The premise of this course is that there is no great political philosophy in the American tradition—the Federalist Papers do not rival Plato or Marx—but that profound thinking about politics does occur—in the literary art of Melville, Faulkner, Ellison, Mailer, and Morrison among others. Moreover, formally "political" writers, like Madison/Hamilton or John Rawls, present a world that seems antithetical to the world presented by, say, Melville and Morrison: one depicts rational bargaining and self-interested contracts among men in markets and legislatures, whereas the other depicts racial and sexual violence, rape and slavery, in claustrophobic domestic spaces or in nature on frontiers. One depicts rationality and progress, the other madness and tragedy. The literature thus makes visible what is made invisible by political science and American political thought—not only the constitutive power of race, gender, and sex, but also the deep narrative forms structuring the culture. We therefore ask several basic questions. First, how do we understand "political theory," both the practice of "theory" and its subject, "politics." Second, what do we learn about (American) political life by reading literature as a form or kind or genre of political theory? But third, what are the risks of arguing that literature does theoretical work? Do we lose what is precious about literary art if we reduce it to an "argument" about politics? Or, could paying attention to the literary/aesthetic character of a work—to the ways it uses language and narrative to create both ambiguity and meaning, to how it speaks and not only to what it says—be an important part of what literature teaches us about politics and theorizing it? To pursue these questions we focus on Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

**required texts:**

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volumes One and Two*,
Herman Melville, *Moby Dick, Norton Critical Edition only*
Herman Melville, *Short Novels, Norton Critical Edition only*
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*
Toni Morrison, *Playing In The Dark*

course requirements:
1) class attendance is mandatory; un-excused absences hurt your grade
2) response papers are required each week
3) two 5-page critical essays are required
4) grading: response papers 25%; participation 25%; essays 25% x 2, but improvement in your participation and/or writing will count

Note: plagiarism of any kind—presenting someone else’s work as your own, i.e. without attribution—means an F in this class as well as possible disciplinary action by the school.
Class schedule

1/24  introduction:
#1  * Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address”
    * Robert Hayden, “Frederick Douglass”

1/31  Narrative, Politics, & Theory
#2  read:
    * William Adams, “Political Poetics: Narrative Imagination & the Art of Politics”
    * Stanley Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts (intro/appendix)
    * Alisdair MacIntyre “Epistemological Crisis/Dramatic Narrative”
    * Wayne Booth, “Metaphor as Rhetoric”
    * David Scott “Tragedy’s Time”

write:
    * Explore why “narrative” is (un)important in politics.
    * Explore if/why metaphors are constitute, not ornamental.
    * Explore the difference between kinds (or genres) of narrative (e.g. “tragic” vs “romance,” or “dialectical” vs “rhetorical”)

2/7  Narrative and Politics in the United States
#3  read:
    * James Madison, “Federalist #10”
    * Sheldon Wolin – “Norm and Form”
    * Shelley, “In Defense of Poetry”
    * Ernst Renan, “What is a Nation?”
    * O’Sullivan, excerpts from The Democratic Review
    * Michael Rogin, “Declarations of Independence”
    * Sean McCann, “Do You Believe in Magic?”

write:
    * What assumptions drive Madison’s theory of politics? What does he count as politics? What does he fear? Render invisible?
    * Why does Wolin criticize the constitutional system?
    * How do Shelley/Whitman conceive the political role of “poetry”
    * Is Sullivan’s defense of manifest destiny a political poetry?
    * What distinguishes the language (tropes, metaphor, narrative) of Madison compared to Sullivan?
    * What narratives organize American (political) life?
    * Why does McCann criticize American poetry/literature?

2/14  Tocqueville I: American Exceptionalism
#4  read:
    * Michael Rogin, “Liberal Society and the Indian Question” (150 pages + Rogin)

write:
    * What are T’s purposes in writing? (What does a theorist do?)
    * For T what are the crucial determinants of political life?
    * How does T define “America” & what is “exceptional” about it?
    * What does T mean by “equality” (and/or by “democracy”)
    * In what does political freedom consist for T?
    * Relate what T calls democracy to what Rogin calls “liberalism”
    * How is racialized violence related to liberal democracy?
    * Is the American republic at first a continental empire? Does this matter? Why?
    * What narratives organize T’s theory vs Rogin’s theory?
    * What narratives organize American political life?
2/21

Tocqueville II: Individualism & Democratic Despotism

#3
read:
  * Tocqueville, Democracy/vol.2
    Book I: chaps 1,2
    Book II: chaps 1,2,10-14,20
    Book III: chap 21
  * Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (xerox)
  * Tocqueville, Democracy/vol.2
    Book I: chap 5
    Book II: chaps 4-8,15-17
    Book III: chaps 8-12
    Book IV: chaps 1-3,5-8 (140 pages in vol 2 + Emerson)

write:
  * Why/how is individualism a problem?
  * Where is authority lodged in a “democracy”? What new forms of authority does democracy produce & how are they problematic?
  * What is it that T calls “democratic despotism”?
  * Why does T think advancing equality threatens practices of political liberty?
  * T says equality increases “administrative centralization” of the state: Why is that a problem? Why is T still not a libertarian? And might the state support struggles for liberty?
  * What is T’s antidote to democratic despotism?
  * Compare Emerson’s & T’s critique of conformity: Does Emerson’s way of diagnosing conformity manifest the very problem T sees?

2/28

Tocqueville III: “democracy,” nationhood, and race

#4
read:
  * Tocqueville, vol 1, “Tyranny of the Majority” (259-265)
  * Tocqueville, vol.1, “The Three Races...” (331-381)
  * Tocqueville, “historians” (vol 2/Book I/ch 20)
  * Sheldon Wolin, “Democracy without the Citizen”
  * Michael Rogin, “Political Repression”
  * Michael Rogin, “Declarations of Independence”

write:
  * Is Wolin a Tocquevillean? What is your view of his argument?
  * Relate Rogin’s “repression” to T’s “democratic despotism.”
  * Is racial domination constitutive of “democracy in America”?
  * How does race (ideas and narratives of “blackness”) shape popular/mass culture in the US?
  * What narratives organize American political life?
  * Do Rogin and Tocqueville offer incompatible view of the US?

