LAH 350 Politics in Fiction, Spring 2013
MWF 1:00 –2:00, GAR 2.124
LAH 30155/GOV 39030

Professor Bartholomew H. Sparrow
Department of Government
Office hours: MW: 2:00-3:30 pm.

What is at stake in politics and government? Why do political events unfold as they do? Why do politicians and public officials make the choices they do? Theories of politics and government, statistical analyses, and archival research can only take us so far. Many say that the best way to capture politics and government—and the personal and emotional nature of politics, especially—is through good fiction.

In "Politics and Fiction" students read some of the best fiction writing extant on American politics and government. The reading list is based on the quality of the texts, then, rather than on focusing particular authors, addressing particular subjects, or covering particular time periods. Fortunately, particular topics and time periods do come into play. The books' subjects range from accounts of 19th century America, to works on Vietnam and the 1960s, to novels about city and state and national politics and elections, and to contemporary lobbying and radicalism.

Students are asked to read critically, that is to uncover the assumptions of and perspectives of each text with respect to ideology and partisanship, the functioning of politics and the political system, individual and social psychology, and the relevant institutions in each case. What are the political foundations and philosophic premises of the texts? Students will also be expected to consider the writing style employed by each author, and the effect that such style—if a style is obtrusive at all—has on the reader's understanding of the text.

Requirements

Students are responsible for composing (2) books reviews, making in-class presentations, participating in discussions, and writing short response papers ("comment papers").

Students need to have taken Government 310L and 312L

As a student in the class, you are expected to demonstrate the following:

- intellectual engagement in the texts and topics of the course
- honesty, responsibility, self-motivation, and hard work
- self-reflection and on-going assessment of your own learning
- respect for your fellow students and teacher

Specific student assignments:

- reading the week's assigned text in advance of Monday's class
- participating in class discussion (including attendance)
- making oral presentations
- writing book reviews and comment papers
- keeping up with the course's Blackboard site and your own email

Policies:

- Email correspondence is welcome and convenient. *Please format your emails as business correspondence (with a title/greeting and signature), and I shall try to get to you emails within 24 hours—and usually much sooner—unless I am indisposed*. I may also answer on BB should you voice a general concern, one that it might be more useful to share with the class rather than keep to personal email.
- I shall be available before and after class, in office hours, and by appointment if you can't make office hours.
- Let your instructor know in advance if you know you will be late for class or if you have to leave early (e.g., job interview, court appearance). Also let him know ahead of time if you have miss assignments for extraordinary reasons or cannot otherwise participate as expected.
- Computers, mobile 'phones, and other electronic devices need to be off.
- Misconduct will detract from your participation grade. Misconduct is any behavior disruptive to learning and includes the following: activated cell phones, iPods, pagers, etc.; exiting and reentering the classroom (*please use the restroom facilities ahead of time*); personal conversations in class; reading newspapers/magazines; studying for another class; or exhibiting other behavior as interpreted by your instructor. Inappropriate classroom behavior may result in your dismissal from the classroom and that class day will count as an absence.
- Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/ Please inform the instructor of your condition by the 2nd week of classes.
- Special arrangements for the assignments may be considered on an individual basis in exceptional circumstances, but only if you discuss this with the instructor in advance.
- By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.
- You are expected to attend class regularly and arrive promptly (and your instructor will try to begin and end on time!) Let him know as soon as possible before the class, quiz, test, etc., if you have an emergency or special circumstances.

Three tardy appearances (5 or more minutes late) counts as *one* absence.

Three early departures from class count as one absence.

Five or more absences total—excused or unexcused absences does not matter—results in a 2 percent reduction in your course grade, and another 2 percent off for *each additional* absence.

Eight or more class absences may result in failing the class.

