



American Dionysia: Violence, Tragedy, and Democratic Politics

Steven Johnston

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Violence and tragedy riddle democracy - not due to fatal shortcomings or unnecessary failures, but because of its very design and success. To articulate this troubling claim, Steven Johnston explores the cruelty of democratic founding, the brutal use democracies make of citizens and animals during wartime, the ambiguous consequences of legislative action expressive of majority rule, and militant practices of citizenship required to deal with democracy's enemies. Democracy must take responsibility for its success: to rule in denial of violence merely replicates it. Johnston thus calls for the development of a tragic democratic politics and proposes institutional and civic responses to democracy's reign, including the reinvention of tragic festivals and holidays, a new breed of public memorials, and mandatory congressional reparations sessions. Theorizing the violent puzzle of democracy, Johnston addresses classic and contemporary political theory, films, little known monuments, the subversive music of Bruce Springsteen, and the potential of democratic violence by the people themselves.

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