A specifically “modern” politics seems to overthrow the authority of god, church, and tradition— in the name of freedom. In turn, self-determination in its personal and political senses seems to mean an ongoing “democratic experiment” that allows or encourages people to question and contest the authority of social practices, laws, and norms. Canonical political theorists from Rousseau to Marx gave modernity this democratic meaning against traditional forms of authority and the authority of tradition, against deference, ascribed identity, and forms of inequality or exclusion. But significant figures in “modern political thought” have also profoundly questioned this romance of emancipation. Some theorists have explored what could be called the paradox of authority: we deny the authority of a idea, institution, or person by withdrawing our assent, but we can refuse allegiance only by also investing our assent in alternate commitments. Authority is then inescapable, and the authority of some commitments (equality, participation) are a condition of democratic life. At the same time, some theorists explored how democratic forms in Europe were entwined with slavery and colonization as specifically modern forms of authority and domination. Some theorists showed how self-determination among enfranchised citizens actually produced mass conformity and political docility, while other theorists focused on the difficulties that colonized peoples faced in struggling for their freedom. If modern politics was animated by a narrative promising movement from domination to emancipation, a significant chorus of modern political theorists have questioned it. In political, cultural and psychological terms, in metropolitan and colonial scenes, and through a variety of genres, they disclosed new, “modern,” forms of subjection, while re-imagining the meaning and conditions of human freedom.

As we bring the concept of authority, the idea of modernity, and arguments about democracy into conversation, we thus will ask: in what ways is democracy a contest about axioms, ideas, and practices, and in what ways does that very contest have enabling conditions and require certain commitments on our part? We also ask: how are people shaped as individual subjects by the authority of parents, and by the authority of ruling ideas about, for instance, rights, gender, and moral agency? What hidden forms of authority enable people to act as subjects and citizens capable of self-determination? What commitments are entailed in or even required by practices of freedom?
Learning Goals:
* close reading of texts
* writing critical essays that use textual evidence to address themes
* speaking in collaborative and conversational ways about contested topics
* beginning to understand “politics” and the canon of political theory

Required Texts in order of use:
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America volume 2 (Vintage)
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy
Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good & Evil
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals
Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Grand Inquisitor
Franz Kafka, The Penal Colony & Other stories
Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Genealogy of Morals
Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals
Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Grand Inquisitor
Franz Kafka, The Penal Colony & Other stories
Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents
Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love
Franz Fanon, Wretched of the Earth
Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition
xeroxed packet supplied by instructor

Course Requirements
- attendance is mandatory: we meet only once a week; unexcused absences count against your grade
- preparation of assigned texts is presumed
- a 1-page (typed) response to readings each week (questions in syllabus)
- two 5-page essays about course texts (a third essay is optional)
- a final optional project relating course texts to a current event/issue

Grading:
- response papers 25%
- participation 25%
- essays 25% x 2 = 50% (improvement in writing also counts)

* plagiarism -using content you do not attribute to its actual source- is punished by an F in the course. If you have ANY questions about what counts as plagiarism (i.e. what resources, passages, or work you should cite) please ask for clarification!

* Policy on electronics: I expect all cell-phones to be turned off and put out of sight and reach. Laptop use is not allowed unless the student has learning difficulties that require it.

* We will take a break half-way through class for 10 minutes.
class schedule:

1/27
#1 introduction: the modern romance of emancipation
read:
* John Winthrop, “Speech to the General Court”
* Karl Marx, excerpts from early writings

2/3
#2 Tocqueville I: democratic despotism
read:
* Tocqueville, Democracy in America Vol 1 (xerox)
* Tocqueville, Democracy/vol.2
  Book I: chaps 1,2
  Book II: chaps 1,2,10-16,20
  Book III: chap 21
  then
  Book I: chap 5 and 20
  Book II: chaps 4-5,7-8,17
  Book III: chaps 8-12
* Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance
write:
* How does T define democracy? What does he mean by “equality”? 
* How does T envision and locate “political liberty”? 
* How/why does (pursuit of) “equality” threaten “liberty”? 
* What is “individualism”? Why/how a problem? 
* What is “democratic despotism”? 
* What is the problem with the authority of public opinion? 
* What is “association”? how a verb & noun? How does “association” mitigate despotism? 
* How would Tocqueville critique Emerson? How could E respond?