First paper due: Friday March 2

3/6

Going Whaling I: nationhood/narrative

#5
read:
  * Tocqueville, on poetry (vol 2/book I/ch 13/17-18)
  * David Potter, The Impending Crisis, chap. 1 (xerox)
  * Melville, Moby Dick, Norton edition p.465-70
  * Melville, Moby Dick through (including) chapter 42 (to p.165)
  * Norton MD p.644-657/657-8

write:
  * Discuss one passage or theme
  * What does “call me Ishmael” suggest?
  * Why does M use stage directions? How is M writing a tragedy?
  * Does the text advance a philosophical position?
  * What/who does Ahab personify?
  * How do Melville and Tocqueville illuminate each other?
SPRING BREAK

3/20  Going Whaling II
#8
read:  * Moby Dick - complete the novel!
write:  * discuss one passage or theme.
        * Assess the character of Ahab.
        * What might the end mean?
        * What does Ishmael learn from his experience?
        * Does the text advance a philosophical position?
        * Where/how does the novel leave its reader? In Fish’s terms, what kind of reader does it engender? Are readers (like) citizens?
        * Is there a “politics” to its literary art?

3/27  Going Whaling III
#9
read:  * DH Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (xerox)
        * Michael Rogin, Subversive Genealogy: the Politics & Art of Herman Melville, “Moby Dick & the American 1848” (xerox)
        * Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”
        * George Shulman “Chasing the Whale”
write:  * Compare two interpretations of Moby Dick
        * Does MD critically retell the story Americans tell themselves?
        * Does the novel engender withdrawal from politics, as Tocqueville worries American “poetry” will do? Or does it represent an alternative way to imagine “democratic dignity”
        * Is the novel “about” philosophy, or politics? Both? Neither – it is about literary representation itself?

4/3  Forms of Slavery, Forms of Protest
#10
read:  * Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener”
        * Norton edition, commentary 239-256
        * Melville, “Benito Cereno”
        * Norton edition, commentary, p.287-329

2nd paper (OPTIONAL) due Friday 4/6 by noon
4/10  Race, Narrative & Politics  
#11  
**read:**  
* James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone”  
* James Baldwin, “There Are No White People”  
* James Baldwin, “Letter to my Nephew”  
* Kimberly Crenshaw, “Reel Time/Real Justice”  

**write:**  
* How does the imagination of blackness shape American politics?  
* What is the “innocence” or disavowal that Baldwin depicts among those who call themselves white?  
* What is unsaid and unspeakable among whites and/or blacks?  
* How is “narrative” related to politics around racial inequality  
* Use Crenshaw to depict our post-civil rights movement context.

4/17  En-gendering Narrative and Nationhood I  
#12  
**read:**  
* James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”  
* Toni Morrison, Beloved (Part One – up to p.165)  

**write:**  
* What difference does it make to orient a novel around blacks rather than whites and women rather than men?  
* Why is haunting so important to M’s story? What does this suggest about the past and our relationship to it?  
* How and by whom is the novel narrated? Why? With what effects?  
* Depict the relationship between Sethe and Beloved.  
* (how) does the novel address constitutively “American” (not only “black”) experiences?  
* Is M writing the novel Baldwin said needed to be written?

4/24  En-gendering Narrative II  
#13  
**read:**  
* Toni Morrison, Beloved (complete it!)  

**write:**  
* What happens in the Sethe-Beloved relationship? What are we to conclude from it?  
* How does Denver influence your interpretation of the novel?  
* How do Morrison understand our freedom in relation to the haunting power of the past? Can we get free of it?  
* What does it mean to say “this is not a story to pass on”?  

5/1  Narrative & Politics  
#14  
**read:**  
* Toni Morrison, Nobel Address  
* Friedrich Nietzsche, “My Redemption” from Zarathustra  
  * Mae Henderson, “TM’s Beloved: Re-membering the Body as Historical Text” (xerox)  
* George Shulman, “Beloved and American Political Culture”  
* Madhu Dubey, “The Politics of Genre in Beloved”  

final paper due THURSDAY MAY 3 BY 5PM
The fundamental question in this course is: How has an “American” nation been (re)imagined and (re)made over time? We therefore relate the symbols and narratives by which different groups “imagine community” – in conflict with other groups that imagine national community differently – and thereby forge state power, social institutions, and cultural forms. But we pursue this inquiry by focusing on a paradox: in American history, the meaning of “America” has always been tied to the promise of democracy, but also to the ideology of white supremacy and practices of racial domination. The idea and practice of nationhood in the American case is linked both to a democratic promise and to racial domination. We therefore analyze how “democracy” in America has been conceived and practiced in racialized and exclusionary terms, but also how people have struggled against white supremacy in the name of fulfilling a democratic promise they call the real “meaning of America.” (And repeatedly, some political actors – Emma Goldman and Malcolm X may be the most famous – seek equality but refuse to invoke a special American promise.)

So we pursue several related questions.
(1) If nationhood is an “imagined community,” how has the identity of an “American” nation been imagined and redefined, and by whom against whom? What has it meant to say that something or someone is “American”?
(2) How has “American” identity been fashioned in racial terms?
(3) How have those cast as racial others – and un-American – redefined the meaning of democracy and of America? To ask these questions is to see how differently situated people seek (or repudiate) belonging as “Americans” in an “American” nation, which means
(4) we study the stories people tell about the history/meaning of nationhood. People narrate nationhood in their struggles about race and democracy. Our terms of inquiry thus are: nationhood-race-democracy & stories-belonging-identity.

There is a political purpose to this inquiry. Since the language of “American” identity is so tied to racial exclusion and domination, should those committed to equality and democracy organize politics against the national frame, in counter-national (say, local and global) ways? “America” is the symbolic name for a special place, an almost sacred image of human possibility, but the United States is in fact an empire, not even a nation-state, and needs to be addressed accordingly. Americans across all class lines do “really see this but need to. Or, as examples like Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and Obama more recently suggest, must an effective critics of inequality retell stories of nationhood? To authorize fundamental reforms and generate broad support for them, must critics appeal (and revise) an idea of American nationhood?
Alisdair Macintyre on (the idea of) tradition:

