

David Blake
OH: M, Th 2-3:20 *and by appointment*
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Fall 2020

LIT 280

Literature, Film, and the Art of American Politics

Required Texts:

James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "Notes on a Native Son" (Canvas)
Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Penguin) 978-0140186864
Joan Didion, *Democracy* (Vintage) 978-0679754855
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (Graywolf) 978-1555976903
Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (Vintage) 978-1400079490
Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 edition (Penguin) 978-0140421996
Sunil Yapa, *Your Heart is a Muscle the Size of a Fist* (Back Bay) 978-0-316-38655-5

Required Films:

John Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate* (Canvas)
Elia Kazan, *A Face in the Crowd* (Canvas)
Anna Deveare Smith, *Notes from the Field* (Canvas)

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 and realist novel to Hollywood thrillers and documentary theater.

After surveying many of you over the summer, I know how important recent events are to your expectations for this course. The syllabus reflects the topics you and your classmates deemed the most important in light of rising authoritarianism, a disorienting media environment, systemic racism, police violence against African Americans, and escalating protest movements. Our principal objective in this course is to look at literature and film 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, I hope you will come to understand politics as being a fundamentally creative enterprise. At the same time, I have designed the course to facilitate careful reflection about the many crises facing us today.

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

Schedule of Readings and Discussions

Th 27 August: Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (Canvas)

Citizenship and Identity

M 31 August: Whitman, Preface to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*; "Song of Myself"

Th 3 September: Whitman, "Song of Myself"

T 8 September: Whitman, "Song of Myself"; Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (Canvas)

****Remember: TCNJ will follow a Monday schedule on this Tuesday****

Th 10 September: Rankine, *Citizen*, 1-79

M 14 September: Rankine, *Citizen*, 80-161

Th 17 September: Rankine, *Citizen*, cont.

Media and Structural Racism

M 21 September: Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 1-108

Th 24 September: Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 109-215

M 28 September: Understanding Legitimate and Fake News Media

Th 1 October: Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, 215-329
Plessy vs. Ferguson, 1896 (Canvas)

Populism and Demagoguery

M 5 October: Roth, *The Plot Against America*, 1-121

Th 8 October: Roth, *The Plot Against America*, 122-236

M 12 October: Roth, *The Plot Against America*, 237-362

****Remember: Last Day to Register to Vote in NJ****

Th 15 October: Kazan, *A Face in the Crowd*
Paper #1 Due

M 19 October: Kazan, *A Face in the Crowd*

Protests, Police, and the Prison-Industrial Complex

- Th 22 October: Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son"
Complete Reading Quiz #1 by this Date (Canvas)
- M 26 October: Smith, *Notes from the Field*
- Th 29 October: Smith, *Notes from the Field*
- M 2 November: Yapa, *Your Heart is a Muscle the Size of a Fist*, 3-115
****Remember to Vote: Tuesday 3 November is Election Day ****
- Th 5 November: Yapa, *Your Heart is a Muscle the Size of a Fist*, 116-209
- M 9 November: Yapa, *Your Heart is a Muscle the Size of a Fist*, 210-306

Representing Enemies

- Th 12 November: Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate*
Paper #2 Due
- M 16 November: Frankenheimer, *The Manchurian Candidate*
- Th 19 November: Didion, *Democracy*

** Thanksgiving Break**
- M 30 November: Didion, *Democracy*
- Th 3 December: Thinking about the Final Project
Complete Reading Quiz #2 by this Date (Canvas)
- TBA: Due Date Final Project

Course Policies

- 1) The necessities of a remote semester will change some of the familiar rhythms of this course, but it will not change its basic values. Your success will depend on your completing the readings, viewing the posted videos, and participating in our discussion boards and Zoomed class discussions. 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.

With a few exceptions, all class sessions will take place on Zoom during our scheduled class time.

These are extraordinary times, and my goal is to get each of you through this course in good shape. Nonetheless, your attendance and participation are critical to your success. 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 complete one longer final project.
- 3) All essays must be uploaded to Canvas on time. I will reduce the grade by 10% for each 24 hour period a paper is late, unless you've made prior arrangements with me..
- 4) Reading Quizzes: The course will include two reading quizzes that will test your recall and comprehension of course films and readings. You will complete these short-answer assessments outside of regular class time on Canvas and pledge to not use any books, notes, internet sources, electronic messages, or other forms of outside aid to take the exam or communicate its contents.
- 5) Final Project: The final project will involve your seeing and analyzing a film you will select from a pre-determined list and comparing it to one of the course texts. I will distribute details about this assignment later in the semester.
- 6) Honors students: Students who are taking this course through the Honors program will be required to keep a journal throughout this semester that reflects on contemporary politics in light of the course assignments. This journal will be used in the final project. I will distribute details about this journal assignment independently.
- 7) 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*. All work for this course must be done by you. 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 and 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: <https://academicintegrity.tcnj.edu/>