2/10
#3 Tocqueville II: retelling emancipation as tragedy
read:
* Tocqueville, vol. 2, Book IV: chaps 1-3,6-8
* Michael Rogin, “Political Repression” (xerox)
* Sheldon Wolin, Democracy without the citizen
write:
* How/why is the state a problem for T? Why only a threat to political liberty, not also a resource those seeking it? 
* How does Rogin on race/exclusion amend T on demo despotism? 
* how is “democracy” related to demonized difference? 
* How does Wolin echo or revise Tocqueville?

FIRST PAPER DUE: Friday feb 16 5pm

2/17
#4 Nietzsche I: Re-imagining authority and democracy
read:
* Nietzsche, “Homer’s Contest” (xerox)
* The Birth of Tragedy
  Sections 1-4,7-10,12-15,18,23-25
  then "Attempt at Self-Criticism"
write:
* What is “tragedy” (as a dramatic form)? what is “tragic”?
* Define the “Dionysian” and “Appolonian” - why affirm both?
* How is the institution of tragedy related to the polis as a participatory political community?
* How is philosophy (Socrates/Plato) related to tragedy? Why is Nietzsche so critical of “the theoretical man”?

2/24
#5
Nietzsche II: the death of god & theistic substitutes

read:
* The Gay Science, excerpts/xerox

write:
* what is it we men of knowledge don’t know?
* How does N question “truth” and defend “perspective optics”?
* How does N revise the way we think about “morality”?
* how does N address the question of WHAT we value and the “value” of our values?
* why is he critical of democratic revolution and equality?
* What does N value?
* How does N see his philosophical/cultural/political role?

3/3
#6
Nietzsche III: Genealogy of Modern Culture

read:
* Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, first & second essays (entire); third essay (sects 9-28)

write:
* what is the origin (and value) of morality
* Assess the difference between “noble” and “slave” moralities?
* what does N think is happening in modernity?
* What is “the ascetic ideal” and how is it secularized?
* What is N’s project in relation to the “will to truth”?

3/10
#7
Democratizing Nietzsche

read:
* Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, excerpts
* William Connolly, “The Order of Modernity” & “Nietzsche: Politics and Homesickness” in Political Theory & Modernity
* Connolly, “Democracy & Normalization” in Politics & Ambiguity

write:
* Assess How/why Connolly uses N for democratic purposes?

SPRING BREAK

3/24
#8
Fictions of Modern despotism

read:
* Fyodor Dostoevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor”
* Franz Kafka, ”In the Penal Colony”
write: * How are themes in Nietzsche dramatized by Franz &/or Fyodor?
* assess the difference between “arguing” about a “crisis of authority,” like Schaar, and dramatizing it in “fiction”?

SECOND PAPER DUE Friday 3/27
3/31
#9
Psychoanalysis I
read:
* Jonathan Lear, “The Shrink Is In” (xerox)
* Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams (excerpt)
* Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents
write:
* Identify Freud’s central claims about the human condition
* How/why do dreams matter? What do dreams tell us? How do dreams figure in Freud’s theory?
* What is Freud’s relationship to “authority?”
* How does Freud explain/view aggression & guilt? What is his solution?

4/7
#10
Psychoanalysis II: revising Freud
read:
* Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death (xerox)
* Carl Schorske, Michael Rogin etc
* Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic In Women” (xerox)
write:
* How does Brown affirm and yet also revise “Freud”?
* Is psychoanalysis a flight from politics? How so/not?
* Why must feminists draw on psychoanalytic theory?

4/14
#11
Psychoanalysis III: revising Freud
read:
* Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love
  introduction, chapters 1,3,4,6

4/12
#11
de-centering Europe: Race, Empire, and de-colonization
read:
* Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (xerox excerpt)
* Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth
  (read chaps 1,3,4 and then the preface by Sartre)
* Anne Norton, “Fanon’s Revolutionary Rhetoric”
* David Scott, “Tragedy’s Time”
write:
* Does Fanon theorize authority, or only domination?
* Does Fanon see a psychological dimension in domination?
* How does Fanon imagine emancipation?
* Do our readings resonate in Fanon’s texts?

