FILM S435
Television and Crime
Instructor: Nicholas Forster (Nicholas.forster@yale.edu)
Office Hours: E-mail for appointment

Summer 2022
Time: T/Th 1-4:15PM
Location: TBD

Note: This syllabus is subject to change.

Course Description:
What has been going on in television over the last two decades? In what ways has television drama been dictated by narratives of crime? How do these stories relate to the world outside the screen?

With a particular focus on post 9/11 serialized television, this course probes the relationship between American culture and television program’s staging of crime. In this class we will explore the ways that television shows over the last two decades have muddied the waters and challenged the earlier, often clearer, representations of violence and unlawful actions on television. Paying attention to historical precedents, each class will focus on a specific show/series and examine how that program endeavors to represent the connections between law, crime, and race. Our investigation will attend to cultural context, close analysis, and historical precedent as we look at representations of crime and larger systems, structures, and procedures of (in)justice.

We begin our journey by looking at historical precedents before turning to the first season of the HBO show The Wire. As we make our way through the next two decades, we will dive into the worlds created on streaming services, premium cable, and network television. These include shows produced/created by Shonda Rhimes and John Ridley. Finally, we end with the first season of the FX anthology series American Crime Story: The People vs OJ Simpson.

Our readings will include scholarship from across disciplines. Certain essays will provide a way to understand the production of a television show, other essays will offer theoretical questions and conceptual frameworks. We will traverse fields like Sociology, Film and Media Studies, and African American Studies. In an effort to remain engaged with contemporary discussions around social media and the ethos of “Recap culture” students will be asked to post blog entries every week.

Required Reading/Viewing:
Studying television can be especially difficult due to the extended time commitment. This is all the more true for an abbreviated summer class. Over our five weeks we will watch the entirety of at least two seasons of a show. While we will move through an episode or two of many shows,
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digging deep into a full season will offer us the space to reflect, analyze, and understand contemporary serialize television. This means that there will be an expectation that you will view quite a bit of material.

**Critically, the viewing is in addition to the reading.** I understand that this can be a strain, but it is important that we take these works seriously and reckon with the entirety (within limits) of the project they propose.

Some television shows will be available on DVD through the Yale’s Film Archive. However, given the shifting landscape of the entertainment industry over the last decade you will be asked to watch programs on several streaming services like Hulu, Netflix, and HBOMax. You will not be required to purchase any textbooks or physical media, but it is your responsibility to access the programs that are available through streaming services.

For those interested in avoiding spoilers I recommend you watch the show before doing the reading. It is important to note that some of these readings may contain spoilers for later seasons. Over the course of the class, I will try to announce some related readings or viewings that might be helpful as we raise many questions and ideas. I encourage you to have a look at these as they will provide important background work for final papers.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Understand the ways television has fictionalized and represented crime.
- Develop critical thinking and questioning skills and a condense history of trends in contemporary media.
- Engage unfamiliar work and make sense of it through close analysis.
- Create evidence-based claims regarding television.
- Express and substantiate an argument about the relationship between television and crime.

**Students Will:**

- Submit 1 blog post (250-500 words) per week prior to each class (due Monday night 8PM EST). These will be the beginnings of the discussion we have in class.
  - Every post must include a citation to course reading
    - If you cite a reading include the author and the page number. For example, you might write: “Elizabeth Alexander writes that ‘[example quotation]’ (Alexander, [pg number]).
    - If you cite a scene from a show include the episode title and a time stamp (how far into the episode). For example: (“The Target” 8:20) would refer
to a scene that begins 8 minutes and 20 seconds into the episode of *The Wire*, titled “The Target”

- It is essential to read other student’s posts.

- Come to class prepared to fill out a worksheet with questions pertaining to the reading assigned for that day. These are not graded as quizzes but are part of your attendance and participation and they are helpful places to begin conversation.

- Lead class through a presentation that will stage important questions or ideas related to viewing and reading. Details for these presentations can be found in the “Presentation Guidelines” document on Canvas.

- Complete a final project in consultation with me; this is typically a 2000-3000 word paper (8-12 pages). Students may propose alternatives such as television pitches. If you choose an alternative assignment (i.e. not a paper) your project must be approved by the instructor beforehand. Due date: TBD

**Grading:**

- Participation, Attendance, Engagement: 25%
- Blog Posts / Media Projects: 30%
  - If submitted late but within a week, blog posts will receive ½ credit. Blog posts submitted later than one week will not be accepted.
- Class Presentation: 20%
- Final Project: 25%
  - Final projects that are submitted late will be subject to a grade deduction. 1/3 of a letter grade will be marked for each day late.
- Please note: if a major assignment like the final project is not submitted students may fail class.

**An Important Note on Plagiarism:**

At Yale there is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. In this class all work submitted must be your own and when other texts/scholars/ideas are quoted or paraphrased they must be cited.

As a loose rule of thumb, plagiarism is the act of taking words or ideas (paraphrasing is included here) from another source without the proper attribution. If you have any questions here email me.

Please follow the guidelines and rules established by Yale College and the Center for Teaching and Learning. As the Yale College statement on Academic Honesty reads, in part:
“Discovering how to use others’ work to advance one’s own is a key part of learning. Very few scholars ever have completely original ideas, and even the greatest scholars build on their predecessors’ achievements. Understanding how to incorporate others’ points into one’s own arguments, and how to acknowledge those points properly, is one sign of maturing scholarship.” (http://catalog.yale.edu/first-year-student-handbook/academic-information/introduction-undergraduate-education/academic-honesty/)

There is some extremely helpful material (especially the “High Risk Situations” section) at the Center for Teaching and Learning’s website which you can find here: https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/undergraduates/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism/what-plagiarism

**Tutoring and Academic Support:**
During Yale Summer Session the Poorvu Center will offer various kinds of support including writing guidance and tutoring. This is a fantastic opportunity to have an experienced writer work with you. I encourage everyone to attend! You can learn more and sign up here: https://yaleuniversity.mywconline.com/

**What Does It Mean to Participate?:**
We are here to learn. What that looks like may be different for each student in the class. This is about work and that work may be emotional, intellectual, and personal—we will acknowledge and honor this dedication to scholarly rigor throughout the summer. In class we will recognize various forms of “knowledge” or intelligence which are shaped by embodied experiences and past histories. It is important that we recognize each other, and it is essential that we respect all contributions in class.

Equally, it is necessary that everyone feels accountable and comfortable for what they say. Passion and engaged discussion are phenomenal, but tone, clarity, information, and the power of certain ideas matter. This means that, quite simply, words matter and how one says such words also matters. My hope is that by being open we can work to reckon with a variety of questions, answering some and leaving many others open. In other words, we will work to communicate and build ideas in community rather than isolation.

Finally, if you are uncomfortable talking in public, please let me know over e-mail. Class should be a space of learning, but it should also be a brave space where people feel comfortable rather than fearful.