

## Democracy Action Lab

6-Week Online Course for Grades 7-11 | Interactive Syllabus\*



**Dates:** October 19, 2020 - December 2, 2020 (6 weeks)

**Location:** Zoom online video conference

**6 Class Sessions:** Monday & Wednesday

4:00pm-5:30pm EST (grades 7-11)

\*Wednesday Workshops with an asterisk are optional\*

**Office Hours:** 30-min before & after each class and by appointment

**Course Materials:** Computer or tablet for online webinar participation; all course reading, listening, and viewing materials are free online resources

**Co-Lead Instructors:** Lisa Kapp & Greyson Mann

\*Syllabus is in development

### Course Description

The Democracy Action Lab will equip young activists with the knowledge and skills to design and execute a community action plan. A community action plan will assess a social justice issue and help the young thinker to bring their solutions to life. Together, we will explore how we can redefine democracy and imagine a world with healthier systems. Students will have the opportunity to interview and collaborate with political advocates and other change-makers. Change-makers will apply their knowledge of relevant issues to create a community plan with measurable outcomes. Potential projects include creating social media advocacy campaigns, planning interdisciplinary public performances that encourage voter turnout or civic engagement (such as an online dance performance, art exhibition, podcast or creative writing project), and/or an online event or fundraiser.

### Course Goals

1. Collaboratively define Democracy: what does it mean to you? What does it mean to us as a group? What does it look like in practice, in the U.S. and globally?
2. Gain and apply working knowledge of political organizing at the national and local level, along with effective forms of youth activism and advocacy (such as social media), voter registration strategies (including mail-in voting), the history of voter engagement and suppression.
3. Describe and reflect upon the construction of social identity informed by membership in multiple groups in society.
4. Learn to recognize injustice and discrimination at the individual and systemic level, such as gerrymandering and voter suppression, and learn strategies to educate others and to take action
5. Create a community action plan for the 2020 election based on rigorous research and personal interests
6. Digitally archive your final community action project in a format compatible with leading online college applications (e.g. the [Common App](#) and the [Coalition for College Access](#)).

### Final Portfolio Project

By the end of the course, students will have planned a community action project or event that highlights an issue they care about; projects all will have measurable impact on local or national 2020 elections. Potential projects include creating social media advocacy campaigns, an interdisciplinary public performance that encourages voter turnout or civic engagement (such as dancing, poster art, spoken-word performances etc), and/or a socially distanced event or fundraiser. All projects will be digitally archived in a format compatible with leading online high school and college applications.

## Instructional Team



**Lisa Kapp, Co-Lead Instructor | She/Her**

Lisa Kapp is a middle and high school humanities and history teacher at Saint Ann's School. She has a passion for US, World and Art History, and she's a tech enthusiast who is eager to share ideas & resources



**Greyson Mann, Visiting Instructor | He/Him**

Greyson is a fifth-generation Washingtonian and attended Wofford College, where he received a Princeton in Asia Fellowship to teach at YK Pao School in Shanghai. He helped launch the Whittle School & Studios flagship campus in Washington DC, where he taught debate and coached the Model UN team. He previously served as a presidential appointee in the Department of Education's Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, where he supported the development of a global network of political, education, and religious leaders. He also worked with Digital Promise to develop a national network of forward-thinking superintendents. He speaks Chinese and has lived in Beijing and Shanghai. He is currently



**Inayah Bashir, Assistant Instructor | She/Her, They/Them**

Inayah graduated from Wesleyan University with a B.A. in Social Studies. She is a [2020 Watson Fellow](#) and will spend next year exploring the stories of African restorative spiritual practices. Inayah is also founder of Holistic Wealth, LLC which aims to foster healthy conversations around mental, emotional, and community wellness.



**Andrew Finkelman, Apprentice Instructor | He/Him**

Andrew is an incoming senior at Wesleyan University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Hispanic Literatures and Cultures. A tennis enthusiast and member of Wesleyan's tennis team, Andrew has taught for the USTA's youth tennis and education programs in Nogales, Mexico and Brooklyn, NY. As a MeshEd intern, he is focused on curriculum research and is currently developing and launching an asynchronous civics course focused on the 2020 presidential election.



