AMST S307: Terrorism and US Popular Culture
Summer Session A 2017: TTh 9 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Instructor
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Office Hours
by appointment

Course Description
The twenty-first century dawned for the United States with the airplane hijackings of September 11, 2001. While this event has dominated American political and cultural consciousness ever since, it was not the nation’s first encounter with terror. Pressing questions have endured over time: what is terrorism, what is its history in relationship to the United States, what are its effects, and what can/should we do about it?

Broadly speaking, culture consists of the ways we create and enact collective meanings about our lives and our place(s) in the world. When an event of large scale, scope, and impact occurs, culture provides the medium through which individuals in relationship with their communities try to make sense of that event and determine precisely what has happened and what it might mean for the future. Popular culture in particular, which includes commonly-accessible forms of meaning-making such as films, books, and television, provides shared sites through which individuals and communities without any special kind of expertise can critically explore complex questions and generate sometimes similar, sometimes different, and sometimes unresolved meanings.

Engaging these cultural texts within literature and popular culture will take us from the beginnings of US history to our contemporary daily lives, through territory fraught with thorny contentions over definitions, causes, consequences, and implications. Often, the term “terrorism” has been used to mark the boundaries of socially and politically acceptable action. Yet such action often has been employed by those who already occupy the social and political periphery – even as established institutions at the core of American society, such as the government and law enforcement, have also been viewed as employing exceptional measures. Given broader, ongoing, unresolved conversations about the roots and nature of, and appropriate responses to, acts of terror, I anticipate the possibility that we as a class might remain similarly somewhat in suspense – perhaps resistant to any certainties or consensus – about these same considerations.

This interdisciplinary course draws on secondary sources in fields such as history, literature, and cultural studies, as well as the primary resources of archives, films, documentaries, novels, graphic novels, plays, autobiographies, television shows, oral histories, and photography. Our exploration across time will include the 1692 Salem
witchcraft trials in connection with the Cold War, engagements between Native Americans and the US military, post-Reconstruction lynchings, the 1920 Wall Street bombing, the Weather Underground’s left-wing extremism, the right-wing extremist Oklahoma City bombing, and September 11, 2001.

Contemplating the term “terrorism” occasions a distinct need for thoughtful, informed, self-reflexive, responsible assessments. As ourselves participants in American popular culture we are, all of us, necessarily and inextricably implicated in this exploration, requiring our personal investment in this ongoing discussion. Our term’s writing assignments will cultivate the skills required for such care in critical research, analysis, and argument. Ultimately, students will evaluate and assert evidence-based claims about what it means for an event or movement in US history to be considered terrorism and will interrogate how popular culture contributes to common understandings of and responses to terrorism.

Learning Objectives

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- Understand and apply appropriately concepts within the field of American Studies
- Analyze how a popular culture text or object of study reflects the cultural, political, and historical context of both its development and its reception, to distinguish how specific conditions produce particular kinds of practices and beliefs, especially in regard to forming meaning about terrorism
- Recognize and critique how cultural processes and constructions pose both challenges and opportunities for understanding and responding to terrorism
- Identify and assess your own values and beliefs about terrorism and American culture and be able to critically and self-reflexively evaluate those values and beliefs within the terms of class discussions and formal written arguments

Structure

This course meets twice each week for discussion-oriented class sessions when the concepts raised by assigned readings and viewings are clarified and discussed. Students should be prepared to engage in discussion with the instructor and with one another with questions and original responses. This course features complex, multifaceted material that raises issues not easily resolvable with simple “yes” or “no” answers. Rather, students are called to think critically, working toward understanding and interpretation rather than mere memorization of course content.

Please keep in mind: unless otherwise noted, all viewings, like all readings, are to be completed by no later than the date on which they appear on the syllabus.

Required Materials
The texts listed below will be supplemented by readings provided to you as handouts or posted on the course website. Please note: anyone experiencing technical difficulties with this website must seek swift resolution by directing questions to Classes*v2 Help (classesv2@yale.edu) or Yale Information Technology Services (Yale ITS: 203-432-5242, <http://its.yale.edu/help/student-support>). For website postings, you are expected either to print them out and bring them to class or to have them open on your laptop. For the required books, I have provided the ISBN numbers so you can attempt to locate less expensive used editions from online sellers. However, the texts are available at the Yale Book Store.

REQUIRED READING
Find and read the following texts by no later than the due dates scheduled on the syllabus course calendar. This lists what you likely will need time to locate; other reading assignments are noted only on the calendar and should be immediately accessible via the course website.

ISBN-10: 0872892999

ISBN-10: 1439157065

ISBN-10: 0156034026

ISBN-10: 0142437336

ISBN-10: 140120841X

ISBN-10: 1400079497

REQUIRED VIEWING
Find and view the following films and television shows by no later than the due dates scheduled on the syllabus course calendar. This lists what you likely will need time to locate; other viewing assignments are noted only on the calendar and should be
immediately accessible via the internet.