“"The connection between narrative and tradition has hitherto gone unnoticed, perhaps because tradition usually has been taken seriously only by conservative social theorists. Yet those features of tradition which emerge as important when the connection between tradition and narrative is understood are ones which conservative theorists are unlikely to attend to. For what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible to rival interpretations. If I am a Jew, I have to recognize that the tradition of Judaism is partly constituted by a continuous argument over what it means to be a Jew. Suppose I am an American: the tradition is partly constituted by continuous argument over what it means to be an American and partly by continuous argument over what it means to have rejected tradition ... [These] traditions have epistemological debate as a necessary feature of their conflicts. For it is not merely that different participants in a tradition disagree; they also disagree as to how to characterize their disagreement and as to how to resolve them. They disagree as to what constitutes appropriate reasoning, decisive evidence, conclusive proof. A tradition then not only embodies the narrative of an argument, but is only to be recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative re-tellings. Every tradition therefore is always in danger of lapsing into incoherence, and when a tradition does so lapse, it sometimes can only be recovered by a revolutionary reconstitution...” from “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” The Monist 60 (1977)
Suggestions for reading Tocqueville VOLUME ONE:

He is a French aristocrat writing to other French aristocrats about the United States. He uses it as an example of a “democratic” society to persuade them to stop fighting against the emergence of democratic norms and practices, the better to influence HOW democratization occurs. (Not whether, but how.) Imagine: millions of formerly disenfranchised peasants in France are being emancipated: what form should politics take as they enter the stage of history? He is not an egalitarian democrat, but he believes democracy is inevitable and that it has “advantages.” Imagine him as an anthropologist studying a strange tribe, these Americans, whose way of life prefigures the future he expects his OWN tribe to inhabit. The key question for him, he says, is whether democracy (which he associates with the spread of equality) can also produce liberty. He worries about this because he believes the French Revolution advanced equality, but produced despotism (a powerful and violent state, and then Napoleonic empire) rather than a stable republic. Will the victor in the revolutionary process not be “the people,” popular sovereignty (and so real political freedom in a real way) but a bureaucratic (and violent) state acting in the name of the people? Accordingly, he is asking what form will politics take in modernity, a modernity he defines as the transition from aristocratic/monarchical regime.

1. How does he contrast a “democratic” and “aristocratic” society? Which means:

2. Ask: what does he mean by democracy, by equality, and by liberty? Especially focus on how he imagines “politics” and how he imagines “liberty” as “political”

3. Ask: WHAT does he see (and not see) in American society? we will want to explore how he invents “American exceptionalism” as he makes a picture for his aristocratic audience.

4. Ask: how does he define the “advantages” of democracy? (To live “democratically” is to live how?)

5. Ask: what STORY does he tell? In this regard, The key to volume one is that the US appears as the SOLUTION to the PROBLEM posed by “revolution” in France. The U.S. is what Marx (five years later) called “a conservative form of republic.” Whereas in France, masses of formerly excluded poor people came to attack Christian religion and morality, property, and the state, in the US, citizens (however poor) support religion, accumulate rather than attack property, and deem the state an expression of their identity. Tocqueville thus advances the greatest version of what is now called “American exceptionalism.”

But notice: Tocqueville tells a SECOND story – that “America” is founded on genocide and slavery. This story is in the last chapter of volume one. He separates this story —it is about AMERICA, he says, not DEMOCRACY. But of course these stories are related, two sides of each other. so also note: When he defines what makes the US different than (unlike) European nations, he defines identity through difference – partly by contrast to Europe – ”new world” vs “old world” (freedom vs feudalism) BUT ALSO ”civilized” vs ”savage” (white supremacy).

6. Watch Tocqueville’s METHOD – how does he STUDY politics? He says the politics of a people are to be explained by reference to customs, to law, and to geography. What does he mean by “customs” (culture?) Why is custom more important than laws in explaining/understanding politics? What is his view of what we now call “culture”? How is it the “ground” of politics? Also watch how he seeks/ endorses the stability of a “moral” framework to set limits to the “political” world he depicts as agitated and creative. That moral framework is implanted culturally. It is not so much true, as necessary.
7. What is Tocqueville’s theory of what sustains and contains “democracy”? (a) it depends on religion: theistic faith and adherence to “morality” — why? (b) it depends on respect for property and rights more broadly — why? (c) it depends on participation — locally — in associations and townships — why and how are they “schools of liberty”? Why participation locally, but otherwise very indirect participation through representatives?

TERMS:

For Tocqueville, “equality” refers to:
(a) formal equality by law: we bear equal formal rights to own property, move locations, and exercise civic/political freedoms to speech and assembly. Though you have far more money and social power than me, neither of us is legally fixed in ascribed social positions and both of us are entitled to “equal treatment” by the law; (b) more substantive commonality of condition compared to aristocratic Europe; (c) a NORM or STANDARD that, over time, brings all hierarchies into question — except inequality of wealth, which seems legitimate if earned rather than inherited.

For Tocqueville, “liberty” refers to:
(a) the ability to act without constraint by the state, as in civil liberties and freedom of contract;
(b) independence of mind, that is, a capacity, as Tocqueville puts it, “to think, feel, and act for themselves” apart from or opposed to the powerful authority he associates with public opinion;
(c) the ability to participate in the exercise of power and political self-governance — the “art of association”

For Tocqueville, “democracy” refers to:
(a) the formal equality of persons who, though unequal in talent or property, nevertheless bear political and civil rights and are not made unequal by law; (b) a system of majority rule and decentralized decision making involving localities, states, and the national government, whereby citizens participate in their own governance in more or less mediated (direct or indirect) ways;
(c) a culture, a way of life, in which people expect to pursue their own individual life-plans, but also to participate in making the rules (and conventions) they live by.

For Tocqueville “despotism” refers not to literal “hard” or coercive tyranny that literally, physically, violently forces our compliance, but to a “soft” kind of tyranny of the kind that Foucault names “normalization.”

VOLUME TWO: THE QUESTION IS: HOW DOES HIS VIEW OF MODERNITY/DEMOCRACY CHANGE?
The transition to volume two appears in volume one, in the chapter on majority tyranny, the greatest example of which is white hostility toward free blacks in the north — see his footnote. Despite formal rights, majority opinion excludes them, and likewise, the tyranny of the majority controls whites themselves. If he names the problem of conformity among whites as the danger in volume one, that problem is renamed “democratic despotism” in volume two — how enfranchised people imprison themselves in a soft tyranny. But there is no reference to race in volume two.

