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978-1-107-10060-2 - American Dionysia: Violence, Tragedy, and Democratic Politics

Steven Johnston

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American Dionysia

Violence and tragedy riddle democracy – ironically because of its very design and success. To articulate this troubling claim, Steven Johnston explores the crimes of democratic founding, the brutal use democracies make of citizens and animals during wartime, the inevitable repercussions of majority rule, and the militant practices of citizenship required to deal with democracy's enemies. Democracy must take responsibility for the consequences of its success; politics that denies 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 legislative reparations sessions. Theorizing the violent puzzle of democracy, Johnston addresses classic and contemporary political theory, films, little-known monuments and memorials, the subversive music of Bruce Springsteen, and the potential of democratic violence by the people themselves.

Steven Johnston is the Neal A. Maxwell Chair in Political Theory, Public Policy, and Public Service in the Department of Political Science at the University of Utah. He is the author of *The Truth about Patriotism* (2007) and *Encountering Tragedy: Rousseau and the Project of Democratic Order* (1999). He has published articles in *Theory & Event*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, *Strategies*, *Political Research Quarterly*, and *Polity*. In 2013 he founded the Neal A. Maxwell Lecture Series in Political Theory and Contemporary Politics. He is a regular contributor to the academic theory and politics blog *The Contemporary Condition*.

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For Judy, always

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page vii</i>
Introduction: There Will Be Blood: Antinomies of Democracy	i
1 American Dionysia	29
2 Democracy at War with Itself: Citizens	54
3 Democracy at War with Itself: Animals	89
4 Forcing Democracy to Be Free: Rousseau to Springsteen	118
5 Two Cheers for Democratic Violence	149
6 New Tragic Democratic Traditions	194
Conclusion: Democracy’s Tragic Affirmations	240
<i>Notes</i>	249
<i>Bibliography</i>	283
<i>Index</i>	293

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Acknowledgments

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