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 and through the literary art of novelists and poets. Moreover, academic and journalistic writing about politics typically presents a world that seems antithetical to the world presented by our writers: one depicts rational bargaining and self-interested contracts among men in markets and legislatures, whereas the other depicts racial and sexual violence, in domestic spaces or on "the frontier." One depicts rationality and progress, the other madness, despair, tragedy. The literature thus makes visible what is made invisible by prevailing forms of political science, by canonized political thought, by typical political speech and by dominant media—not only forms of domination like race and gender, but also the deep narrative forms that structure the culture. Our goal, then, is to explore how American literary art articulates what is unspeakable and unspoken in the culture, and to trace political correlates to these literary acts of bearing witness. How do literary artists retell the stories Americans tell themselves about themselves? How does literary art re-orient people toward the assumptions, practices, and tropes that rule their world and govern what "American" means? How does it help us re-think what we call politics?

Course Requirements:
* Attendance is mandatory: un-excused absences hurt your grade
* Preparation for class is presumed
* a one-page response paper on the readings each week
* one 5-page critical essay
* one longer project, developed with me, due at last class (draft earlier)
* grading: response papers 25%; participation 25%; essays 25% x 2; but improvement in writing and/or participation also counts

Required texts in order of use:
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America volume two (Vintage)
Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (Harper)
Jacques Ranciere, Dis-Agreement (Minnesota)
Norman O. Brown, Love's Body (Vintage - purchase individually through Amazon)
Margaret Atwood, Handmaid's Tale (Anchor)
Toni Morrison, Paradise (Knopf)
Phillip Roth, Human Stain (Vintage)
Tony Kushner, Angels in America Parts One & Two (TCG)
and (to order individually through Amazon:
Barati Mukherjee, Jasmine OR
Chang-Rae Lee, Native Speaker OR
Lan Cao, Monkey Bridge OR
Gloria Anzaldua, Borderlands

Recommended Texts for longer projects:
Norman Mailer, Why Are We In Vietnam (Picador - bookstore)
Thomas Pynchon, Vineland (Harper - bookstore)
Toni Morrison, A Mercy (Knopf - bookstore)
Michael Rogin, Ronald Reagan, The Movie (Univ California)
various movies.....

plagiarism policy: the use of the words or work of others without attribution is punishable by an F in the course. If you have ANY question about what counts as plagiarism (i.e. what resources, work, or passages you should cite) please ask for clarification!!
1/29 Introduction
#1
read:
* Emile Durkheim, "What is a Social Fact?"
* William Adams, “Political Poetics”
* Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation (excerpts/xerox)
* Herman Melville, excerpt on Manifest Destiny
* Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address & Second Inaugural
* Robert Hayden, “Frederick Douglass”
* Barack Obama, Second Inaugural

2/5 Democracy as/and despotism

2/12 Cold War Paranoia and Narratives of Politics

Optional project:
* view/interpret "The Manchurian Candidate" using assorted secondary readings
* use Tocqueville, Mills, Rogin (& others) to update “democratic despotism”
#4
read:  * Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
 * Jonathan Lear, “The Shrink Is In”
write:  * how does the novel dramatize a political question through plot, metaphor, and/or character?
 * does the novel advance a view of or stance toward politics?
 * Assess the meaning of a female heroine named Oedipa.
 * where does the novel push/leave the reader?
 * are practices of “reading” related to practices of citizenship?

Optional project:
 * read Pynchon’s post-60s Vineland & compare to Lot 49
 * analyze (political) paranoia using psycho-analytic and narrative theories

2/26 Insides & Outsides II: defining/doing radical/democratic politics

#5
read:  * Stokely Carmichael, “What we Want”
 * SDS, anti-war speeches
 * Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics”
 * Staughton Lynd, “Coalition Politics or Non-Violent Revolution?”
 * Jacques Ranciere, *Dis-Agreement*
write:  * how do sixties critics relate race, empire, and nation?
 * Where does “politics” occur? What defines “the political”?
 * Why does Rustin distinguish “protest” & “politics”? Why does Lynd fear electoral/legislative politics? How do they invoke democracy but reveal different aspects/meanings?
 * Is “politics” a distinctive aspect of every activity/institution or a specific practice tied to citizenship? Both?
 * Weigh Ranciere’s distinction of “the political” & “the police.”
 * Compare Tocqueville and Ranciere on democracy & politics

optional project:
 * compare different theories of the political and democratic, e.g. Goodwyn on social movement, Mills on publics, Tocqueville on association, Lynd on non-violent revolution, etc. Do literary works shed light on these comparisons?