His central question is: How will people be organized when they are not defined by (but rather emancipated from) tradition and inherited communities? What authority will orient their lives? THEY say they are sovereign “individuals” living by self-determination and boot-strap efforts. But Tocqueville, a sociologist, sees these people held together in new and nightmarish ways. Self-declared individuals will in fact be oriented by the authority of public opinion; they will become
absorbed in commodity culture, the acquisitive pursuit of wealth and status to the exclusion of all else, and rather than act together to govern themselves, they will create “community” by a shared identification with the state as their collective (national) representative. Tocqueville fears they will lose “the capacity to think, feel and act for themselves.” Absorbed in their private affairs, and lacking real connections with each other, they will lose both independence of mind and the capacity to govern themselves politically. They will be absorbed by commodity culture and absorbed by a state (and public opinion) they see as an expression of their (national) will. Rather than a beacon of liberty, the US represents a new form of “democratic despotism.” Tocq asks: What can prevent this?

It is crucial to note that Tocqueville is discussing the “danger” of despotism among the enfranchised, that is, among whites. He separates out the issue of slavery and race, from the issue of despotism, as if these were separate. He has in fact identified, but compartmentalized the two great problems in (American) politics – one is its basis in constitutive exclusion, the other is what comes to be called “mass society” during the cold war. He separates these, we need to keep them together.

But to pursue the “mass society” argument:
Why will individualism become a problem?
Why will public opinion become so powerful?
Why will people withdraw from public participation?
Why will the state become so powerful?
Why will “revolutions” become more rare?

Is he making a “scientific” prediction like a meteorologist, or giving a warning about a future we CAN avoid? To be effective as a warning he must purposely exaggerate the danger he sees? How can he convince of a danger we cannot yet see (before it is too late)?

In volume two, then, what does “democracy” mean? Does it mean mass society the generated by propertied individualism? Will democracy in the sense of participation have become as residual a form as the aristocratic way of life whose passing he laments in volume one? What kind of account of modernity is this?

Subject: discussion #3

I. Tocquville, individualism, and association –
(A) The argument: In aristocratic society aristocrats "associate," but their bonds are dictated by birth. There is no civil society in which individuals have the right to form "voluntary associations" by choice about any issue or interest they choose. Individuals bearing rights refuse the bonds of caste and tradition, but can and must form such "voluntary associations," and for T, the "art" of forming such associations IS their political and civil freedom. France becomes a "democratic" society insofar as people develop the practice of living by this art of voluntarily associating. In America, association (as a verb) is a custom –a practice, a habit, part of our ordinary lives –but people can change, customs can be lost or abandoned, T worries, if people become more anxious, withdrawn, self-regarding, etc. In a society characterized by individualism, people do become more atomized and therefore "feeble" –i.e. less powerful because more separated from each other– and they need to form associations to generate power. Individualism proclaims individual rights and freedom, but it ultimately means impotence, and the only antidote is association, which (as a verb) means power

(B) The critique:
1. Tocqueville ignores how an association (as a noun) can be hierarchial, corporate, unequal, tyrannical. For minorities, local townships are local tyrannies. Ben mentioned states rights – states were tyrannies that excluded or enslaved blacks, and the central state had to be provoked to intervene on behalf of equality. (If you focus on inequality, the central state remains valuable or necessary because
"voluntary associations" among elites serve narrow interests, or associations of, say, a white majority enforce exclusion. For T association (verb) is a good thing, period, compared to atomization or withdrawal, but we want to ask: whose association, for what purposes?

2. Is a civil society characterized by multiple group associations an answer to a "manufacturing aristocracy?" It is an answer of a sort for people who "need to be reminded that they live in society" - association (as a verb) is indeed a way to "mitigate" the effects of individualism - but is "association" (as a verb and noun) a way to govern collective decisions, to gain or exercise power over, say, the course of the economy? The idea of a civil society characterized by associations, an idea that comes to be called "pluralism," sometimes seems merely therapeutic - all the key decisions get made elsewhere, by elites - while the rest of us have an illusion of freedom because we (have the right to) associate in the pta etc. Associations may be like a sandbox to play in, while we are on the deck of the Pequod, headed for disaster. (Moby Dick, written in 1850, is a great companson piece to Tocqueville volume 2.)

3. But still, social movements and political parties are forms of association! Or should we give up on the idea of taking power over the basic public decisions about how we live?

II. How does the argument about conformity intersect with the argument about exclusion? 

(A) what Tocqueville calls "public opinion" is about the making of normative (liberal) subjects and that has also meant the construction of WHITENESS as well as a normative masculinity. Liberalism, as the only world possible, is a system of conformity with a racial and gendered subtext. The production of liberal subjects requires incredible discipline, repression, policing -- this is also what it means for immigrants to become "white." What immigrants assimilate TO is whiteness but called self-reliance or normality or freedom. People want to belong; no one wants to be stripped of the privileges that come from enfranchisement, and what is the price of the ticket to enfranchisement?

(B) The mass culture we live in and by - the "american" culture - is mediated by racialized images. The very ideas of masterful individuality, of freedom, responsibility, and morality, are race-d as white. The norms we impose on ourselves and others are not only conceived in class and religious terms, but are conceived in relation to "others" who embody deficiency or pathology. But "public opinion" defines what is fashionable and not only normal, and blackness mediates fashion, coolness, desirability in complex ways. We identify with the outlaw, the rock and roll hero, the more we live under the thumb of the sheriff, in the corporate square. The culture plays both ways: it produces romanticized images of dissent and independence, which we also consume. So, the conformity he laments - conformity to what? to whom? to real others or to a sort of abstract 'they'? How does conformity work, that is, what produces it - partly external coercive sanctions, but also something internal, partly worldly associations seeking to impose certain norms as law, but also an internal complicity. (This became profoundly clear during the McCarthy era, as so many people "named names" to avoid ostracism and all that it meant for careers, families, lives.) T wants to distinguish a salutary consensus (religious, moral) from a pernicious conformity, but they are connected. (yet you have to grant the point that every society, and perhaps especially a democratic society committed to equality, requires a common grammar, some kinds of shared assumptions? Is the issue whether there are spaces to publically contest that grammar, those assumptions?)

III. Every community defines itself, and every definition divides people, including some and excluding others. Every we (every definition of a we, even of humanity) excludes! Every faith, every devotion, divides. What is the solution? space to contest these definitions, the terms of inclusion, the justification for exclusion? In a "democratic" regime such contest and spaces for it are enabled and valued?

