

David Blake
Bliss Hall, 226
OH: M 11-12:30, Th 12:30-1:50
and by appointment
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Fall 2016

LIT 280

Literature, Film, and the Art of American Politics

Required Texts:

Henry Adams, *Democracy* (Random House) 978-0375760587
Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Penguin) 978-0140186864
Joan Didion, *Democracy* (Vintage) 978-0679754855
Allen Ginsberg, *Kaddish* (City Lights) 978-0872865112
Tom Paine, *Rights of Man* (Dover) 978-0486408934
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (Graywolf) 978-1555976903
Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* (Scribner) 978-0684847504
Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (Vintage) 978-1400079490
Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 edition (Penguin) 978-0140421996

Required Films:

Frank Capra, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
John Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate*
Tim Robbins, *Bob Roberts*

Course Introduction and Objectives

People commonly think of writers and filmmakers as independent agents pursuing a muse of their own. There is a common misperception that politics and art rarely intersect, and when they do, the results are awkward and unfortunate. As we will see, however, there is a long tradition of writers being attracted to American politics, either using their works to serve a socio-political cause or finding inspiration in the political system itself. (“The United States themselves,” Walt Whitman once wrote, “are essentially the greatest poem.”) This attraction has only grown in the electronic age as filmmakers and television producers have regularly used political settings to entertain us. What many Americans do not know is that there is an even longer national tradition of politicians turning to the arts as a way of studying statecraft, learning lessons from poets, playwrights, and television shows about how to govern in a democracy. We will explore both of these traditions across an array of genres ranging from the epic poem to the realist novel to the Hollywood comedy.

Our principal objective in this course is to look at literature through the lens of politics, applying political and cultural theory to a series of creative texts which will benefit from such analysis. In the process, we will also come to understand politics as being a fundamentally creative enterprise. Selected from across three centuries, the readings in the course will demonstrate how the political imagination in the United States has been historically situated and how it has changed over time.

*Please see pg. 6 for a statement of the formal learning goals and curricular outcomes for this course.

Schedule of Readings and Discussions

Th 1 September: Politics and Aesthetics

“The Great American Mystery”

T 6 September: Adams, *Democracy*, chs. 1-9

****Remember that on this Tuesday, the College will follow a Monday schedule****

Th 8 September: Adams, *Democracy*, to end: Washington “Farewell Address” (Canvas)

Representation and Identity

M 12 September: Paine, *Rights of Man*, 97-144, 152-155 (note);
Madison, “Federalist No. 10” (Canvas)

Th 15 September: Whitman, “Song of Myself”

M 19 September: Whitman, “Song of Myself”

Public Opinion and History

Th 22 September: Chesnut, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 1-108

M 26 September: Chesnut, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 109-215

Th 29 September: Chesnut, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 215-329
Plessy vs. Ferguson, 1896 (Canvas)

M 3 October: Capra, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
Paper #1 Due

Th 6 October: Capra, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

Populism and Demagoguery

M 10 October: **No class Fall Break**

Th 13 October: Roth, *The Plot Against America*, 1-121

M 17 October: Roth, *The Plot Against America*, 122-236

**** October 18 Last Day to Register to Vote in General Election in NJ****

Th 20 October: Roth, *The Plot Against America*, 237-362

Campaigns and Celebrity

- M 24 October: **In Class Reading Quiz**
Robbins, *Bob Roberts*
- Th 27 October: Robbins, *Bob Roberts*
- M 31 October: Coover, *A Political Fable*, originally published as
"The Cat in the Hat for President" (Canvas)

"A Hard Story to Tell"

- Th 3 November: Reed, *Flight to Canada*, 1-80
- M 7 November: Reed, *Flight to Canada*, 81-180

****Tuesday 8 November: Election Day – Remember to Vote****

- Th 10 November: Didion, *Democracy*, 11-123
- M 14 November: Didion, *Democracy*, 124-239
Paper #2 Due
- Th 17 November: **No Class**

Representing Enemies

- M 21 November: Ginsberg, *Kaddish*
- Th 24 November: **No class: Thanksgiving**
- M 28 November: Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate*
- Th 1 December: **In Class Reading Quiz**
Ginsberg, *Kaddish*
Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate*
Rogin, *Ronald Reagan: The Movie*, selection (Canvas)

