Democracies in “America”
English 202B: Writing in the Humanities

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Office hours: Monday, 10-12noon
Wednesday, 1:20-2:20

Required Books:
Mike Rose, Lives on the Boundary. Penguin.
Joseph Gibaldi, etc. The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research. (optional)
ProCopy packet (Student Bookstore)

Course Description:

For many, the Supreme Court decision for President-elect Bush was a proper closure to a chaotic election; for others, a sad moment for American democracy. Such a contested election forces all of us to rethink our notion of a “democracy,” its strengths and weaknesses.

How “democratic” do we want our country to be? After the divisive contest of 2000, do we want a President elected by popular vote, not the electoral college? Do we want campaign finance reform to put more controls on monied interests?

What is a “democracy”? In Democracy in America, the nineteenth-century French historian Alexis de Tocqueville argues for a universal idea of democracy that is inevitable and perfectable. Today we tend to define “democracy” as a dynamic process, constantly evolving (for better or worse) to respond to present needs. There have been many “democracies” in America, and there continue to be many diverse notions of “democracy” in our own time.

Many observers of our political scene worry that our polarized election signals our country’s lack of consensus, its division among regional, class, and racial lines. Others, while acknowledging the need for consensus—the need for shared values—celebrate the multiple voices of dissent in our country, a kind of “anti-consensus” that always contests those in power. At this time in our history, do we share common values? How much room do we allow for dissent?

How do we as citizens—and present and future educators, historians, journalists, and artists—act to respond to problems in our democracy? Do we watch “West Wing” and dream of a system as it might be, helpless or unwilling to change the “real” situation? Or are we invigorated by “West Wing” to think about and act out those very dreams? (Art is not simply antithetical to political action.)

These are some of the questions we’ll explore in our “Writing in the Humanities” course. We’ll respond to texts by historians, artists, educators, philosophers, political scientists, and journalists as we assess our political situation and how it affects (or even situates) our lives.
Papers
(1) Autobiographical Narrative (4-5 pp.)
(2) Reading Responses (five in all; one page each)
(3) Evaluation #1 (Tocqueville, 4-5 pp)
(4) Evaluation #2 (Greider and current media, 5-6 pp)
(5) Final research paper (7-8 pp)

Class grade (attendance; participation; paper presentations; e-mail evaluations) 15%

Attendance: Talk to me if you cannot complete a paper on time. Do you have two major exams on the day a paper is due? Or a major semester project? E-mail if a problem arises. If you don't make these prior arrangements, I'll be forced to dock a late paper one letter grade per class period.

Attendance is mandatory in our class. You are responsible for being in class, on time, during every meeting period. Three or more unexcuses absences will result in grade deductions. Excessive absences will result in failure of the course.

Email: You need to have an email account for our class. I will be sending announcements, updated assignments, and writing prompts through email. You will also use your email account to exchange paper evaluations with your writing group and to access an article on electronic reserve (for paper #3). If you have not already activated your email account, please do so immediately. To activate your account, take your Penn State ID to an automatic signature station and follow instructions there. Stations are located at 103 Boucke, 6 Findlay, W111 Pattee, 112 Redifer, 107 Waring, 108 Warnock, and 2 Willard.

Accommodations: The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate any type of accommodation in this course or have any questions about physical access, please tell me as soon as possible.

Daily Syllabus:

Jan. 8(M) Introduction to the course
Jan. 10(W) George Orwell, “Why I Write” (25-31, WL)
Jan. 12(F) Barbara Mellix, “From Outside In” (75-85, WL)
Jan. 15(M) Frederick Douglass from Narrative (103-108, WL)
Jan. 17(W) Mike Rose, Lives on the Boundary, Preface and chapters 1-3 (xi, xii; 1-65)
Jan. 19(F) Rose, Lives, chapters 4 and 5 (67-132)
Jan. 22(M) Rose, Lives, chapter 6 and 7 (133-204)
Jan. 24(W) Rose, Lives, chapter 8 and Epilogue (205-42)
Workshop #1 (early drafts on transparency--3 volunteers)
Work in groups of 3. Give your draft to two fellow students and email your evaluations.