IV. How might Tocqueville be related to post 9/11 society?
A. Begin with the fundamental point in T's story: what triumphs with the French Revolution?

(1) the state in the name of democracy: On the one hand, In what relationship do people stand toward the state - in a condition of dependence toward "their" shepard and protector? They see it as their representative? To which they willingly give up their rights for the sake of their security (and well-being)? On the other hand, the state, claming to represent 'the people" does what in their name? The language of "democracy" empowers the state, which claims the legitimacy to do anything for the greater good. In T's story, "democracy" names a new form of power, not a counter to it, a form of power in the name of the people.

(2) What also triumphs with the French Revolution, he argues, is a new manufacturing aristocracy, in the name of the (democratic) right to own property. When this democratic state joins with this manufacturing aristocracy, you see a very powerful formation, legitimized in the name of securing the safety, individual rights, and well-being of the many -a formation that claims it is the only form that freedom and civilization can take.

(3). What also triumphs after the french revolution is a culture (many of us call it capitalist) that values "material well-being" above all else.Tocqueville does not attribute this to capitalism but to "democracy" and "individualism." But the point is that liberal subjects who wish to be left alone, or who define freedom in terms of individual consumption, or equate citizenship with consumption, sustain this state and aristocracy. Because if we want security and tranquility above all, the better to pursue our private lives, we relinquish responsibility for governance, and soon we relinquish rights, too. But we are acquisitive and self-absorbed not because we are greedy, but because we are anxious, (independent and impotent) and our anxiety makes us very vulnerable to mobilization and manipulation. We want to feel like we are still in charge, and we console ourselves for our tutelage by reminding ourselves that we elect our guardians every four years, T says, but if we lack experience of political responsiblity, we will lack the basis to make such judgments, and even still, we remain in tutelage.

B. In T's terms, therefore, the attack on 9/11 only intensified -or were used to intensify- the deepest "propensities" (he also says "instincts") of this society. People stand in relation to the state as an audience that, in its individual impotence, vicariously identifies with the power of the state, which promises protection and well-being. Anxious and fearful, we want to be protected. But also many of us saw 9/11 as a great chance to "renew" America - to re-establish a sense of community - to restore "national unity" - to find against a common PURPOSE after the clinton years, a decade of "corruption and greed and self-interest." T's argument suggests that atomized people in a fragmented society long for a kind of "poetry" to make the fragments cohere into a whole, to create an "imaginatory community", to give life purpose to an otherwise "anti-poetic" life which at once absorbs and disgusts us.

C. Rogin and 9/11: imagine that the national culture is recurrently organized around moments of "counter-subversion," when political discourse depicts subversive threats that must be overcome to preserve the American Way of Life. those threats are "demonized" - what does that mean? Are we in the midst of such a counter-subversive moment? Look at the material on Anti-Communism and see what you think!! Was there a "real" threat? How was it conceptualized and symbolized, and with what consequences? How was the idea of an "external" threat translated into the idea of alien threat "within?" Was Anti-Communism (in the name of protecting freedom and a free world from despotism) the language of empire?
First paper: no more than FIVE pages typed, due Monday March 1 by noon.

1. A fundamental issue in a "democratic" age is authority: to whom or what do (should) "democratic" people give assent? By who/what do (should) they orient thought and action? Compare how Emerson and Tocqueville answer this question.

2. Assess how Tocqueville conceives the causes of and antidotes to "democratic despotism."

3. Discuss how Tocqueville theorizes authority in politics. (He distinguishes kinds of authority: the authority of public opinion and of the state generate subjugation, but the authority of god, morality, and constitutional rights generate personal and political liberty. Why does he make this distinction? Is it credible, and essential for thinking about democracy? Why/not? Should he (not) set the authority of religion outside and beneath politics?)

4. Tocqueville says: "liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without [religious/theistic?] faith." Must democratic politics be "anchored" this way - in a faith/morality not subject to politics? Why/not?

5. Analyze individualism in the forming of an "American" identity. (a) Does faith in "self-reliance" or self-making bespeak a national identity? (b) Does this idea grossly distort how human (social) beings must and do live, or does the idea seem credible because it is embedded in widespread social practices? (c) If we view the world and the self through the optic of "individualism" what is rendered (in)visible? (d) Is individualism a racial/gendered construction? (e) What are the characteristic problems of a self/nation so conceived?

6. Does any claim about a common "American" identity impose a fiction on heterogeneous reality, coercing a false unity by reading out certain people and practices? Or do we really need to identify a dominant ("hegemonic") national culture, the better to analyze and contest it? Should we (not) argue about politics by making claims about the "identity" or "values" of Americans? Use one or two texts to explore the question of national identity.

7. "Tocqueville is right: individualism is a major problem in modern society, and the only cure is political association, to counteract the weakness of the isolated individual, the conformism of the mass, and the power of the state." Assess his critique of "individualism" and his defense of "political liberty."

8. Tocqueville claims to identify the "art" and "forms" which can "combat" and "mitigate" what he calls the "instincts" of a democratic age. Analyze this language of art and instinct, and his claim that freedom is an "art" people must (but can) learn.

9. Hannah Arendt says: "No one could be called happy without [a] share in public happiness, no one could be called free without [an] experience of public freedom, and no one could be happy or free without participating... in public power." Discuss the ideal of participatory democracy in Tocq or Wolin.

10. Compare the visions of politics presented by Madison in his defense of an extended republic, and the vision of politics presented by Wolin. Pay special attention to Wolin’s idea of a dialectic between constitutional form and democracy agency/content.

11. Assess the meaning and importance of gender in Tocqueville’s thought, both to his stipulations about the division of labor, and to his figurative language about public opinion and the state.

12. Use Tocqueville/Emerson/Wolin to discuss what democracy is, and is for.
13. Rogin claims that the United States is a “liberal” society. How does he define it? What social practices and cultural ideals characterize it? What problems does he claim are inherent in it? Assess his arguments.

14. For Rogin, racial domination (and cultural appropriation) are constitutive of liberal society in the United States—not unfortunate exceptions or anomalies. What does this mean? Do you agree? Why/not?

15. For many (white) Americans, following Lincoln, American society is conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are equal; for Rogin, American society is conceived in slavery and dedicated to the proposition that black people are created unequal. Explore the stakes in this disagreement: What differences follow from narrating history by each perspective? Can/must both perspectives be recognized? Why (and with what effect) put genocide, chattel slavery, and continuing racial domination at the center of American social life and history?