Required Texts

19th Century

Gore Vidal, *Lincoln* IBSN: 0375708763
Henry Adams, *Democracy* ISBN: 1605201108

Vietnam and the 1960s

Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* ISBN: 0140185003
Don DeLillo, *Libra* ISBN: 014015604
Philip Roth, *American Pastoral ISBN:* 0375701429
Tim O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods* ISBN: 0140250947

Local, State, and Federal Politics

Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* ISBN: 0156031043
Edwin O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah* ISBN: 0316626597*
Billy Lee Brammer, *The Gay Place* ISBN: 0292708319
Garrett Epps, *The Shad Treatment* ISBN: 0813917764
Michael Halberstam, *The Wanting of Levine* ISBN: 0417052200*

Contemporary Issues

Christopher Buckley, *Thank you for Smoking* ISBN: 0812976525
David Goodwillie, *American Subversive* ISBN: 1439157065

* Out of print but readily available from online sources or secondhand book stores; *not on order at the UT Coop*.

Grades

Book Review (1500-2000 words), two per student: 20 x 2 = 40 percent
Comment Papers (400 words maximum), 10 for the semester: 3 x 10 = 30 percent
Class Participation (including attendance): 25 percent
Presentation/Discussion leadership: 5 percent

You are to write two book reviews. Each is to be revised *twice*, with the help of some of your classmates. The papers are due on Fridays at midnight, and to be posted on your team's discussion board (look under "Blackboard Tools," on the righthand menu, and then proceed to "Groups"). Each team will have its own number. The 1st revision is due by class on Wednesday of the following week, the 2nd revision is then due the next class day, that Friday.

The comment papers are to be your reactions/remarks on the book review written by one of your teammates. You are responsible for one per week, *except* for the

week when you are presenting and the two weeks when you are writing your book reviews. The comment papers can focus on book review's ideas, its argument (with textual evidence and text page number), its organization, its composition (such as transitions, phrasing, syntax, and grammar), or on any other matters you think relevant to improving the quality of the review.

You are responsible for attendance and participation. As Woody Allen has said, 85 percent of success is just showing up, and your regular presence and engagement in class discussion is expected.

You are to be divided into four (4) teams of five (5). You will be in these teams for the whole semester, and enrolled in a team-only site on the class's Blackboard page that allows you to post papers, circulate comments, and email your classmates.

Course Schedule

From Monday through Friday of the preceding week, students will have read the book under discussion. Each week—not including week one and week two—will then proceed as follows.

On **Mondays**, one or two students, depending on the students' choices, will select a passage from the text (from one or two sentences to a paragraph to a page), read it out loud, say what it signifies for them, and then open class discussion with a question. Each presentation should last five-to-ten minutes, but it should be tightly composed and professional: direct and to the point.

By Monday at 10:00 a.m., the other students will have submitted the comment papers on their teams' Blackboard online forum—responses to each "thread" that is a book review—in response to their teammate's first draft of her/his book review. Again, students may give feedback on the ideas, organization, clarity, omissions, and/or other points they think relevant. Note that these comments themselves need to be well-argued, substantiated (page numbers, examples, quotations, etc.), and precise so as to be the most helpful to the book reviewer. Those students who write comment papers are not those writing the book reviews, and vice versa.

On **Wednesdays**, you will meet in your teams for the first half of the class (about) and go over the revised book reviews that have been printed out and brought to class by the author. In the second half of the class, we will continue to discuss the book, starting off with comments from the students writing the reviews.

On **Fridays**, the students writing the book reviews hand in their polished review copy. The class will be taken up with further discussions about the text as well as about, where appropriate or relevant, the writing process. Friday evening,

by ten p.m. those writing book reviews have to upload their documents to their teams' discussion board, creating a new thread with the book review.

Weekly Readings:

January 14:	Introduction: Course overview, Division into teams, Discussion of writing
January 21:	**MLK holiday**
January 23, 25:	Gore Vidal, *Lincoln*: no book reviews or comment papers due
January 28:	Henry Adams, *Democracy*
February 4:	Warren, *All the King's Men*
February 11:	Greene, *The Quiet American*
February 18:	O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah*
February 25:	DeLillo, *Libra*
March 4:	Brammer, *The Gay Place*
March 11:	**Spring Break**
March 18:	Roth, *American Pastoral*
March 25:	Epps, *The Shad Treatment*
April 1:	O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*
April 8:	Writing workshop, catch-up week
April 15:	Halberstam, *The Wanting of Levine*
April 22:	Buckley, *Thank You for Smoking*
April 29:	Goodwillie, *American Subversive*