**Hamzah Jhaveri, Apprentice Instructor | He/Him, They/Them**

Hamzah is a rising junior at Yale University, where they study Anthropology and Energy Studies. Hamzah's academic interests span across disciplines but have recently included environmental and energy justice movements in the United States. They are an organizer with the Yale Endowment Justice Coalition, a student-led divestment group, and Sunrise New Haven, a youth-led climate justice movement. Beyond organizing, Hamzah serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the Yale Herald, Yale's only weekly publication, and formerly worked at the Yale Sustainable Food Program and the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

**Visiting Guest Experts and Core Course Content** \*Speakers are subject to change.

Gabe Hurlock



**Gabe Hurlock** is a 2020 graduate of Wesleyan University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy and dance. After 7 years of service overseas as an A-10 aircraft technician in the U.S. Air Force, including 10 months in Afghanistan, she returned to her hometown in Atlanta, GA. At the Art Institute of Atlanta, she earned an associate's degree in digital filmmaking and was awarded Best Editor at the 2016 Atlanta International Film Festival. As a lifelong dancer, her focus is in African traditional/spiritual dances and diasporic modalities of social justice art.

Dennis White



**Dennis White** grew up in West Virginia as the son of a Coal Miner. He dropped out of high school and worked minimum wage jobs until he joined the Army in 2005. Dennis spent 10 years in service before attending Wesleyan University. Dennis has years of volunteer activist experience and several years as paid staff at nonprofits and Political campaigns. Recently, Dennis was the national veterans constituency organizer for the Bernie Sanders campaign. Currently, he organizes for Getting Out the Vote in North Carolina, while attending graduate school for labor studies at UMass Amherst.

Ruby Dawes



**Ruby Dawes** is a junior at Barnard College, Columbia University, studying Art History and Intellectual History. Ruby is interested in restorative justice and resistance, and is currently interning with Students for Justice (Reclaim Our Vote initiative), a non-partisan campaign working towards alleviating voter suppression, which disproportionately targets voters of color. She manages 50 volunteers who postcard and phone bank potential voters.

Angela Davis



**Angela Y. Davis** is a political activist, scholar, author, and speaker. She is an advocate for the oppressed and exploited, writing on Black liberation, prison abolition, the intersections of race, gender, and class. She is a distinguished professor emerita at the University of California, Santa Cruz. [Listen](#) to an interview with Angela Davis and WBR.

Stacey Abrams



**Stacey Abrams** was the Democratic nominee for Governor of Georgia. Abrams was the first black woman to become the gubernatorial nominee for a major party in the U.S. After witnessing the mismanagement of the election, Abrams launched [Fair Fight](#), to fund and train voter protection teams. [Watch](#) her interview with *The Guardian* on voter suppression.

Bryan Stevenson



**Bryan Stevenson** is a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor and the incarcerated. He is the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, challenging racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. Bryan is the author of the bestselling book *Just Mercy*. [Watch](#) Bryan's TED Talk "We Need to Talk About Injustice."

Sarah Williams



**Sarah Williams** is co-founder and CEO of Propel Capital, which invests in entrepreneurs, innovators, and changemakers building a more equitable society. She serves on the boards of Brooklyn Community Foundation, Color of Change, and New Media Ventures. [Read](#) Sarah's *Medium* article "Together We Sound Like Change."

## Course-at-a-Glance

### Week One: Creating Our Community Contract & Defining Democracy



Student Assignment (uploaded by 5:00pm EST on Friday, October 23): Think about a time you were personally impacted (positively or negatively) by society's ideas about race, gender, or class. What would've been a fair/democratic way for your voice to be heard?

#### Session 1: Monday, October 19th

##### *Understanding Democracy & Social Justice*

##### *Spotlight Issue: Civic Engagement*

- **Introductions:** Let's get to know one another!
- **Building Our Community:**
  - What is a community contract?
  - What's our community contract?
- **Review & Collaboratively Establish Course Goals**
- **Define Key Social Justice Terms**
- **Breakout Session:** What do you appreciate about your community? How would you change your community?
- **Prepare** for our roleplay exercise for Wednesday!

#### Session 2: Wednesday, October 21

##### *Putting Your Feet in Their Shoes!*

- **Roleplay Exercise:** Explore the roles & responsibilities of community members by resolving an issue as a community!
- **Discuss** popular social justice issues
  - What do you already understand?
  - What do you want to learn?
- **Reflect** on a time you were personally impacted (positively or negatively) by society's ideas about race, gender, or class. What would've been a fair/democratic way for your voice to be heard?

### Week Two: Elections



Student Assignment (uploaded by 5:00pm EST on Friday, October 30): How do you foster environments in which individuals of diverse backgrounds, identities, and ideas can engage with each other? What issues matter the most to you? Why?

