POSSIBLE SEMINAR TOPICS FOR 2025-26

**Community and Technocracy**

The term community is ubiquitous in our public discourse: community organizing; the Black community; the LGBT community; community development; the business community; the Evangelical community; the academic community;etc.It might be interesting to take a deep dive into how & why this term is deployed so widely. A good starting point might be Ferdinand Tönnies’ distinction between *gemeinschaft* (community) versus *gesellschaft* (society), that is social relations based on personal relations, traditions, and deeply shared values versus mass society organized around formal, impersonal, contractual relations. Our contemporary widespread usage of “community” suggests a recognition something positive and essential to human relations, perhaps solidarity and connectedness, that is diminished by modernity.

Prompt questions to explore might be:

1. Is “community” possible in contemporary technocratic society?
2. Does social media promote community?
3. Does community depend on proximity and personal interaction?

**Rewritten Masterpieces**

Recently there have been some notable rewrites of masterpieces: Percival Everett’s retelling of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, *James*, David West Read (*Schitt’s Creek*) and Max Martin’s reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet*, *& Juliet*; and Sandra Norman’s reworking of George Orwell’s *1984*, *Julia*. What all these efforts have in common is a post-modern critique of the masterpieces, a de-centering and deconstruction of main characters – Huck Finn, Romeo, and Winston Smith are given a back seat to Jim, Juliet, and Julia. We could explore what is gained and what is lost in these efforts. Are these “legitimate” literary exercises or simply transgressive escapades.

These three examples vary a lot in their level of nuance and artistry, but they all suggest some interesting questions:

1. Are these “legitimate” literary exercises or simply transgressive escapades.
2. What is a masterpiece and how much reverence should we accord such works?

**Fascism**

The term *fascism* is tossed around quite a bit these days. Often it is used as a synonym for *authoritarianism* and can deployed by both the left and the right as an epithet rather than an empirical description. It might be interesting to take explore it as a political economic system. Some intellectual historians trace its origins to the 1891 encyclical, *Rarum Novarum* issued by Pope Leo XIII to address the conflict between labor and capital. The nascent Fascist Party in Italy championed women’s suffrage and 8-hour workdays. Moreover, ideologically it resonated *syndicalism* and *corporatism* of the early 20th Century. Obviously, it took a toxic turn as it adopted increasingly ultra-nationalist and ethno-centric values.

Possible Prompt questions:

1. How can we define fascism?
2. What is the basis of its appeal?
3. How can we distinguish fascism from other forms of authoritarian rule?
4. What is the relationship between fascism and capitalism?

**Comedy**

It might be interesting to explore comedy as a genre. What makes something funny? What is the relationship between comedy and society. Is there something that connects comedy over time…what might Aristophanes (*The Frogs*), Petronius (*Satyricon*), and Moliere (*Tartuffe*) have in common with Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, George Carlin? Might be fun to view and discuss some stand-up as well as scenes from plays or movies?

**Cryptocurrency Seminar Proposal**

This seminar will explore the rapidly evolving world of cryptocurrency, beginning with foundational concepts such as blockchain technology, digital wallets, mining processes, and the mechanics of decentralized finance. We will explore practical understanding of major cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum, learn about trading platforms and security protocols, and examine the technical infrastructure that enables peer-to-peer digital transactions. We will address cryptocurrency's broader societal implications, including its potential to revolutionize traditional banking systems, enable financial inclusion for unbanked populations, and reshape global economic structures. We will critically examine both the opportunities and risks, discussing regulatory challenges, environmental concerns related to energy-intensive mining, market volatility, and the role of cryptocurrency in illicit activities.

**Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) Seminar Proposal**

This seminar will examine the phenomenon of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP), formerly known as UFOs. We will explore the historical evolution of UAP reporting from early aviation mysteries to modern military encounters and recent declassified reports from agencies like the Pentagon's All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO). We will cover scientific methodologies for investigating aerial anomalies, including radar analysis, photographic evidence evaluation, and atmospheric physics principles that could explain unconventional flight characteristics. Beyond the technical aspects, the seminar will examine the broader implications of UAP phenomena for national security and scientific inquiry, while addressing the sociological impact of UAP disclosure on public perception, media representation, and cultural narratives about extraterrestrial life.

