

Moderator:

Dr. Jamil Khader is an associate professor of English and co-chair of the Diversity Council at Stetson University. A Palestinian from Israel, Khader completed his Ph.D. in English Literature at The Pennsylvania State University, and taught for two years at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey, before he joined the English Department at Stetson. His teaching and research focus on cosmopolitanism, especially the political and aesthetic dimensions underpinning the ethics of cross-cultural communication, human rights and globalization. His publications have appeared in various national and international literary journals, including *Ariel*, *Feminist Studies*, *College Literature*, *MELUS*, *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, and other collections. He is co-editing, with Molly Rothenberg, a collection of essays on the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, entitled, *Žižek Now: Current Perspectives in Žižek Studies* for Polity Press (forthcoming 2011), and is completing a book titled, *Fidelity to the International: Cartographies of Revolutionary Struggle in Postcolonial Writings*.

Panelists:

Dr. William J. Ball, visiting associate professor of political science, teaches, publishes and leads community projects on civic engagement and public dialog. In particular, he and his students work to engage members of the public in deliberative dialog with each other and with their public officials on policy areas about which they disagree. The goal of this work is to create stronger civic bonds within communities and to offer a deliberative model for the civic education of adults. His Ph.D is from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He was a recipient of the national McGraw Hill Award for Teaching and Scholarship in Civic Education.

At the Stetson panel, Ball will examine the rise in political violence and incivility in the United States in the last two decades and their long-term (the technological changes in the mass media and the increasing divergence of partisanship between political elites and the general public) and short-term causes (the resistance of the two-party system to the emergence of the Tea Party, swings in a "cycle of disillusionment," and straightforward economic fear, all of which have peaked since 2008 and are likely to recede as quickly). He will offer suggestions of how individuals concerned about incivility can join in the work of the large pre-existing movement for more civil forms of engagement with the political system.

Dr. Paul Croce is a professor of American Studies at Stetson University. Teaching courses on topics that bring out deep values differences (environmental issues, war and peace, health care, Darwinism and the divine, the '50s and '60s), and writing biographies of William James and serving as president of the James Society (<http://wjsociety.org/>), he perceived the need to conciliate differences and found the example of a figure whose ideas can shed light on our current dilemmas.

Croce will address civility and the importance of dealing with deep polarizations in improving civility. He believes current divisions began in the 1960s, when vital issues of race relations, personal life especially gender roles, and the Vietnam War divided Americans deeply. The country has never really settled those differences, Croce says, and now in public life there is more attention to bashing the opposition (often with lurid references to the extremes during the '60s) than to dealing with our mounting

problems. He will suggest we listen to different views, try to understand the values animating them, and ask “Given what you value, what can be done to deal with any one problem at hand?”

Dr. Paul Lachelier, assistant professor of sociology, teaches and writes about American politics and culture, citizen participation, and social theory. His recent research examines American individualism and its relation to civility and citizenship. Courses he teaches include Sociological Theories, How Americans Think, Power & Evil, and Community Organizing for Social Change. His Ph.D. is from the University of Wisconsin.

Lachelier will offer some highlights on the scholarly debate as to whether Americans are polarizing politically and socially, provide brief historical context on the origins of civility, and consider the promise and limits of civility in contemporary American society. He will conclude with a discussion of some specific ideas to promote civility in American democracy.

Dr. William R. Nylen, professor and chair of political science, is an expert in Latin American politics and political economy (especially Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina & Venezuela), democracy and democratization, and political economy and economic development. He has a Ph.D in political science/comparative politics from Columbia University in the City of New York. He is the author of *Elitist Democracy vs. Participatory Democracy: Lessons From Brazil* (St. Martins/Palgrave, 2003), many journal publications and is fluent Portuguese and Spanish.

Nylen will explore the extent to which a measure of incivility has been a part of the norm in conflict-laden democratic politics, but that such incivility has been recently repackaged within the symbolism of the American Revolution. He will examine four interrelated causes for the rise of destructive incivility in American politics namely, the civic disengagement of vast numbers of citizens ‘drop out’ of the democratic game of citizenship; the 24/7 availability of political ‘infotainment’ that targets specific markets, precluding ‘the other side of the story’; the structural inequalities of the American economy; and the conscious conservative strategy of blaming these inequalities on the alleged excesses of Big Government, tax-and-spend Democratic politicians (pilloried as ‘closet socialists’), and a host of ‘lazy’ and otherwise ‘unworthy’ recipients of taxpayers’ dollars.

Dr. Rebecca Watts, assistant professor of communication studies, specializes in teaching and research related to political discourse and public culture. She completed her Ph.D. at Texas A&M University in communication with a focus in rhetoric and public affairs. In her book, *Contemporary Southern Identity: Community through Controversy* (2008, University Press of Mississippi), she examines how various stakeholders throughout the South have engaged in community debates—through rallies, letters to the editor, online postings, and other public fora—about the symbols, ideas, and people they want to represent them. Case studies included in her book include the debate about flying the Confederate flag atop the State Capitol in South Carolina and the addition of a statue of Arthur Ashe alongside statues of Confederate leaders on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Va. She teaches classes related to public discourse and diversity of worldviews such as Intercultural Communication, History of American Public Address: The Civil Rights Era, and a seminar on the Rhetoric of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa.

In the panel discussion, Watts will focus her remarks on the concepts of listening rhetoric and dialectical rhetoric, which encourage communicators to engage in meaningful listening to one another as they seek to articulate their own arguments in discourse and debate. She will draw on some examples from her own research related to community debates about Southern identity. Finally, she will encourage those in academia, in particular, to examine thoughtfully the degree to which we can encourage diversity of ideology and perspective amongst ourselves, our students, and our communities.