- 8) The Academic Enhancement Center is an excellent place to get help on your papers. All tutoring will take place online this semester. Please see the details for The Writer's Place at <https://tutoringcenter.tcnj.edu/humanities/writers-place/>
- 9) The challenges of learning in our remote environment will not compromise the accessibility of this course. *Students who experience barriers in this course are encouraged to contact me as early in the semester as possible. The Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) is available to facilitate the removal of barriers and to ensure reasonable accommodations. For more information about ARC, please visit: <https://arc.tcnj.edu/>.* 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: <https://arc.tcnj.edu/students/>

- 10) The breakdown in grading percentages is:

15%	Paper 1
20%	Paper 2
15%	Reading Quiz 1
15%	Reading Quiz 2
20%	Final Project
<u>15%</u>	<u>In-class performance</u>
100%	Total

- 11) 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

- 12) A syllabus is a plan not a contract. While we will make every effort to follow this schedule, I reserve the right to modify modes of delivery, alter the due dates of assignments, to change 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.

13) Please feel free to attend my electronic office hours if you have questions you'd like to ask about the class. The best way to reach me is by e-mail – blake@tcnj.edu -- not by the message center in Canvas. I check my mail regularly and expect you to do the same.

Special Procedures for the Remote Fall 2020 Semester

Office Hours:

Expectations of students for virtual office/student hours:

- Office hours will be held in Google Hangout.
- It is recommended that you attend office hours in a place where you can have your camera on for better clarity in questions and answers. This is not, however, a requirement. I will be happy simply to talk with you.
- Make sure that you have your course materials (books, notes, etc.) available when you attend office hours.

Procedures for attending office/student hours:

- Select an appointment from the available time slots on the document I have shared with you on Google Drive: David Blake: Office Hours Fall 2020 Sign Up Sheet
- At the designated time, please send me an invitation to Google Hangout. This is located on the left-hand side of your gmail screen.
- I will accept your invitation when I am done with the students proceeding you.
- We will determine whether it makes sense to have a video conference, an audio conference in which we are both looking at a paper draft, or to type out a quick question and answer.

Why Google Hangout and not Zoom?

- Google Hangouts lets anyone who has my email address attend office hours rather than just people who have access to my courses on Canvas. Advisees, former students, alums, and colleagues can all reach me during that time for a video or audio conference.
- The interest in Office Hours fluctuates at different points in the semester. Holding Office Hours in Zoom requires me to run a video conference even when no one is attending. At a time when much of the nation has turned to Zoom for conferencing, one advantage of Google Hangouts is that it only takes up bandwidth when students are interested in meeting.

Participation and Technology:

Your participation in this course matters and is valued. This course will utilize live Zoom sessions. If you do not have access to the necessary equipment for this course, TCNJ can provide it for you for the semester. Please contact care@tcnj.edu to help you secure the needed technology free of charge. This is a confidential process. However, if you need assistance in this process, please let me know. Also, the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) is available to help facilitate the removal of barriers and to ensure reasonable accommodations if needed. For more information about ARC, please visit: <https://arc.tcnj.edu/>.

Access to IT support:

If you have technology issues or needs during the semester, please contact the IT Helpdesk at 609-771-2660 or helpdesk@tcnj.edu.

Recording of Classes:

In accordance with the Remote Classroom Camera/Microphone Use and Recording Policy our class sessions may on occasion be audiovisually recorded (both for students in the class to refer back to and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live). Recordings of your audiovisual participation in the class session are considered “directory information” under the College’s Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Policy. Access to the recordings will be password-protected and available to students in the class through Canvas. In general, a recording will not be maintained beyond the end of the following semester (allowing students who

earned a grade of incomplete to finish the course) and thereafter will be deleted unless a compelling need exists for retaining it. If you have concerns about being recorded or having the recording accessed by other students in the class, please contact me or the Accessibility Resource Center, who can endeavor to address those concerns and ensure that the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and TCNJ Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Policy and [Remote Classroom Camera/Microphone Use and Recording](#) are met.

LIT 280/ Literature, Film, and the Art of American Politics
Fall 2020
Department, School, and College Goals and Policies

1) As part of the TCNJ English major, LIT 280/ Literature, Film, and the Art of American Politics provides a rigorous survey of crossing multiple historical time periods. The course will meet the following English Department Learning Outcomes:

- (1,12) Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with a range of critical, generic, and literary traditions (including recent theoretical approaches) that shape – and are shaped by literary discourses and texts of particular periods or movements.
- (3,14) Students will be able to identify historically specific elements relevant to a particular text.
- (4,15) Students will be able to read a literary work and characterize its main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies in an argumentative, thesis-driven essay.

2) As part of the curriculum of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, LIT 280 meets the following Learning Goals devised by Dean Benjamin Rifkin and presented to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education:

- (1) Written Communication
- (5) Critical Analysis and Reasoning: Ability to critique the arguments of others in the discipline and the construction of one's own arguments in the discipline, using data/evidence are a focus of instruction and/or the ability to analyze linguistic and cultural patterns
- (7) Interpret Language and Symbol
- (8) Intercultural Competence: The development of understanding of other cultures and/or subcultures (practices, perspectives, behavior patterns, etc.)
- (11) Preparation to Participate in Civic Life: The development of understanding of political processes in US democracy and/or the development of respect for civil discourse.

