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Office Hours: Monday 12 Noon to 1:50 pm by appointment
Wednesday 12 Noon to 1pm by appointment

Syllabus Fall 2018

ENGLISH 361 CONTEMPORARY PROSE: TRUE CRIME

Required texts:

1. *True Crime: An American Anthology*, Edited by Harold Schechter
New York: Library of America, 2008
2. *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote
New York: Vintage International, 2012
3. *All the President's Men*, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward
New York: Simon & Schuster trade paperback, 2014
4. *Remembering Satan*, Lawrence Wright
New York: First Vintage Books, 1995
5. *A False Report: A True Story of Rape in America*, T. Christian Miller & Ken Armstrong
New York: Crown, 2018
5. Various handouts **downloaded** from Blackboard

Please note that computers and other electronic devices are not allowed in class, so you will need *physical* copies of all texts.

Course Description: In this course we will examine the history of True Crime narratives in America, from the colonial period up to the present day. We will explore the origins of our fascination with crimes of ever-increasing magnitude and horror. Is this fascination a result of our wish to escape the more mundane if no less disturbing transgressions of our everyday life and our larger culture, or is it perhaps a reflection of what Professor Thomas Doeherty calls “a culture-wide loss of faith in psychological or sociological explanations for criminal deviance and a return to the old Puritan explanation for human evil”? By reading a number of true crime narratives, beginning with Puritan pre-trial examinations and leading up to present-day books and articles, we will examine how a culture’s changing relationship to “real life” crime narratives can help us understand the complex role criminality plays in defining a culture.

Attendance: English 361 is a seminar, that is, a small group that gathers to read and discuss literature. It is an active experience, and as such, attendance and participation in class discussion are essential to the learning experience. On-time attendance is mandatory and an integral part of the participation grade (though not the only criterion). As we only meet once a week, missing one class is equivalent to missing a full week of classes. Absences due to religious holidays or illness are excused only if I am notified in advance and may require documentation. If you have other commitments during class time that may result in multiple absences, this may not be the semester to take this class. Two unexcused absences is a basis for failing the class, as are three excused absences. Note that three absences is the equivalent of missing six classes in a course that meets twice a week; that is a full fifth of our class. Three latenesses are equivalent to one absence, as is consistently not bringing required texts to class in hard copy.

Requirements: This course requires a substantial amount of reading and the viewing of videos. There will also be weekly short (1-2 pages) written responses to the texts and the occasional in-class writing assignments. There will be two shorter (5-7 pages) papers and one longer (10-plus pages) final paper. An Annotated Bibliography for the final paper will be required. In addition to content, papers will be graded on both grammar and style elements. No paper containing numerous spelling and/or grammatical errors can receive an A. An A paper at the university level demonstrates critical thinking, an analysis of the issues of the prompt, and a mature style. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date, in hard copy only. I do not accept emailed papers. Extensions will only be granted in the case of documented long-term illness or emergency. I do not give paper extensions because of extracurricular activities, sports, Greek Life, broken printers/computers, work, assignments, exams in or papers due for another class, or the failure to manage one's time properly.

Participation: Everyone is expected to arrive on time having completed all the required reading/watching for that week. We cannot have a meaningful learning experience if only a few students have engaged with the texts. You are expected to ask questions, express opinions, and respond to classmates' comments in a respectful way. Students will be expected to write short responses to the texts, but participation in lively discussion is essential to your success in the class. Class participation is 15 percent of your grade and you should not expect to do well if you do not regularly speak. I do keep track of participation. If speaking in class fills you with dread, please see me. I sympathize. Nonetheless, class participation is essential to a seminar and I do require it. This portion of your grade also includes any impromptu in-class activities, quizzes, or group work. You cannot make up missed in-class activities.

A Word About Electronics: To reiterate, electronic devices (phones, laptops, tablets, things that have not yet been invented) are not allowed in the classroom unless you have a documented accommodation (see Support Systems section below). I expect a student's undivided attention for a mere two hours and twenty minutes a week. Research shows that manual notetaking (i.e., with pen and paper) helps students process more material and retain it for a longer period of time than electronic notetaking (or browsing Amazon bargains or Instagram during discussion). Moreover, transcribing notes into a Word program from handwritten notes helps processing

and retention (<https://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>).

Caveat: The texts we will be reading depict crimes of various kinds, including rape and murder. On occasion, reading assignments, videos, or presentations may contain graphic portrayals of these crimes, and class discussion may similarly be quite vivid. Please consider if you are willing and able to engage with this type of material. If not, you may want to reconsider enrolling in this course.

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| Grading: | 1000 points possible |
| Paper One | 150 points |
| Paper Two | 200 points |
| Annotated Bibliography | 50 points |
| Paper Three | 300 points |
| Reading Responses | 150 points |
| Participation | 150 points |

USC Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.

equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations.

dsp.usc.edu

USC Support and Advocacy (USCSA) – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

English 361/Contemporary Prose Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

Please note that this schedule is deliberately flexible and subject to change.

Week One August 22

Course introduction

Week Two August 29

Seventeenth century: The birth of true crime writing in America

Readings due: Salem Witch Trials Preliminary hearings (BB)

Week Three September 5

Readings due: Salem witch trials continued
Salem Witch Trials TV miniseries (BB)

Week Four September 12

Eighteenth Century: Crimes as source material

Readings due: From *True Crime*:
“The Murder of a Daughter” Benjamin Franklin
“An Account of a Murder Committed by Mr. J_____ Y_____ Upon His
Family, in December, A.D. 1781” Anonymous
“A Crime More Atrocious and Horrible Than Any Other” Timothy Dwight
“The Record of Crimes in the United States” Various

Week Five September 19

NO CLASS

Week Six September 26

Nineteenth Century: The debut of investigative journalism and literary sensibility

Readings due: From *True Crime*
“A Memorable Murder” Celia Thaxter
“Hunting Human Game” Frank Norris
“The Hossack Murder” Susan Glaspell

From BB
“A Jury of Her Peers” Susan Glaspell

**First paper due

Week Seven October 3

The 20th century (mid century): The “nonfiction novel”

Readings due: *In Cold Blood*

Week Eight October 10

Readings due: *In Cold Blood*
In Cold Blood the movie, (BB)

Week Nine October 17

The 20th century (the 70s): Political Drama

Readings due: *All the President's Men*

Week Ten October 24

Readings due: *All the President's Men*
All the President's Men the movie

Week Eleven October 31

The 20th century (the 80s): Recovered Memory Epidemic

Readings due: *Remembering Satan*

Week Twelve November 7

Readings due: *Remembering Satan*

**Second paper due

Week Thirteen November 14

The 21st century: #Metoo

Readings due: *A False Report*

**Annotated bibliography due

Week Fourteen November 21

THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS

Week Fifteen November 28

Readings due: *A False Report*

Final December 7, 2 p.m.

**Final paper due