**The pursuit of happiness**

250 years ago, the Declaration  of Independence declared the unalienable rights of life , liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Some argue that this phase is a variation of John Locke’s statement on life, liberty and property. What were the Founders expressing by the change in wording? What is *the pursuit of happiness*? Should foundational documents be subject to originalist interpretation to understand the intent of the Founders? The 21st century person may not differentiate greatly between property and happiness. Have our values changed in 250 years so that we are missing a distinction in meaning. Should a historical document be cherished as a relic or revered as a value statement for the present day?

**The American Identity: What Does It Mean to be an American?**

The current federal mass deportation efforts of undocumented immigrants and attacks on birthright citizenship raise profound questions about what it means to be an American and the basis of citizenship in addition to constitutional questions. For centuries, the United States has been defined by a shared set of ideals often called the "American creed"—liberty, individualism, equality, and self-government. This identity was seen as a unifying force in a nation of immigrants, a "melting pot" of cultures coalescing around a common political philosophy. Yet, today, that consensus seems fractured. From debates over immigration and national narratives to deepening political polarization, we are forced to ask what, if anything, holds us together. Is being "American" primarily about allegiance to a set of ideas, or is it about sharing a common culture and history? And in a nation this diverse and divided, can we—or should we—still strive for a single national identity?

**Is Globalization Dead?**

The era from the 1990s through the 2010s was defined by globalization—the unprecedented flow of goods, capital, and ideas across borders. This integration promised and arguably delivered greater efficiency and shared prosperity, but it also brought significant disruption, rising inequality, and perhaps a sense of lost national control. Recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain crises, and geopolitical conflicts have exposed the fragility of this interconnected system. Some experts now speak of "slowbalization" or even a complete reversal. Are we witnessing the end of the globalized world as we know it, or is it simply transforming into something new, perhaps more regional and more contentious? What are the biggest risks we face if the bridges of globalization are dismantled? What will the new global order look like?

**The Great Political Realignment**

The familiar labels of "Democrat" and "Republican" no longer seem to capture the reality of American politics. We are living through a major political realignment, where traditional party coalitions are fracturing and re-forming in unexpected ways. Issues of class, education, and geography are scrambling old loyalties, creating a landscape that is less about left-versus-right and more about complex, shifting cultural and economic tribes. What are the primary forces driving this realignment—is it economics, cultural grievances, or demographic change? More importantly, how would you describe the new coalitions that are emerging, and what do they mean for the future of American governance?

**The Books That Built You**

Some books we read for entertainment, and others we read for information. But a rare few do something more: they fundamentally alter our perception of ourselves, of the world, and our place in it. These are the books that find us at the right time, providing either a mirror that helps us understand ourselves or a window that opens up new possibilities. They become a part of our intellectual and emotional architecture. Beyond simply naming a favorite novel or a useful non-fiction book, what single book has had the most profound and lasting impact on the person you are today? What specific idea or feeling did it instill in you that continues to guide you today?

**The Power of an Idea**

History is often told as a story of great leaders, decisive battles, and technological breakthroughs. But beneath it all is the silent, immense power of ideas. Concepts like liberty, monotheism, the scientific method, or justice have arguably done more to shape human civilization than any single event or individual. Other transformative ideas include democracy, human rights, capitalism, nonviolence, individualism, and even nationalism—each radically altering how societies organize themselves, what they value, and how they imagine the future. These ideas shape our laws, build our institutions, and define our sense of what is possible. If you had to identify one single idea as the most influential in all of history—for good or for ill—what would it be, and how would you defend its paramount importance in shaping the world we inhabit today?

Feudalism -

We all think we know what it is, but how does feudalism evolve within human groups? This history books of Western Civilization generally associate Feudal structures with the Dark Ages or Middle Ages. Are we on the brink of a new age of Feudal structures? Cullen Murphy from The Atlantic claims that it took several hundred years from the fall of the Roman Empire until government was again conceived as operating for the common good in a “civil Body Politck”.

So - is Feudalism and its hierarchies more “human” than the Enlightenment’s “self-governance”?

Is the American “polity” heading towards Feudalism? - Can the “body Politick” pull us back from a return to the Middle Ages? <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/07/government-privatization-feudalism/682888/>

Monopoly and Geopolitics

It’s time to revisit old paradigms - anti-monopoly / re-industrialization. Can the American people (as matters of domestic and foreign policy)— figure out the right mix of populism and economic patriotism in a society characterized by disgust with establishment politics but also broadly fearful of new forms of economic disruption and dislocation

<https://www.liberalpatriot.com/p/monopoly-power-and-geopolitics?utm_source=%2Fsearch%2Fliberal%2520patriot&utm_medium=reader2>