Papers
response #1
draft #1
Jan. 26(F) workshop #2  draft #2
(2nd draft on transparency--2 volunteers)
Give your 2nd draft to your two fellow students
and email your evaluations.

Jan. 29(M) Autobiographical Narrative due.  Paper #1

Feb. 2(F) Tocqueville, Part I, Bk. I, chapter 11,
"Advantages of Democracy in the United States"
(100-111)

Feb. 5(M) Tocqueville, Part I, from chapter 12 on the "tyranny
of the majority" (116-121); Part II, Bk I, chapter 20
(163-68)

Feb. 7(W) Tocqueville, Part II, Bk 2, chapters 26 and 27
(189-194); Bk 3, chapter 48 (262-73)

Feb. 9(F) Sean Wilentz, "Many Democracies" (packet)

Feb. 12(M) Wilentz and Tocqueville, cont.

Feb. 14(W) Tocqueville, cont. (Does his 18th century text
say anything to us today?)

Feb. 16(F) workshop #1  draft #1
Feb. 19(M) workshop #2  draft #2
Feb. 21 (W) Tocqueville evaluation due.  Paper #2
Introduction to Palmer Museum exhibit

Feb. 23(F) Palmer Museum Exhibition: "History Past, History Present:
The Daguerreotype Portrait in America"
3P.M. gallery talk on this exhibition

Museum hours: Tuesday-Saturday: 10A.M.-4:30P.M.
Sunday, noon to 4 P.M.

Daguerreotype Exhibition: Jan. 16-May 20

PROBLEMS WITH DEMOCRACY: THE ELECTION OF 2000
(How "democratic" are we? How "democratic" do we want to be? What
can we do about such problems?)

Feb. 26(M) The Palmer Exhibition.
News articles in packet: Paul Taylor,
"The New Political Theatre" and Neal Gabler,
"Behind the Political Curtain"

Feb. 28(W) William Greider, "Stupefied Democracy" (packet)

March 2(F) "Mark Russell Comedy Special" (on video)  Response #3

Spring Break, March 5-9
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>March 14(W)</td>
<td>Greider, cont.</td>
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<td>March 16(F)</td>
<td>Greider, cont.</td>
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<td>March 19(M)</td>
<td>Relate Greider to news articles on legal system: Linda Greenhouse and N. R. Kleinfield (11-13 and 15, packet)</td>
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<td>March 21(W)</td>
<td>Relate Greider to race issues” Alex Keyssar and Mark Styn (21, 23-24)</td>
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<td>March 23(F)</td>
<td>Race issues, cont.: Ponnuru, Goldberg, Jacoby (24-26; 27-28; 29-30)</td>
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<td>March 26(M)</td>
<td>workshop #1</td>
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<td>March 28(W)</td>
<td>workshop #2</td>
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<td>March 30(F)</td>
<td>Greider Evaluation due (with support from 2 or more news articles)</td>
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<td>In Class: Discussion of final research paper; and film, “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”</td>
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<td>April 2(M)</td>
<td>“Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”</td>
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<td>April 4(W)</td>
<td>“Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”</td>
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<td>April 6(F)</td>
<td>Discussion of film</td>
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<td>Proposal due for final paper with bibliography</td>
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<td>April 9(M)</td>
<td>Ha Jim, “The Bridegroom” in <em>The Best American Short Stories.</em> 202-27</td>
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<td>April 13(F)</td>
<td>ZZ Packer, “Brownies” (280-300) Revised proposal and biblio.</td>
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<td>Your proposals on transparency--4 volunteers</td>
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<td>April 20(F)</td>
<td>Lahiri, cont.</td>
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<td>April 23(M)</td>
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<td>Your work on transparency--2-3 volunteers</td>
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<td>April 25(W)</td>
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<td>Your work on transparency or class group workshop</td>
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<td>April 27(F)</td>
<td>Final paper due; class evaluation</td>
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