4/28
#13
Recovering the political
read:
* Hannah Arendt, “between past and future”(x)
* Arendt, “understanding and politics”
* Arendt, “collective responsibility
* Arendt, from The Life of the Mind (x)
* Arendt, “Action” (from The Human Condition)
* Arendt, “What is Freedom”

5/5
#14    authority and democracy
read:    * Bonnie Honig, “Declarations of Independence”
         * George Shulman “Thinking authority democratically”

FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY May 8 by 5pm
Authority and Modernity

First Paper: due Friday Feb 16 by 5pm
Write a 5-page, typed, double-spaced essay on one question:

1. "Subjection to authority never yields freedom." -A.nonymous

    "True freedom is exercised in relation to the right kind of authority."-B.nonymous

    "But what kind of authority is that?" -C.nonymous

    Use the readings to assess the relation of authority & freedom

2. Analyze Tocqueville's claims about the axiomatic assumptions made by people in a "democratic age." Is he correct in identifying the assumptions, and is he correct about their consequences? (You can use Emerson &/or Marx to develop a response.)

3. Tocqueville distinguishes kinds of authority: the authority of public opinion or the state generate subjugation, he argues, but the authority of god, of conscience, or of constitutional rights, in contrast, generate personal and political liberty. Analyze how and why he (like Winthrop) distinguishes between good or true authority and bad or corrupt authority. Is this distinction credible? Is even good or true authority problematic (and how so?) Is the distinction still useful for theorizing democracy? Why?

4. Use Tocqueville to explore where authority is (and should be) lodged in a democracy: majority rule, constitutional law, locality, nation-state? Is there no one answer but political contest/cases?

5. Assess T’s claim: "if they would be free they must have faith." Faith in what, practiced how? Do Emerson &/or Marx (dis) agree?

6. Assess T’s claim: "Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without [religious] faith." What are his arguments? How does he relate faith & morality to character-shaping and political virtues? Why must a democratic culture be anchored this way? What does he fear? Is the task is not to get free of faith, as if that were possible, but to find a faith that fosters freedom? Is the question not whether faith, but which? How so?

7. "Tocqueville is right: Individualism generates submission to the authority of public opinion and of the state; Americans claim to reject authority, but they end up rebellious sheep precisely because of their individualism, which promises but sabotages freedom. The key antidote is indeed political association, which counteracts the weakness of isolated individuals, the docility of the mass, and the power of the state." Assess Tocqueville’s view of individualism.
8. Are authority and freedom always antithetical, as Emerson claims, or related, as Winthrop and Tocqueville argue? Is there one right answer to this question, or does any answer require attending to context, specifics, and politics?

9. "Tocqueville is right: democratic politics requires deep cultural consensus about norms, and a constitutional framework not subject to dispute. Such 'authority' is both a limit on power and a resource for criticism."-A.nonymous

"As any excluded group knows, cultural authority (like religion or gender norms) is a form of domination. In a truly democratic society, people do and can revise the framework of assumptions and norms that shapes & governs them."-B.nonymous

Explore how a constitutional/cultural framework can be a problem and/or a resource.

10. Is T right that “democracy” levels downward, as people demand comfort, uniformity, and security? Is this what “democracy” means in practice? Does T offer another vision of what it does/ might mean?

11. Assess T’s depiction of democratic despotism and his antidotes.

12. For Tocqueville, people who worship public opinion are also "a flock of timid and industrious animals" guided and gratified by their state. Assess this image of "mass society." [What is it meant to represent? In what sense is it true? Is it deceptive but useful? Is it a dangerous projection of other fears? What would Rogin say?]

13. Tocqueville endorses the confinement of women, whose virtue, he says, is responsible for the "success of the republic." He also renders the state and public opinion as a feminine power out of place, a maternal authority that emasculates men, whose freedom he calls freedom "manly." Obviously he is "sexist" but: assess the meaning & use of sexual difference or gender in his text

14. 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 that must be learned to counteract the "natural propensities" of "men" in a democratic era.

15. Tocqueville does not theorize “capitalism,” but democracy means propertied/acquisitive individualism, and a harsh “manufacturing aristocracy.” How does his account of class and aristocracy relate to his account of “democracy” and what is his solution?
16. For, Marx the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism: he calls people to withdraw assent from all traditional forms of authority, to “revolve around themselves as their own true suns,” so that “man” becomes his own “sovereign.” M & T disagree about religion, but assess their deeper difference about authority.

17. T seems a “conservative” defender of “authority,” but to sustain the art of association, the key (& radical) democratic practice. Is Wolin a “Tocquevillean” critic of the modern American regime?