16. Do images and tropes of “the frontier” (as well as regeneration through violence against racialized others) continue to shape American politics? Does appropriation of blackness continue to make an “American” culture?

17. "Tocqueville is right: The US is a mass society because people are atomized by the ideology of individual self-making, homogenized by consumer culture promising to promote their material well-being, and mobilized by a national security state claiming to defend their safety. All but an elite are privatized and powerless.”—A.nonymous

“No, American society is fundamentally divided by hierarchies of power and identity. Arguments about conformity disguise how divided we are, and how much groups conflict.”—B.nonymous

Discuss

18. "Politics is about who gets what, where, and when. As Madison argued, American politics concerns pragmatic, interest-based, and rational action by groups and individuals.”—A.nonymous

“American politics is driven by issues of identity, not about what we (don’t) have, but about who we are (not), as actors anxiously define identity through difference, and make the “Un-American” a symbol of corruption and threat.”—B.nonymous

Assess these different views of politics

19. "Democratic politics requires a consensus about commitments and a framework of rules, whose authority is both a limit to power and a resource for criticism.”—A.nonymous

“As excluded groups know, such forms of cultural authority always entail domination: democratic political life must allow, and is enriched when, people question and revise the assumptions and commitments that frame their lives and agency.”—B.nonymous

Assess how a cultural/constitutional framework is a problem & resource.

20. Use Addams to assess the role of “narrative” in Tocqueville’s theory, or in Rogin’s account of American politics.

21. Analyze how national identity is constructed through difference, but also how outcasts claim membership in (and redefine) an American “we.”
22. By calling poets unacknowledged legislators, Shelley credits the worldly power of poetry, and he invents (the idea of) cultural politics in an effort to reform overtly political practices through expressive arts and cultural production. But by giving artists a public “office,” does he place an impossible or corrupting burden on them, on poetry, and all the arts? Assess the ‘office’ Shelley and/or Emerson give poets.

23. “By projecting a vision of life, poets act as ‘legislators;’ they compose an optic of vision and a framework of value that shapes both the choice and action of audiences. Isn’t this ‘political?’” -Anonymous

“Of course there is power in language, and there is a ‘politics’ in how poets re-present the world. But they do not exercise power, make rules, reform institutions, or offer programs telling us what is to be done. To call them political is to ignore most of what politics is!” -Anonymous

In what senses is poetry “political?”

24. What key ideas in the readings are essential to understanding current events, such as the politics of the current health care debate or the “tea party” movement protesting Obama.

* * *

“In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew so well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men’s lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me.”

Henry David Thoreau, from the opening to Walden
SECOND PAPER:

1. "The most self-conscious and sophisticated “theorizing” of American politics is found in our fiction, which gets at the roots of, and provides a critical perspective on, the deep assumptions, ruling myths, and master narratives that shape our politics." -Anonymous

"On the contrary, novelists in America only replicate the larger culture; even when critical of it, they portray us in traps they cannot imagine how to escape." -Anonymous

Use Melville’s fiction to address this debate about the ways that fiction criticizes and/or mirrors the culture it represents/address.

2. "Users of cultural mythology selectively rewrite myths according to their own needs and political projects. Dominant myths are always open to revision by subordinated groups." -Anonymous

"No myth is infinitely pliable; every powerful story shapes the self-reflection and action of those trying to revise and use it." -Anonymous

Analyze how Melville retells a widely shared myth or narrative.

3. "American writers emplot as tragedy the quest for freedom and redemption." Use Melville’s fiction to discuss this claim: what does it mean to write a “tragedy?” Why is it difficult or surprising to write a tragedy about people in a democratic society? In what lies the tragedy?

Use Melville’s fiction to discuss this claim: “great American critics speak in defiance of their time, but always to redeem the American dream.”

4. Use one Melville text (or passage in it) to assess how we make sense of the world, how we make social life, history, or nature both intelligible and meaningful.

5. "Since reality is not self-evident, interpretation is central to politics; positioned differently in society, we disagree about reality, as characters do about the doubloon. Citizenship means recognizing that we must make interpretations, that we bear different perspectives, and that we always are partly blind. ‘Monomaniacs’ deny this." -Anonymous

"But surely Melville’s fiction tells truths about ourselves and our world that we deny - at our peril. Some people see the world rightly, and others are blind. Some see the woe or the domination, and others deny it to keep their willful innocence. Melville is a truth-teller against inclinations toward self-denial that characterize nations as much as individuals." -Anonymous

Use a Melville text to engage this debate about truth.

6. Analyze how one Melville text theorizes the problem of becoming free, and thus the meaning of "freedom."

7. "Melville’s characters seem fated, driven and constrained -unfree- just like us." -Anonymous

"No, they are agents making choices, just like us." -Anonymous

Assess what Melville teaches about fate & freedom.
9. Relate what a text teaches and how it teaches.

10. Use a text to ask: what is (our) democracy for?

11. Assess gender—the symbolic meaning of masculine & feminine— in one text: what work do such tropes do and with what consequences?

12. Assess the figuration of homosexual desire in one text and explore its larger political purposes.

13. In what ways is Moby Dick “about” politics?

14. In what ways is Moby Dick thinking about the meaning of democracy?

15. D.H. Lawrence and Richard Slotkin depict Moby Dick as narrating the meaning and fate of “America.” How so? What is your judgment?

16. Depict your views of Bartleby and of the Lawyer as you assess the impact on you of Melville’s story about their relationship. What does this pairing mean; what divisions does it dramatize? What do you think the story is “about” and how do you interpret its “moral”? (Does it concern capitalism and its psychic meaning?) What is the meaning (for the lawyer and for us) of Bartleby’s refusals unto death? Is he a monomaniac with a problem or a truth-teller and rebel to admire? Is Melville suggesting that no redemption is possible? Does the story drive us toward the lawyer, and what kind of fate is that? Why can’t the two be reconciled?

17. Use “Benito Cereno” to depict how the story works, as readers take on Delano’s perspective (both his innocence and his racism) until they realize that he is not reliable. What is accomplished by putting readers through this experience?