**COURSE RESERVES**
ISBN-10: 0944092691

**RECOMMENDED READING**
ISBN-10: 0321965248

**Grading and Evaluation**

Summer Session classes advance at an accelerated pace. For unavoidable, uncontrollable circumstances, please consult with me in advance or, depending on the exigency, as soon as possible afterward. However, such circumstances should be rare. Substantial absences and/or delays in submitting work will necessitate a course withdrawal.

**Grading Criteria**

- **Participation**: 10%/10 points (1%/1 point/class)
- **One-Page Reading/Viewing Written Response**: 12%/12 points (3%/3 points/paper)
- **Mid-Term Terrorism/Popular Culture Essay**: 30%/30 points
- **Terrorism/Representation Presentation**: 12%/12 points
- **Terrorism/Representation Final Essay**: 36%/36 points [total = 100%/100 points]

**Grading Scale**

- **A (Exceptional Performance)** = Demonstrates mastery of content and concepts and fulfills basic requirements [Specifically for participation: Contributes substantively to class discussion and exhibits meaningfully attentive behavior *consistently*]
- **B (Compelling Performance)** = Demonstrates strong grasp of content and concepts and fulfills basic requirements [Specifically for participation: Contributes substantively to class discussion and exhibits meaningfully attentive behavior *frequently*]
- **C (Competent Performance)** = Demonstrates familiarity with content and concepts and fulfills basic requirements [Specifically for participation: Contributes substantively to class discussion and exhibits meaningfully attentive behavior *occasionally*]
D (Precarious Performance) = Demonstrates limited grasp of content and concepts and fulfills few basic requirements [Specifically for participation: Contributes substantively to class discussion and exhibits meaningfully attentive behavior rarely]

F (Inadequate Performance) = Does not demonstrate knowledge of content and concepts and does not fulfill basic requirements [Specifically for participation: Contributes substantively to class discussion and exhibits meaningfully attentive behavior almost never]

Assignment Information

Participation: Students’ questions, comments, and responses give me a good, real-time sense of how well the course material is being understood. At the same time, as we will learn in this class, American Studies as a field emphasizes the importance of multiple voices constructing shared knowledge. For these reasons, students' contributions to class discussion form an integral part of this course. Repeated late arrivals or early departures, like repeated absences, can negatively affect your grade. After all, you are asked to contribute substantively to discussion in each meeting of your class, and lateness and absence – as well as unpreparedness – necessarily hinder your ability to do so. Keep in mind, though, that only participation, and not attendance alone, is graded.

Viewing/Reading Written Response (1 page): Concisely and compellingly detail a thread that connects the viewing and reading assignments for each week’s class. MS Word files emailed to me by no later than 9 a.m. on the Thursdays of June 1, 8, 15, and 22. Accepted format = 1” margins, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, MLA-style citation

Mid-Term Terrorism/Popular Culture Essay (5 to 7 pages): Defining terrorism poses a fraught task. Understanding and possibly even anticipating its consequences presents a crucial challenge. Drawing on what our readings and viewings have so far suggested about the link between representing and defining terrorism and its aftermath, position your definition of terror and its repercussions (both its effects and any responses it occasions) through the lens of how it is represented in popular culture. In other words, argue that “Terrorism is ‘x’ and results in ‘y’ according to how these [films, television shows, books, etc.] have portrayed it.” Cite sources appropriately. MS Word files emailed to me by no later than 9 a.m. on Monday, June 12. Accepted format = 1” margins, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, MLA-style citation

Terrorism/Representation Presentation (in-class, Thursday, June 29, 10 minutes = 5 minutes to talk, 5 minutes to answer questions; submit via email MS Word document of written proposal of one page plus annotated Works Cited list by no later than 9 a.m. on Tuesday, June 27): For this presentation, you will share with the class the research proposal that shapes your final essay. Basically, you need to state your thesis, your materials/sources through an annotated Works Cited list, and your rationale – why you are researching this topic (How does your project relate to course concerns? Why does
it matter? What possible implications might emerge from your work for understanding relationships between terrorism and popular culture?)