3) As an interdisciplinary study of literature, film, and politics, this course will fulfill numerous goals of the Liberal Learning program.

- Students will read a rich variety of works, they “will be able to analyze how forms of expression are used to reflect, exalt, or challenge the values of a culture.”
- They will engage literary texts that “reflect and inspire the richness of human expression, and how language and other forms of expression convey meaning and story.”
- The emphasis on developing an “informed and critical understanding of change” will help students “understand broad patterns of social development in . . . modern societies.”

4) This course meets 160 minutes a week but carries 1 full unit of credit toward the completion of an undergraduate degree. Students enrolled in this course are expected to take substantial responsibility outside the classroom for their own learning experience and to complete assignments at a level of excellence that significantly exceeds what is required at many other colleges and universities, including at the College itself prior to 2006.

5) In accordance with the College's Final Exam/Evaluation Policy, this course has a final paper due during final exam week; this final paper is comprehensive and integrative in nature and counts for 20% of your final grade. (<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9396>)

6) Because the students in this course are assigned additional learning tasks that make the semester's learning experience more deeply engaged and rigorous, no additional classroom time or space is needed.

General Grading Rubric

Grading papers is not a precise business. I do not give or take off a fixed number of points for particular strengths or weaknesses. Sometimes an overwhelmingly good or bad performance in one area outweighs other factors. The following table, therefore, should be read as a guideline only. It breaks down the course's grading criteria into four categories: argument, evidence, style, and mechanics. These are not, however, entirely discrete categories, and in fact, your performance in one area will often shape your performance in another. For example, readers will not be able to appreciate your argument if they have to struggle to understand the sentences that convey it.

CRITERIA GRADE	ARGUMENT	EVIDENCE	STYLE	MECHANICS/ GRAMMAR
A	Argument clearly stated at beginning and developed logically throughout the paper to a conclusion. Paragraphs organized around concepts with strong topic sentences. Argument is bold, fresh, and compelling	Extensive and varied factual evidence supports argument. No significant omissions, irrelevancies, or errors of fact. Quoted and paraphrased material is introduced fluidly, with varying and helpful framing.	Excellent prose style: clear, elegant, persuasive. Language and phrasing are precise and, in some cases, memorable. Writer has an identifiable and coherent voice.	Minimal errors in grammar, spelling, etc.
B	Argument is generally clear, but some digressions or failures to develop fully to a conclusion. Topic sentences advance different stages of the argument. Papers in the B-/C+ range generally have a routine argument, one that re-hashes class discussion rather than breaking new ground.	Generally good evidence, but some lack of variety of sources, errors of omission, and/or irrelevant data. Quoted and paraphrased material is framed properly, though at times mechanically.	Clear, serviceable prose that does not obscure understanding. Writer has used varying sentence patterns, although the sentences lack the rhythm and precision of an A paper. Writer's voice is emerging.	A few errors ranging from typos and spelling mistakes to the inappropriate use of the passive voice.
C	Argument is implied, but not explicitly stated and/or not well developed to a conclusion. When organized, paragraphs and topic sentences emphasize sequence (time, scenes, etc) rather than concepts. Frequent and unnecessary plot summary. These papers often "recognize" an image or thematic pattern and "display" that pattern, but do not advance an argument.	Some evidence, but excessive dependence on a single scene or source, substantial omissions or irrelevancies, and/or minor errors of fact. Quoted and paraphrased materials are simply dropped into the text without attribution or framing.	Understandable writing, but sometimes vague, wooden, or choppy. Sentences are haphazardly constructed, giving the impression that the writer has little control.	Substantial errors which detract from overall effect of paper or suggest a wavering commitment to the assignment.*

D	Argument is barely discernable and/or very poorly developed.	Very little, or largely irrelevant evidence, and/or substantial errors of fact. Problems in quoted and paraphrased material ranging from misquotations to passages that arouse suspicions of plagiarism.	Writing is confusing, vague, and/or hard to understand.	Frequent and serious errors which make paper hard to understand or suggest a profound lack of commitment to the assignment.*
F	No discernable argument or paper totally digresses from argument.	Virtually no relevant evidence and/or very serious errors of fact. Problems in quoted and paraphrased material that indicate a case of either intentional or unintentional plagiarism	Writing is nearly unintelligible.	Massive errors which render paper nearly unintelligible.*

*Note: my response to your paper will not be aimed at correcting your grammar or mechanics, but any paper in which these are prevalent will not receive a high grade, regardless of the quality of the argument and evidence. Students who clearly do not understand a grammatical or stylistic principle (passive voice, comma-splice, etc) will not be markedly penalized. However, once I've explained the principle (in class, in office hours, or in the paper's annotations), the repetition of these errors in future assignments will dramatically reduce the student's grade.