18. Use “Benito Cereno” to discuss the problem of freedom in a society governed by inequality or slavery. What are the roles to be played? How does (racial) inequality produce masquerades? Is it possible to get free of them? What are we to conclude from Babo, a character who never gives an account of his own experience? Do you identify with him, with Delano, or with whom? Can readers be outside this story? How, where?
**study questions for Morrison, Beloved**

**Notice the epigraph, which quotes Paul quoting Hosea: what is the meaning of saying, I will call her beloved who was unloved....? Also interpret the dedication (60 million and more...)

**Notice: the novel occurs in 1876, at the end of the first reconstruction, narrating events from 19 years before; it is written in 1987, after a second "reconstruction" and backlash against it. What is the novel saying about race relations? About the issues facing the African-American community?**

1. What constitutes slavery? (And conversely, what is freedom? Does your encounter with slavery in this book change your view of freedom?)

2. How do the characters imagine freedom? Is freedom doing what you want when you want? What does the book suggest about the emersonian vision of self-making? If no one is born free, and freedom is an achievement, in relation to what forces manifested how?)

3. What is the legacy of slavery for the characters? How does a slave past make "becoming free" difficult? How does a "past" haunt or control a present? Is freedom possible if the past rules the present? Can we ever make the past "past?"

4. Why does Sethe kill her child? Was she "justified?" Was she "prideful?" In what sense is her action "free?" Is it heroic for a slave woman to claim the right to be a mother -even if that means killing your child?

5. How do you feel at the prospect of Sethe, Paul D, and Denver making a new family, a new life, a future together?

6. What does haunting by a ghost signify? Who is this ghost made flesh?

7. What is the relationship between Sethe and Beloved? What is each seeking in and through the other? Is it a healthy healing relationship?

8. What do we learn from the monologues spoken by Sethe and Beloved?

9. How/why is the ghost exorcized? How does Sethe feel about "losing" Beloved?

10. What is the meaning of the epilogue -of the deliberate forgetting? What is the meaning of the repeated final lines: it is not a story to pass on... (think of "pass on" as, it is not a story to ignore, and, it is not a story to bequeath -in what sense are both interpretations true?)

11. What does it mean that “Beloved” is the last word?
Ask: why retell the (exodus) dream of emancipation, of deliverance from captivity, of starting over? Where does this retelling leave the characters, and/or the readers?

Ask: why does the novel compel us to contact, to have a virtually physical experience of slavery, its traumas, its haunting of the present? Is the point to bring readers to FACE, simply to face, what they would forget? Is the point to HEAL the trauma the past represents? Does the novel raise the dead to bury them properly? Or does it show that to be impossible?

Ask: WHO does the novel address? The epigraph says “I will call them my people ...” If the I in this passage by Paul is God, who is the I here? Does Morrison address African-Americans specifically? Does she address Americans in general about an African-American experience? How does the novel, that is, relate the part and the whole, the group and the nation? Also, is the experience of being "haunted" by a painful past EXEMPLARY for ALL “Americans?” But if you say that Sethe can stand in for anyone, are you denying or erasing the particularity of her experience?

Broader Questions:

1. Say the novel is about freedom, or the dream of emancipation: Where does "freedom" appear in the book? How does it appear? In what acts is it manifest? What is the novel teaching about freedom, especially to a culture that believes the myth of self-making and starting over?


3. People are haunted by the past: is it even possible to get "free" of the past? (How!) Is the goal to get free FROM the past OR, to come-to-terms with it? Is the goal redemption from the past, or redemption OF the past, is the goal escaping the past, or making it a meaningful? If the goal is coming-to-terms with the past, or “acceptance,” as Baldwin says, HOW?

4. Does the novel offer “redemption” or rebirth to its character? To its readers? Does it defeat our wish for redemption? Does it redefine redemption?

5. In the novel, is there a single point of view about the past or present? How is the "truth" of the past known or learned? For that matter, how is this text itself to be known?

6. Imagine the text as a parable that makes us, or reveals us to be, makers of meaning. Imagine that the practice of interpretation is a crucial part of our freedom, a sign of it, a kind of action. Where do you see interpretation IN the text, among the characters? How does the design or art of text compel or invite interpretation -active participation- by readers?

7. No single narrative line, no omniscient narrator, no self-evident truth about the past and present - is this art and or is this life? Is it a view of politics, too? Is the goal of a democracy, as Paul D. says, "to lay our stories next to each other?"
study questions: Crenshaw

1. Characterize the key differences between Crenshaw and Martin Luther King. (What has changed since 1963 or 1968?)

2. What do you think about the ideal of "formal equality," that is, of individuals "equal before the law" and "ruled by law," i.e. by an impartial or objective legal process. Is the violation of this ideal the problem, as MLK once argued? Or, as Crenshaw argues, is the ideal itself part of racial domination? Clarify: HOW is the ideal of objective legal process part of the problem??

3. Is "racism" a self-evident truth -or an interpretation of evidence (ghettoes, segregation, beatings, inequality) open to OTHER interpretations? Is the politics of the last thirty years about facing the truth of racism as a fact or is it about trying to advance one story and interpretation of how we live against other stories and interpretations of how we live?

4. Do we live in one nation, or two? What does it mean to suggest we live in two?? Or are both statements true?

5. How should we - who? - narrate Rodney King and the LA riots? What alternate stories ARE there? How do you assess which to believe, decide which to persuade others to adopt?

6. What is the implication of Crenshaw's argument - should the two stories she describes (objective legal process and racial domination) be “laid next to each other,” to quote Morrison’s novel, or does the story of racial domination need to be advanced, and the story of legal objectivity discredited? Is Crenshaw’s goal to make room for the domination story, or to displace the dominant one about neutral legal process??

Specific discussion questions:

1. Is there an inherent meaning to the videotape of Rodney King being beaten?
(Everyone agrees: he IS being beaten. But how do we interpret it? Is it inherently self-evident that this is brutality - or self-defense by police acting justifiably? What does Crenshaw end up saying? At first, she says: to see “self-defense” by police the tape must be “dis-aggregated,” which “distorts” its real meaning. But THEN she says: what we see depends on our “background narrative;” the meaning of the tape is a matter of attribution depending on interpretation. Does the meaning inhere to the object, to the tape or the event, which we see truly or incorrectly? Does the meaning depend on background narrative? What is the implication of making one argument rather than the other?

