will of the governed.

One observation is that the second half of the 20th century saw the rise of liberal democracy with its “transformative” mission, while the first quarter of the 21st century has seen the growth of populism and rise of strong rulers gaining power by offering a more “restorative” mission. These trends tend to leave one either “optimistic” or “pessimistic” about the future of the practice of democracy in the nation has been called “The Great Experiment”

***The establishment of our new Government seemed to be the last great experiment, for promoting human happiness, by reasonable compact, in civil Society.*** – George Washington, January 9, 1790

See <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-04-02-0363>

Materials to be Read and/or Watched:

The inspiration for this query is the 2022 publication of [*The Great Experiment: Why Diverse Democracies Fall Apart and How They Can Endure*](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/665275/the-great-experiment-by-yascha-mounk/)by Yascha Mounk.

Re: this author and this book, please choose from:

1. A review of this book which appeared in the Washington Post is included as a resource (see Attached)
2. Mounk’s article from May 2022 Atlantic Monthly is also useful as a means of sorting out reasons for pessimism and optimism- also included (See Attached)
3. A CSPAN interview with the author – (52 minutes) [[The Great Experiment - Why Diverse Democracies Fall Apart and How They Can Endure] | C-SPAN.org](https://www.c-span.org/video/?519422-1/the-great-experiment-diverse-democracies-fall-endure)
4. Numerous YouTube videos – Yascha Mounk with Andrew Yang
5. [www.yaschamounk.com](http://www.yaschamounk.com) -- Or Mounk’s 2018 Book – *The People vs. Democracy* [*https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674976825*](https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674976825) –
6. A segment from Younk’s book using the metaphor of the public park is included. (See Attached)
7. A segment of Younk’s book using the metaphor of neighborhood is included. (See Attached)

For a wider perspective

1. Writings by Anne Applebaum – anneapplebaum.com
2. Writings by Lee Drutman -- [Breaking the Two Party Doom Loop](https://academic.oup.com/book/36918)

Writing Prompts

As you consider what to write as a reaction to the above, you may wish to consider one or more of the following:

* Do diverse democracies provide sufficient benefit to their citizens to justify efforts to support their survival?
* Is it possible to keep humanity’s instincts towards groupishness in check? If so, how? If not, why not?
* Is it possible to balance the oppressive powers of the state with the restrictive norms of given cultures? If so how? If not, why not?
* For the pessimists: If you could address one challenge to survival or success that you’ve identified, what might it be?
* For the optimists: What is one “blind spot” that needs further attention?

Submitted by Pat Newcomb