3/5 From the Demos to the Dionysian

#6
read:  * Norman O. Brown *Love’s Body*
 * Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy”
write:  * What is Brown’s purpose?
 * Does Brown erase all boundaries/distinctions or expose artifice?
 * How does Brown relate politics, psyche, and poetry?
 * How ARE the personal and the political body related?
 * How does he undermine/enable collective responsibility/action?
 * A dionysian force, democracy is ONLY an episodic interruption of all regimes, including those claiming to be democratic?

Optional project:
 * relate poetry -e.g. Allan Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich or spoken word- & politics
 * Explore how Brown follows Blake, the greatest “prophet against empire.”
 * Compare visions of democracy as interruptive and as institution-building.
 * Compare Brown to other psycho-analytic theories of politics.

FRIDAY 3/8 ---- 5-page paper due by 5pm

3/12 From politics as citizenship to politics as gender (dis)identification
#7
read: * Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality”
* Alice Echols, “The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics”
* Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”
view: * “Thelma & Louise”
write: * Compare how Rich and Butler theorize patriarchy &/or feminism.
* How does T&L perform/repeat/revise gender constructions?
* How does T&L remake male genres (frontier/western/buddy)?
* How does T&L repeat/remake an “American” identity?

3/19
Break
3/26
Backlash I

#8
read: * Margaret Atwood, Handmaid’s Tale
* Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?”
write: * what (national/political/biblical) stories does Atwood retell?
* what is the novel’s view of patriarchy and feminism?
* What does the novel teach about freedom: why do women lose their freedom? In what ways and senses is Ofred “free”?
* How do you interpret the (meaning of the) ending?

Optional project:
* explore how feminists theorize democracy/politics/nation
* Read Linda Zerilli, The Abyss of Freedom, using Arendt to rethink feminism
* use other novels/films/theory to trace the difference entailed by female protagonists/narratives.

4/2
Backlash II: the grip of white supremacy
#9
read: * Loic Waquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration”
* Kimberlee Crenshaw, “Real Justice/Reel Time”
* Toni Morrison, Paradise
write: * How has the racial system changed since the civil rights era?
* Why does racialized inequality persist?
* how is “narrative” related to racial politics?
* assess how M’s novel disrupts racial (& gender) categories.
* How do race and gender intersect in this novel?
* How does M’s novel retell narratives of liberation/emancipation?

Optional project:
* compare Morrison’s Paradise to Beloved, A Mercy, or to other novels on race.
* explore critical race theory
* compare Spike Lee (“Bamboozled”) and Quentin Tarrantino (“Django”) to examine the representation of blacks and blackness in film.
4/9
Backlash III: culture war and literary art
#10
read:
* Phillip Roth, Human Stain
* Eve Kossofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid/Reparative Reading”
write:
* How does HS dramatize the meaning of individualism?
* How does HS dramatize the meaning of inherited group identity?
* How does HS dramatize culture war and depict the new right?
* Assess Roth’s representation of gender (and feminism).

Optional project:
* Relate Human Stain to American Pastoral

4/16
gay rights and the idea of a progressive nationalism
#11
read:
* Tony Kushner, Angels In America Part One and Part Two
* Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy”
write:
* How does A in A represent the meaning of the AIDS epidemic?
* How does A in A dramatize the meaning of citizenship?
* Why is Roy Cohn such a powerful character?
* What is the role of prophecy in the plays?
* Assess Kushner’s attachment to “America”

Optional project:
* explore arguments among queer theorists/activists about marriage, and so about inclusion into normative citizenship.
* use different texts/media to explore grief and mourning in politics.

4/23
Natives & Immigrants
#12
read:
* Gloria Anzaldua, Borderlands
or
* Barati Mukherjee, Jasmine
or
* Chang-Rae Lee, Native Speaker
or
* Lan Cao, Monkey Bridge

4/30
#13
read:
* Wayne Booth, “Metaphor as Rhetoric”
* Sean McCann, “Do You Believe In Magic?”
* Sadiya Hartman, “Fugitive Justice”

5/6
#14
last class/taking stock/final essays due