American Narratives II
fall 2016: Idaem-ug 1735
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The canonical tradition of American political thought, and the canonical
tradition of American literature, seem to present antithetical accounts of
the world: 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 toward "more perfect union," whereas the other
depicts madness, despair, tragedy. The literature has always made visible
what has been hidden or normalized by prevailing forms of political speech,
media, and political thought— not only forms of domination like race and
gender, but also the deep, virtually involuntary narrative (or mythic) forms
that structure the culture. Still, some notable political moments enact "the
return of the repressed" that is usually the province of literature. The long
civil rights era (1948-68) was one such moment, and after 40 years of
retrenchment (1968-2008) we may be entering another such moment. In both
domains—the political and the literary— we explore how artists and activists
presume, test, rework or oppose the deep assumptions, norms, prevailing
practices, powerful tropes and genres that govern us. How do politics and
literature perform and/or re-think nation, narrative, and democracy?

Our goals are: First, to introduce the central forms of narrative and the
central forms of politics in post-world war two American society. That will
involve several weeks on the dimensions of "sixties radicalism" and how
activists raised previously buried issues. Second, to put American literary
art into conversation both with dominant forms of nation/narration and with
vernacular forms of radicalism. Third, to trace the long "after-life" of the
sixties in the "backlash" of the Reagan-Clinton era and in the "impasse" of
the post-9/11 era. Lastly, to explore the radical activism emergent during
the presidency of Obama, and, how literary artists dramatize its meaning.

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 early in semester
* one longer (10-15 page) project, developed with me
* grading: response papers 25%; participation 20%; 1st essay 20%; project 35%.

Required texts (in order of use) available at bookstore
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (Penguin)
Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (Harper)
Norman Mailer, Why are We In Vietnam? (Used copies available
bookstore/amazon)
Jonathan Lear, Radical Hope (Harvard)
Toni Morrison, Paradise (Knopf)
Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric

texts ordered for projects:
Margaret Atwood, Handmaid’s Tale
Gloria Anzaldua, Borderlands/La Frontera
Phillip Roth, The Human Stain
Thomas Pynchon, Vineland
Dave Eggers, The Circle
Jonathan Lethem, Dissident Gardens
**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 (what resources, work, or passages you should cite) please ask!!!

9/8 Introduction

#1 discuss the summer packets:
* William Adams, “Political Poetics”
* Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation (excerpts/xerox)
* Michael Rogin, “political repression”
* presidential speeches

key ideas: culture, myth, narrative; American nationalism/exceptionalism; nation-empire-race; cold war liberalism and “democracy;” inherited idioms of political speech; inherited forms of critique; symbolist vs realist analysis; literature retelling national romance as tragedy

9/15 The long civil rights era: Black insurgency during the cold war era

#2 read:
* C. Wright Mills, “Power in Mass Society” (x)
* Loic Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration” (x)
* documents from SCLC, SNCC, BPP (x)
* journalistic summaries of CRM history (x)
* Stokely Carmichael, “What We Want”(x)
* Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics” (x)
* Martin Luther King, “Where Do We Go From Here?” (x)

write:
* How does Wacquant explain “race-making”
* what characterizes “white supremacy” and why does it persist?
  * identify key debates about whites, strategy & goals
* should blacks identify not nationally but globally, not as a national minority but as colonized subjects of an empire?
* Why does Rustin distinguish “protest” & “politics”?
* what has changed since these documents?

9/22 Race, Rhetoric and National Redemption

#3 read:
* James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (entire)
* James Baldwin, Interview (x)

write:
* How does B explain the meaning of “whiteness” and “blackness”?
* What does B mean by the “innocence” of whites?
* How does B explain the persistence of racialized inequality?
* Assess B’s view of: freedom; Love; Politics
* Is B salvaging the special meaning of “America”?

9/29 The New Left: re-imagining the meaning of democracy

#4 read:
* C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left” (x)
* Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement”(x)
* SDS speeches (x)
* Staugton Lynd, “Coalition Politics or Non-violent Revolution”
* Lawrence Goodwyn, “movement building” from The Populist Moment
* Michael Rogin, “In Defense of the New Left”

write:
* what is “new” about the 60s “left”?
* how do new left critics relate race, empire, and nation?
* assess the trope of “system” (real object or useful fiction?),
“revolution” (as systemic change), from “outside” vs “inside”
* What is wrong with “liberalism”? Why reject formal politics?
* Do “radicals” (Lynd) and “progressives” (Rustin) reveal and value different aspects of “democracy”?
* How/where do critics create/find “politics”? What defines it?

10/6
#5
“Paranoia” in Politics and Literature:

read:
* Ron Rosenbaum, Levittown (x)
* Richard Hofstadter, “the paranoid style” (x)
* Thomas Pynchon, The Cryng of Lot 49 (entire)
* George Shulman, essay excerpt

optional:
* Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”
* Jonathan Lear, “The Shrink Is In” (x)
* Michael Rogin, “Political Demonology” in Reagan

write:
* assess the idea of “paranoia”—is it finding &/or projecting an other, a they, a hidden reality?
* Are “other Americas” hidden in plain sight? How are the enfranchised related to these others?
* how does Lot49 use metaphors or plots to dramatize politics?
* does Lot49 advance a view of or stance toward politics?
* Assess the meaning of a female heroine named Oedipa.
* where does L49 leave readers in relation to the “estate” (i.e. “America” —and its Trystero) that they inherit?
* are practices of “reading” related to practices of citizenship?

