

# **The Art of the Political Revolution: *Millennials, Progressives and and the Future of the Democratic Party***

**Symone D. Sanders**

**Tuesdays | 4:15 - 5:45 pm | Harvard IOP**

As we delve into one of the most bizarre midterm elections in history, the Democratic Party is at a crossroads. What role will millennials, particularly millennials of color, play in the next chapter of American history? How do progressives re-assert their coalition and take their place in a party with which many feel betrayed? Will Black women continue to support a party that has at times left them out and if so, what does their support in 2018 look like? Where does the Democratic Party go from here? Over the course of the semester, we will dive deep into the various coalitions that make up the Democratic Party – millennials, black women, progressives etc – and examine the barriers and opportunities associated with the Party’s ability to effectively communicate with and engage these various coalitions.

Our guests will range from accomplished political professionals to recently elected progressives as well as various factions within the aforementioned coalitions. Joining us either via Skype or in person, our guests will draw from their varied backgrounds to share their real-life experience navigating the Democratic Party apparatus.

The goals of this study groups are twofold. First, to understand that unconventional coalitions and movements are what is shifting the conversation. I and many of our guests have actively participated in events and coalitions that have literally changed the conversation and resulted in actionable policy changes. Whether it be Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign that literally called for a revolution and whose effects can still be felt today. Or young activists who took to the streets from Ferguson to Baton Rouge to ring the alarm on police brutality while simultaneously launching policy and organizing platforms. The movements within the Democratic Party apparatus and adjacent to it are largely responsible for the gains and frankly the crossroads the party finds itself at today. Most importantly, the shift is being led by Individuals not much older than the those participating in the study group. I will be asking our guests to share their personal journeys and how they find themselves at the intersection of a critical moment in history.

Secondly, I want students to understand our institutions are only as strong as the people who support them. Communication, I believe, is an art and where institutions and organizations fail is ineffective communication and engagement. How long can an institution of political party for that matter truly thrive without the support of the people who make the institution what it is? There is a price to pay for ignoring the will of the people and failing to engage with them. The crossroads that the Democratic Party and frankly American politics finds itself at, is largely a result of this. During our study group, I and my guests will offer what we believe are sound solutions, communications tips, tools and engagement techniques.

In the end, I hope students walk away from this study group with a profound appreciation for unlikely coalitions and movements and an understanding that an effective message has the power to shift not only a conversation, but an entire political party.

## **Week 1 – February 13th: Introduction and Overview of the State of the Democratic Party Today**

This week, we will start with a personal introduction and an overview of the state of the Democratic Party as it stands today. What are the barriers the Democratic Party apparatus currently faces? Who are the players at the key players at the table? Where does the party currently stand and where is it going over the course of the next year?

## **Week 2 – February 20<sup>th</sup>: Communicating Across Coalitions on the Left**

It is no small task to effectively engage grassroots progressives while simultaneously trying to keep them on message AND playing “nice” with the establishment wing of the Democratic Party. What are some communication success stories (and failures) when it comes to this? What happens when the grassroots wing isn’t so “grassroots” anymore? How can candidates and operatives effectively engage the various coalitions on the left?

*Guest(s): Arianna Jones, Senior Vice President of Public Relations, Revolution Messaging/Former Deputy Communications Director, Bernie 2016*

## **Week 3 – February 27<sup>th</sup>: Let’s Talk Millennials**

We will examine recent polling on millennials demographic from Harvard, Priorities USA and Next Gen. Who is the millennial generation? What are the barriers to engaging them electorally? What are some of the challenges both political parties face in trying to communicate with this demographic?

## **Week 4 – March 6<sup>th</sup>: Millennials of Color + Activists + Black Women**

The coalitions working within and adjacent to the Democratic Party apparatus are in many ways driving the conversation (mainly because many of them have birthed powerful movements). This week, we will examine the intersection of three specific coalitions –millennials of color, black women and social justice activists. Our guests who have collectively launched very successful policy and organizing platforms, will share their personal stories as well as how they are effectively (and perhaps in the past not so effectively) navigated the left.

*Guest(s): DeRay McKesson, Brittany Packnett, Sam Singyanwe*

## ***Week 5 & 6 - No Study Groups***

## **Week 7 – March 27<sup>th</sup> : Let’s Talk Digital**

Democrats have been woefully outspent on digital by their Republican counterparts. Perhaps because many on the left lack the understanding that digital campaigns are about more than Facebook and Twitter ads. Over the last year, various factions of the Democratic Party apparatus have moved to better understand the digital space and create targeted digital campaigns. What should digital programs focus on? What kinds of methods should be employed to identify and target key voters? Can Democrats afford to cede the digital ground? What are some digital campaign success stories? How can Democrats use digital campaigns to identify new and unlikely voters?

*Guest(s): Rob Flaherty - Creative Director, Priorities USA/Former Rapid Response Director Hillary for America*

## **Week 8 – April 3<sup>rd</sup> : The Future is Now**

One could argue the Democratic Party currently answers to no one, so it’s no wonder its various coalitions and factions are often at odds on everything from policy to how to engage electorally. This week, our guest will be one of the leading voices folks say could be the “next leader of the Democratic Party.” What challenges does he or she believe the Party needs to overcome? What opportunities should everyone from activists to operatives be

capitalizing on in this moment? What is their idea of the “secret sauce” Dems need to pull it together? And of course, where does the Party go from here?

*Possible Guest(s): Senator Bernie Sanders, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand*

### **Week 9 – April 10<sup>th</sup> : Wrap Up**

Let’s pull it all together. An interactive discussion of what we explored this semester, the next frontier for the Democratic Party and the political power of movements and coalitions.

### **Week 10 – April 17<sup>th</sup>: Special Session: The Right Electoral Potion**

In 2017, Democrats saw some success electorally - flipping 34 state legislative seats from red to blue, doubling the number of African American lieutenant governor’s in the country, securing a reliably republican Senate seat in Alabama. However, there is real debate within the Democratic Party on what is the best way forward. Do we go all in to win Obama-Trump voters back to the left? What is the right mix of persuasion and mobilization? Is “A Better Deal” really the message that resonates from Appalachia to California? How do we go about turning out voters of color without scarring of moderate voters we need?

*Guest(s): Justin Fairfax, Lt. Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia*