Norm Busting: Breaking the Unwritten Traditions of Our Democracy from Adams to Trump
Olli Boulder, Fall Term 2019, Mondays 9:30 – 11:30 AM
September 16, 2019 - November 4, 2019
No Books need to be purchased; selected readings will be in Portfolio
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Week 1 - September 16  
Our Democracy in Crisis; But Are We a Democracy?
Political scientists and historians have recently raised concerns about the health of our democracy. Some primarily blame the Republican Party for trampling on our unwritten traditions and rules over the past 25 years. Others fault the founding fathers for intentionally designing a constitution which limited the impact of citizens on governmental decisions. Some scholars go so far as to deny that we are a democracy.

Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:
“How Democracies Die” Levitsky and Ziblatt
“Can Democracy Work” James Miller
“Democracy May Not Exist, But We’ll Miss it When it’s Gone” Astra Taylor
“Democracy vs. the People” Yascha Mounk

Week 2 - September 23  
What Are the Unwritten Norms of Our Democracy? Which Ones Are Vitally Important and Why?
All norms are not created equally. We will survey those norms considered most critical and how political scientists determine which they are.

Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:
“The Broken Branch” Ornstein and Mann
“It’s Even Worse Than It Looks” Ornstein and Mann
“One Nation After Trump” Dionne, Ornstein and Mann
“How Democracies Die” Levitsky and Ziblatt

Week 3 - September 30  Political Parties: Center of Political Life But Not in the Constitution
Political Parties were born almost immediately after the establishment of our republic. Until 2016 they have protected our democracy from electing extremist presidents. However, they have also been responsible for weakening our democracy.

Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:
“Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson” Gordon S. Wood
“The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress” Joanne Freeman

Week 4 - October 7  Norm Busting Presidents and Shifts in the Balance of Power During the Presidencies of Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson

Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:
“If We Can Keep It: How the Republic Collapsed and How It Might Be Saved” Michael Tomasky
“Congressional Government” Woodrow Wilson

Week 5 - October 14  Gingrich Launches an Era of Norm Busting with a Touch of Demagoguery
The year 1995 marked the start of an age of incivility and loss of forbearance in politics. It took an ugly turn during the presidential campaign in 2016.

Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:
“The Broken Branch” Ornstein and Mann
“It’s Even Worse Than It Looks” Ornstein and Mann
“One Nation After Trump” Dionne, Ornstein and Mann
Week 6 - October 21  American Populism and Notable Populists

*Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:*

“Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression,”
Alan Brinkley
“What Is Populism” Jan-Werner Muller

Week 7 - October 28  We the People: How We Have Been Complicit in the Deterioration of Governance

*Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:*

“The Road to Unfreedom” Timothy Snyder

Week 8- November 4  Can We Save Our Democracy?

*Excerpts in portfolio for discussion:*

“On Tyranny” Timothy Snyder

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**Bibliography of Books Excerpted in Portfolio:**

“Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression,”
Alan Brinkley
“One Nation After Trump,” Dionne, Ornstein and Mann
“The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress,” Joanne Freeman
“How Democracies Die,” Levitsky and Ziblatt
“Can Democracy Work?” James Miller
“Democracy vs. the People,” Yascha Mounk
“What Is Populism?” Jan-Werner Muller
“The Broken Branch,” Ornstein and Mann
“It’s Even Worse Than It Looks,” Ornstein and Mann
“On Tyranny,” Timothy Snyder
“The Road to Unfreedom,” Timothy Snyder
“Democracy May Not Exist, But We’ll Miss It When It’s Gone,” Astra Taylor
“If We Can Keep It: How the Republic Collapsed and How It Might Be Saved,”
Michael Tomasky
“Congressional Government,” Woodrow Wilson