2. Is there an inherent meaning to police brutality?
(Everyone agrees, the police can be brutal. Is brutality an anomaly, an unfortunate but increasingly rare act of “discrimination,” an exception in a regime increasingly ruled by color-blind law? In this view, the law is a transcendent rule, protecting all alike, and enforced by police, who are sometimes biased. If the problem is bias then the solution is sensitivity training.) Or on the contrary, is violence an ongoing reality, not an exception, because the problem is not “discrimination” but occupation of one community by another? Then the solution is not sensitivity training FOR the police but community control OF the police (and other institutions.)

How do you weigh these different narratives? What counts as a better story? (Is one more true? Crenshaw insists she is NOT a relativist because she does not think all stories are equally valid.)

3. When african-americans take to the streets in South-Central, are they enacting a “riot” or an “insurrection”? If a different background narrative explains what
the event IS, what follows from saying one rather than the other? (This parallels the idea that no meaning is inherent in the video: a man is being beaten, buildings are being burned, but what is the meaning of these acts? Who decides? How?)

4. When Morrison’s Paul D depicts people “laying stories next to each other” Crenshaw lays a story of insurrection next to a story of riot, a story of police self-defense next to a story of brutality, a story of unfortunate anomaly to the rule of law next to a story of ongoing occupation. What is the point of this? Is the point mutual understanding of the experiences behind different background narratives? To contest the dominant one by asserting the subordinated one? Is Crenshaw trying to get whites to “accept” that we still live in two nations?

5. If actors have different power is laying stories next to each other enough?
THIRD PAPER

1. By calling poets unacknowledged legislators, Shelley credits the worldly power of literary art, and he invents (the idea of) cultural politics in an effort to reform overtly political practices through expressive arts and cultural production. But by giving artists a public “office,” does he place an impossible or corrupting burden on them and their art? Does he confuse the power of language with “politics,” which involves rules, institutions, and coercion of various kinds? Use Morrison’s novel to assess the ‘office’ Shelley and/or Emerson give “poets.”

2. “The most self-conscious and sophisticated “theorizing” of American politics is found in our fiction, which gets at the roots of, and which provides a critical perspective on, the deep assumptions, ruling myths, and master narratives that shape our politics.” A.nonymous

“No, novelists only replicate the larger culture; even when critical of it, they portray traps they cannot imagine how to escape.” B.nonymous

Use Beloved to address this debate about the ways that fiction mirrors and/or criticizes the culture it represents/address.

3. “American writers emplot as tragedy the quest for freedom and redemption.” Use Beloved to discuss this claim: What does it mean to write a “tragedy?” Why is it difficult/surprising to write a tragedy about (ex) slaves in a democratic society? In what lies the tragedy?

4. Analyze how Beloved theorizes (or dramatizes) the problem of becoming free, and thus the meaning of “freedom.”

5. “Sethe seems fated, driven, constrained -unfree- like us.”-A.nonymous

“No, she is an agent making choices, just like us.” B.nonymous

Assess what Beloved teaches about fate & freedom.

6. Relate what Morrison’s novel teaches and how it teaches.

7. “Beloved is about the effort to redeem the suffering and crimes of the past, and, by the story it tells and the language it uses, the novel itself redeems this history and those who bear it. This is what art (and politics) must do.” -A.nonymous

“Sethe and Beloved seek redemption, but the novel -by dramatizing what is self-defeating in their quest, and by refusing to redeem the history it retells- confronts this key wish and trope in American culture.” -B.nonymous

Analyze how Beloved dramatizes, enacts, or troubles our faith in the redemptive power of love, art, or language.

8. Explore how Morrison addresses the place and meaning of gender as shaped by race and patriarchy. (Focus on: motherhood, mother-daughter relations, the ways that female bodies are marked and used, figurations of breasts and milk; gendered dimensions of freedom, etc.)

9. James Baldwin: “My inheritance was specifically limited and limiting; my birthright was vast, connecting me to all lives, and to everyone, forever. But one cannot claim the birthright without accepting the inheritance.” Explore how Beloved relates the particular and the universal

10. Use Beloved to assess how people make sense of the world, how we make history, circumstances or nature intelligible and meaningful.
12. "Since reality is not self-evident, interpretation is central to politics; positioned differently in society, we disagree about reality, as characters do about the doubloon. Citizenship means recognizing that we must make interpretations, that we bear different perspectives, and that we always are partly blind." -Anonymous

"Morrison’s fiction tells truths about ourselves and our world that we deny -at our peril. Some people see the world rightly, and others keep their willful innocence. Morrison is a truth-teller against forms of blindness that characterize nations and individuals."-Anonymous

Use Beloved (or Baldwin) to engage this debate about truth.

13. Since we inherit not 'the' past but a story representing it, a democracy must multiply the perspectives and voices that narrate the past. That’s the point of Williams and Morrison!" -Anonymous

“NO! We inherit a past whose meaning we deny; we must get the right story about what matters most in our past or we remain imprisoned by it. That’s their point!”-Anonymous

Explore the politics of narration

14. 
"...we have no other choice; we must go back to the beginning; it must all be done over..." William Carlos Williams In the American Grain

"It is for us the living...to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far nobly advanced ... that these dead shall not have died in vain." -Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

"It is not a story to pass on." Toni Morrison

Analyze how Beloved relates the past, and freedom in the present.

15. For Baldwin and Morrison, the only way to avoid repeating the past is to come-to-terms with it and take responsibility for it, but Obama now argues that such efforts only tie people to injury and recrimination, and preclude making the future differently. Enter this debate about the past and its power.

16. "Formal rights, the impersonal rule of law, and ideals of objectivity are said to characterize a constitutional democracy, but in fact are the mask and instrument of domination." Discuss by using Crenshaw, Baldwin or Morrison.

17. For Baldwin, "white" Americans intend Blacks to perish, but "innocence" is their worst crime. While they associate the loss of innocence with corruption, he makes losing innocence a condition of adulthood and freedom. But (a) what does it mean to insist that others live by willful blindness, by disavowing what they know but refuse to take responsibility for? What kind of claim precludes any credible way to argue back? Is it ever necessary to make such claims about willful innocence? Are they ever effective, persuasive? And (b) what does it mean to make loss of innocence the key to adulthood?

18. In its form and content, Beloved presents the idea of “laying stories next to each other,” and thus a democratic aesthetic and politics. Crenshaw, in contrast, depicts a world of unequal groups struggling for power. How might you understand and relate these two perspectives?