10/13
Emergent Feminism: from citizenship to civil society, from nation to sisterhood, from citizen to outlaw

read:
* Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality” (x)
* Gayle Rubin, “The Exchange of Women” (x)
* Combahee River Collective, Statement (x)

view:
* “Thelma & Louise”

read:
* packet on film (x)

write:
* Compare how Rich/Rubin/Combahee theorize patriarchy/feminism
* how are heterosexuality (and kinship) “political” institutions?
* in what does “feminism” consist?
* with whom should women identify, and on what basis?
* How does T&L perform/repeat/revise gender construction?
* How does T&L remake male genres (frontier/western/buddy)?
* How does T&L repeat/remake an “American” identity?

First paper due MONDAY 10/17 by 10am

Monday 10/17 6pm extra credit class meeting:
lecture by James Lawson, founder of SNCC
PART TWO OF SEMESTER: -60s AFTER-LIFE, BACKLASH, AND IMPASSE

10/20 Frontier Myths die hard: Empire, race, masculinity, violence
read: * Norman Mailer, Why are We In Vietnam? (entire)
write: * how does WV “explain” Vietnam? What sort of problem is “Vietnam”
  * What is WV’s view of the frontier myth? (relate manhood, guns/hunting/violence, freedom, redemption)
  * what is the relation between DJ and Rusty?
  * what kind of character/narrator is DJ? Is he (not) Mailer?
  * does WV explain the white nationalism mobilized by Trump?
  * How does WV relate corporate life, shit, assholes, & sex
  * Explore the homosexual bond of DJ and Tex
  * How do frontier myth & savage war relate to democratic ideals?
  * Does Mailer retell the frontier romance as tragedy? Comedy?
Optional: * Allan Ginsberg, “Wichita Vortex Sutra” (x)
  * Martin Luther King, “A Time to Break Silence” (x)
optional writing: compare how Mailer, Ginsberg and King analyze the war

10/27 Empire as a Way of Life: Amnesia, Disavowal & Permanent War
read: * William Adams, “Remembering Vietnam” (x)
  * Linda Bose, “Techno-muscularity...” (x)
  * Bill Kaufman, Ain’t My America (introduction/x)
  * Barack Obama, Nobel Peace Prize speech
optional: * Michael Rogin, “Make My Day: Spectacle..in Imperial Politics” (x)
  * Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, and Politics” (xerox)
write: * Compare views of (the meaning/causes of) the Vietnam War.
  * For what reasons should we (who?) reject it?
  * Is it possible to be a “world power” AND a “democratic” society?
  * Does anti-imperial politics have enabling conditions -i.e. isolation? Pacifism? Shared austerity not individualistic consumer culture? De-centralization of power?
  * Are elites rational? deranged? Is the mass public ignorant, indifferent, amnesiac, invested in violence?
  * Do myth/symbolism merely rationalize “material interest”?
    * Compare claims of a “republic” -or a “system”- in “crisis”
  * Explore genre differences: political speech, sermon, poem, novel
11/3  Individualism, (neo)liberalism, "new right" populism  
#9  
read:  
* Tocqueville, Democracy in America (on “individualism”)  
* Cowie, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the New Deal”  
* Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism & the End of Liberal Democracy” (x)  
* Steve Fraser, “Limousine Liberalism”  
write:  
* What is neo-liberalism and how does the concept explain historical change?  
* Why did the New Deal consensus break down?  
* Assess the implications of the anti-statism that Reagan articulated  
* Assess the significance of “individualism” in American politics  
* what is “populism” in contrast to (neo)liberalism? Is it problematic?  

11/10  populism and politics II  
#10  
read:  
* readings on Occupy Wall Street and Sanders campaign  
* Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener: A Tale of Wall Street”  
* Lee Edelman, “Bartleby and the Humanities” (x)  
* Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy” (x)  
write:  
* how (by what idioms, values, memories, tropes) is opposition to inequality articulated? What does OWS “occupy” & Sanders “restore”  
  * Explore the ‘instrumental,’ ‘expressive’ and ‘pre-figurative’ in left politics: what is the purpose of collective action?  
* Should OWS use electoral & legislative politics for instrumental goals, or focus on prefigurative practice of democratic life?  
* Is “direct” vs “representative” democracy a liability or asset?  
* How do you interpret the political implications of “Bartleby” for those interested in protest, refusal, strike?  
  * in defining democracy as episodic, but not as a form of government or shared rule, is Wolin giving up too much?  

11/17  Mourning, Melancholy & Creativity in protest and politics  
#11  
read:  
* Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism” (x)  
* Jonathan Lear, Radical Hope (entire)  
write:  
* Engage the contrast between Plenty Coup and Sitting Bull: Is “surrender” to loss a capitulation to white supremacy, or a condition of possibility for making a way out of no-way?  
* Is it melancholic self-destruction to resist or deny change?  
* Is mourning (the death of a way of life—buffalo hunting or the American dream or white supremacy) the only way forward?  

11/24  Thanksgiving/class cancelled
12/01  the grip of white supremacy I
#11
read:  * Toni Morrison, *Paradise*
       * Hortense Spillers, “Momma’s Baby, Poppa’s Maybe…”
write:  * assess how the novel disrupts racial (& gender) categories
       * How do race and gender intersect in it?
       * How does it retell narratives of liberation/emancipation?
       * Assess the novel’s view of nation, nationalism, nation-building
       * where/how does the novel leave readers?

12/08  the grip of white supremacy II
#12
read:  * Kimberlee Crenshaw, “Real Justice/Reel Time”
       * Saidiyah Hartman, “Fugitive Justice”
       * Obama and Sharpton speeches at Democratic Nat’l Convention 2004
       * readings on Black Lives Matter
write:  * Why will video documentation (not) end police violence?
       * how does “narrative” underwrite racial domination -and protest?
       * How has racialized inequality persists/changned since 1968?
       * Assess BLM language and strategy in relation to prior radicalism

12/15  Genre and Democracy
#13
read:  * Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*
       * Walt Whitman ---