#### Session 3: Monday, October 26

##### *National & Local Elections*

##### *Spotlight Issue: Voter Suppression*

- **Share:** What issues matter to you and why? How are we currently given voice in our democracy?
- **Learn:** Elections (Local & National)
- **Watch** this mini-documentary on the Voting Rights Act, the 26th Amendment, and the ongoing history of Voter Suppression
- **Discuss** issues at the forefront of local and national politics
- **Breakout Session:** Create a voters' guide for your local and national elections with Brooklyn Creative Learning Lab Intern Andrew Finkelman

#### Session 4: Wednesday, October 28\*

##### *Community Action Plan Workshop*

- **Develop** a "work-in-progress" version of your Community Action Plan Outline
- **Understand** research methods for designing your Civic Engagement Project
- **Research** the organizations, politicians, and impacted communities that are connected to your focus issue
- **Brainstorm** your plan and how it will progress the collaborative effort toward change.
- **Presentation:** Former Lab participants share their projects and offer advice

## Week Three: Local Political Involvement & Civic Engagement



Student Assignment (uploaded by 5:00pm EST on Friday, November 06): Without the legal right to vote, how can you still voice your values and make an impact on the 2020 elections? Upload your Community Action Plan outline.

### Session 5: Monday, November 02

*Understanding Civic Engagement Spotlight Issue: Local Politics & Grassroots Organizing Guest Speakers: Dennis & Gabe Hurlock*

- **Understand** how local government operates
- **Define** civic engagement and explore the ways it intersects with electoral politics
- **Brainstorm** your change-maker powers!
- **Interactive Presentation** with labor and voting rights activist Dennis White; facilitated by Gabe Hurlock

### Session 6: Wednesday, November 04\*

*Community Action Plan Workshop*

- **Research** local opinions about your social justice issue
- **Give & Receive Feedback** for your Community Action Plan Outline
- **Work** on Community Action Plan

## Week Four: Restorative Justice



Student Assignment (uploaded by 5:00pm EST on Friday, November 13): Upload a photo of you with your Community Action Plan (a work in progress)!

### Session 7: Monday, Nov 09

*The Importance of Restorative Justice in Democracy*

*Spotlight Issue: Restorative Justice Guest Speaker: Gabe Hurlock*

- **Define** restorative justice
- **Learn** the history of restorative justice
- **Explore:** How can Restorative Justice translate in your daily life?
- **Interactive Presentation** with Gabe Hurlock on restorative justice and art as activism

### Session 8: Wednesday, Nov 11\*

*Community Action Plan Workshop*

- **Give & Receive Feedback** for your Community Action Plan
- **Prepare** for your final presentation

**Week Five: Careers in Community Action**

 Student Assignment (uploaded by 5:00pm EST on Friday, November 20): How can we best support you for your final presentation?

**Session 9: Monday, Nov 16**

*Careers in Community Action*  
*Spotlight Issue: Real World Action*  
*Guest Speaker: Ruby Dawes*

- **Explore** the ways that you can continue community action work beyond this class and project
- **Discuss** various careers and contributions that can have a positive impact on community action
- **Develop** a Community Engagement Oath!
- **Interactive Presentation** with Ruby Dawes on how to turn your political passions into real-world action
- **Reflect** on the Democracy Action Lab

**Session 10: Wednesday, Nov 18\***


*Community Action Plan Workshop*

- **Give & Receive Feedback** for your Community Action Plan
- **Prepare** for your final presentation

**Week Six: Thanksgiving Week (Optional)**

**Monday, Nov 16: Optional Guided Project Workshop Session**

**Week Seven: Final Presentation, Feedback, Digitally Archive Project**

 Student assignment (final project due Monday, November 16, 12:00pm EST): Community Action Plan; Digitally archive project

**Session 13: Monday, Nov 30**

*Final Presentations*

- Presenting & digitally archiving your community action plan
- Collaborative real-time feedback & reflection on projects
- Bringing your action plan into the real world

**Session 14: Wednesday, Dec 2**

*Final Presentations*

- Presenting & digitally archiving your community action plan
- Collaborative real-time feedback & reflection on projects
- Bringing your action plan into the real world

**About the Brooklyn Creative Learning Lab**

The Brooklyn Creative Learning Lab is the incubator for new courses and digital tools built by Mesh Ed, an educational design collective that develops and launches vibrant out-of-school enrichment programs and digital portfolio tools for middle school, high school, and early college students. Learn more about our summer Creative Learning Lab offerings on our [website](#).