

Course title:

Politics Beyond Words: Silence, Babble, and Symbolism in Democratic Society

Professor:

Benjamin R. Teitelbaum

Duration:

30 Hours

Abstract:

Democracy depends upon faithful public communication. Theorists of democratic process often assume that votes faithfully represent citizens' will, that open discussion allows society to better understand what is righteous and true, that, indeed, political participation in the most basic sense is synonymous with "using your voice." What happens, then, when actors in democratic society speak evasively, disingenuously, or not at all? This course investigates the role of silence and nonsense talk in democracies. Drawing from an interdisciplinary body of sources spanning both humanities and social sciences, it explores the following topics: silence as resource and obstacle among early democratic theorists; melancholy and fears of social decline; strategic silence and dissidence; reactionary anti-liberalism and the rejection of discourse; romanticism and the transcendence of language; and media disinformation. Students in this course will gain new tools, not only to consider undertheorized subjects in political theory, but also a lens to analyze cotemporary political and cultural conflict.

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