"An American Lyric"

- M 5 December: Rankine, *Citizen*
- Th 7 December: Rankine, *Citizen*
- TBA: Due Date Final Paper

Course Policies

- 1) The success of this course depends on your keeping-up with the reading and participating in class. On some days I will take a firm hand in guiding you through the texts; on others, I will leave the discussions open to the class. Your attendance and participation are mandatory. After two absences (regardless of the reason), your participation grade will suffer. If circumstances arise which mandate a prolonged absence, please contact the Office of Student Life (771-2201) and provide me with appropriate documentation. For more information, please see the College's Attendance Policy: <http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9134>
- 2) Written assignments: You will write two medium-length papers in this course and one longer final paper (2500 words).
- 3) All essays must be printed legibly on 8.5 x 11 white paper. They must be turned in during class on the date that they are due and also submitted to Canvas. I will reduce the grade by 10% for each 24 hour period a paper is late. Papers over 72 hours late risk failure, unless you've made prior arrangements with me.
- 4) Reading Quizzes: The course will include two announced reading quizzes that will test your recall and comprehension of course films and readings. These short-answer assessments will give help balance out the course's emphasis on papers.
- 5) The College of New Jersey prohibits students from using the same paper for two different courses *unless the student receives written permission from both instructors*. You must do all the work in this course, not someone else. Please avoid plagiarism! If you ever have questions about plagiarism or proper citation methods, please consult me. All cases of plagiarism will be referred to the Academic Integrity Officer of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. They will also result in a zero grade for the paper and/ or a failure in the course.

Academic dishonesty is any attempt by the student to gain academic advantage through dishonest means, to submit, as his or her own, work which has not been done by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment. Such dishonesty would include, but is not limited to: submitting as his/her own a project, paper, report, test, or speech copied from, partially copied, or paraphrased from the work of another (whether the source is printed, under copyright, or in manuscript form). Credit must be given for words quoted or paraphrased. The rules apply to any academic dishonesty, whether the work is graded or ungraded, group or individual, written or oral. TCNJ's academic integrity policy is available on the web:

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/integrity.html>.

- 6) The Academic Enhancement Center in Forcina Hall, room 145, is an excellent place to get help on your papers. Call The Writer's Place at 771-2895 or 771-3325 or see the hours at <http://www.tcnj.edu/~tutoring/humanities/writing.html>.
- 7) Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify the professor of this course and contact the Office of Differing Abilities Services (609-771-2571). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. TCNJ's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy is available on the web: <http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu/>.

8) The breakdown in grading percentages is:

15%	Paper 1
25%	Paper 2
25%	Reading Quizzes
25%	Final Paper
<u>10%</u>	<u>In-class performance</u>
100%	Total

10) The grading scale in this course incorporates the principle of “rounding up,” so further adjustments will not be made:

100 - 93.5 % = A	79.4 - 76.5 % = C+
93.4 - 89.5 % = A-	76.4 - 73.5 % = C
89.4 - 87.5 % = B+	73.4 - 69.5 % = C-
86.4 - 83.5 % = B	69.4 - 64.5 % = D
83.4 - 79.5 % = B-	64.4-0 % = F

11) Honors students will be required to do research for their final paper and will also participate in a presentation of their work during the Celebration of Student Achievement. Details to follow.

12) A syllabus is a plan not a contract. While we will make every effort to follow this schedule, I reserve the right to alter the due dates of assignments, to clarify and modify the nature and length of assignments, and to include unannounced assessments in order to meet the educational goals of this course.

13) Whether literature, art, music, or film, cultural expression gains some of its power from its ability to explore the extremes of human relationships. The writers and thinkers in this course address a wide range of experiences that range from the reflective to the traumatic and from the socially acceptable to the morally grotesque. If you are anxious about your personal response to these works, you should consider whether this course is appropriate for you. My expectation is that every student will complete every one of the assigned readings and be prepared to listen to discussions about them in class.

14) Please feel free to come by my office if you have questions you’d like to ask about the class. The best way to contact me is by e-mail – blake@tenj.edu. I check my mail regularly and expect you to do the same.