Terrorism/Representation Final Essay (8 to 10 pages): Pick a crisis from any period during US history. Consider whether or not this presents an instance of terrorism through the lens of one or more popular culture texts that have engaged it and that we have not already discussed. In other words, what do we know and think of this event or phenomenon through the medium of its representation? What might be the effects, consequences, or implications not only of this event, but also of this particular representation? Essentially, attend to how the text(s) you have selected might be answering this course’s framing questions: what is terrorism, what is its history in relationship to the United States, what are its effects, and what can/should we do about it? Make your case by integrating independent research, based on scholarly sources, with our semester's readings and discussions. MS Word files emailed to me by no later than 9 a.m. on Thursday, June 29. Accepted format = 1” margins, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, MLA-style citation

Academic Integrity

Violations of expected and acceptable academic conduct include plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, work done for one course submitted to another, deliberate falsification of data, interference with other students' work, and copyright violations. These violations are all defined within Yale College’s Undergraduate Regulations: http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/

When in doubt regarding appropriate academic conduct, including scholarly citations and other issues, please consult me rather than waiting for a problem to develop.

Accommodations for Students with Special Needs

Yale College wishes to provide appropriate accommodations for students with special needs. If you have a disability and might require accommodations in this course, please contact Ms. Judy York in the Resource Office on Disabilities (203-432-2324; judith.york@yale.edu) to make arrangements to address your needs.

How to Do Well

Be Here: Show up and when you’re here, speak up. We clarify and explore assigned material in class, and other students say really interesting things. Lots of learning happens. Plus, actual participation – and not just attendance – is graded, so unless you can shout really loudly from wherever you are when you’re absent, you need to be here to join the conversation. It is your responsibility to check in with a classmate about missed material. For unavoidable, uncontrollable circumstances, please consult with me in advance or, depending on the exigency, as soon as possible afterward. However,
such circumstances should be rare. Give the accelerated pace of Summer Session, substantial absences will likely necessitate a course withdrawal.

**Really Be Here:** Turn off the cell phone. Use the laptop for note-taking, referencing course material, and searching the internet for discussion-related information. All other uses take you out of the zen of really being here. And they distract/annoy/irritate everyone else, including me.

**Be Prepared:** Assignments provide you with the basic material you need to learn course concepts. Do your homework, bring all materials (handouts, texts, etc.) to class on the day they are scheduled for discussion, and you will be ready to ask questions, offer answers, and engage with other students in conversation. You will look smart, sound smart, and set yourself up for success.

**Meet Deadlines:** Should you require more time to complete an assignment, you must contact me before the day on which the assignment is due or, depending on the exigency, as soon as possible afterward. However, such circumstances should be rare. Give the accelerated pace of Summer Session, substantial delays in submitting work will likely necessitate a course withdrawal.

**Remember Your English 101:** While this is not a writing class per se, assignments require you to produce intelligible written arguments and such arguments can become unintelligible (picture me reading your work and thinking, “whaaaaa?”) through poor writing style. If you need help, please get assistance at the Yale College Writing Center (writing.yalecollege.yale.edu).

**Check Your Email:** Check your email routinely. This is fair warning that you are assumed to have received emailed messages and are therefore responsible for information communicated via email.

**Respect Others:** It is important for each student to feel free to contribute to class discussions and exercises. Accordingly, mean-spirited and/or disrespectful remarks made either to me or between students are not tolerated. This is not meant to indicate that you forgo any right to free speech and expression, but I ask that you recognize that everyone else has those rights as well. I ask that you communicate thoughtfully and respectfully with me and with others in the class.
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<td><em>Munich</em>. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Dreamworks SKG, 2006. DVD. [viewed in class]</td>
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<td>2 Popular Culture: Contemporary Terms and Concerns</td>
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**VIEWING/READING WRITTEN RESPONSES DUE by email by no later than 9 a.m.**


“Season One: Grace.” *Homeland.* Cr. Alex Gansa and Howard Gordon. Showtime Networks, Oct. 9, 2011. [viewed in class] |
4 Historical Legacies

Thursday, 6/8


VIEWING/READING WRITTEN RESPONSES DUE by email by no later than 9 a.m.

MID-TERM TERRORISM/POPULAR CULTURE ESSAY DUE

9 a.m., Monday, 6/12 by email

MID-TERM TERRORISM/POPULAR CULTURE ESSAY DUE

**VIEWING/READING WRITTEN RESPONSES DUE**  
by email by no later than 9 a.m.
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<td>7 September 11, 2001</td>
<td>Tuesday, 6/20</td>
<td>YouTube: full live news coverage of September 11, 2001 (any major network – ABC, NBC, CNN, etc.) = approximately 1.5 hours</td>
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*The Dark Knight*. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros., 2008. DVD. [viewed in class]

**VIEWING/READING WRITTEN RESPONSES DUE by email by no later than 9 a.m.**
**TERRORISM/REPRESENTATION PRESENTATION PROPOSAL DUE**  
by email by no later than 9 a.m. |
|-------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 Wrapping Up | Thursday, 6/29 | **IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS**  
**TERRORISM/REPRESENTATION FINAL ESSAY DUE**  
by email by no later than 9 a.m. |