CRIMINOLOGY 1700
Crime, Media, and Politics
Fall 2016 Syllabus

Course information:
Room: Snell Library 115
Time: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays 1:35-2:40
Course website on Blackboard (log in at: http://blackboard.neu.edu/).

Instructor information:
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Course Catalog Description:
Crime and justice are popular and controversial subjects, appearing regularly in political debates and campaigns, news reports, as well as films, television shows, and music. In this course, students will discuss and critique contemporary portrayals of crime and justice in these arenas, reacting to current events as they occur in the worlds of politics, major events and incidents receiving news coverage, and recent films, television shows, and music. To set up these discussions, students will develop critical toolkits for assessing these images of crime and justice by reading and discussing theories, research and critiques. Additionally, students will read and discuss historical portrayals of crime and justice with the goal of identifying both parallels and differences between these and current events.

Course Rationale/ Description
Crime is both a popular and controversial subject. Political debates (and stalemates) over the death penalty, drugs, “tough on crime” laws, inner-city violence, white collar crime, and police tactics and behavior are regular news fodder. Among domestic concerns, being “soft” on crime is one of the most damaging characterizations one can make of a politician. Crime is also a central cultural focus: we seem fascinated by movies and television shows focusing on criminals, law enforcement officers, lawyers, and prisons.

In this course we will survey, critique, and analyze the construction and consequences of portrayals of crime and justice in the media and politics. The course might be summarized by a series of (seemingly) simple questions:
- How do we perceive social problems, crime trends, and justice policies?
- How is crime portrayed in popular entertainment, in the news media, and in political discourse?
  - Both historically and contemporarily
- Why is crime and justice portrayed or framed in these ways in each of these domains?
- Who is served by such framings?
- What are the consequences of these portrayals and framings of crime and justice?
- What are the roles of race/ethnicity, class, and gender in such portrayals?

The course will generally be concerned with accomplishing two tasks. The first is the development of critical toolkits for assessing images of crime and justice both in general but also specifically for each of the three public arenas: politics, the news, and popular culture. The second is the utilization of this toolkit to examine historical and contemporary portrayals of crime and justice in these settings. This structure will also allow us to react to events in the real world as they happen: as politicians propose policies or make claims, as crime events are covered by the news, and as new songs, TV shows, or other cultural products emerge, become controversial, or are criminalized.

**Place in University and SCCJ Curriculum/ Prerequisites**
- There are no prerequisites.
- For Criminal Justice majors, the course counts as a “thematic elective”
- For all students, the course fulfills two of the “NUPath Core Categories”
  - IC: Interpreting Culture
  - SI: Understanding Societies and Institutions

**Course Objectives and Learning Goals:**
This is a short list of what I hope to achieve this semester:
- Help you develop a critical toolkit for understanding portrayals of crime and justice in politics, the news media, and the popular media, especially focused on three areas:
  - How crime and justice are portrayed, with a particular focus on race, class, gender, age, and power in the portrayals.
  - The motivations or explanations for portraying crime and justice in particular ways
  - The consequences of particular portrayals of crime and justice
- Provide an overview of historical portrayals of crime and justice in these arenas to help you develop an understanding of the parallels and differences relative to contemporary portrayals
- Provide you with an understanding of portrayals of crime and justice, specifically:
  - Changes in the way crime and justice are portrayed across time, contexts, and types of crime
- Make you a critical consumer of news reports on, politicians’ claims about, and media depictions of crime and crime policies.

**Requirements, Assignments, and Grading:**
- Participation and Image Discussion 15%
- Exam #1 20%
- Exam #2 20%
- Exam #3 20%
- Issue/Image Critique: Presentation and Paper 25%

**What to expect in class/ What I expect of students:**
- What to expect in class:
  - Class time will be spent in a mixture of lecture and discussion.
  - I will generally begin class by introducing the topic and setting it in the context of the class.
  - We will generally then move on to discuss the assigned reading for the day.
    - Rather than me simply telling you about the reading, I will generally pose a series of question about and inspired by the ideas in the reading, and we will discuss the answers as a class.
The remainder of class will be used to apply the ideas we have discussed to real-world examples.
  • I will often have some examples I want to discuss.
  • And we will also draw on the “images” submitted by students (more on this below).
• I will normally make use of some kind of “presentation slides” during class.
  • The slides will generally have some outline and questions to guide our discussion of the reading.
  • They will also contain links to some of the pictures, news articles, and audio and video clips we will check out in class.
  • I will post the slides on the course blackboard site each day after class.
  • NOTE: As the slides will often contain questions but not answers, they will be useful as a study guide only in combination with the notes you take on the readings and in class.

What I expect of students:
• Complete the required readings for that day. Be sure to note ideas within the readings that are either unclear or interesting for class discussion.
• Be prepared to (and do) participate in the class discussion.

Image discussion assignments:
Each student will sign up as an “image discussant” for three separate class periods (most class sessions will have multiple discussants), one in each section. Here’s what is involved:

• Prior to class, the discussant will complete the readings and then find and select one “image of crime” to present to the class.
  • Images may include:
    • newspaper articles or other textual representations of crime and justice (graphic novels, selections from novels or short stories, etc.)
    • pictures or other images (from news stories, twitter, etc.)
    • audio files (radio, podcast, music, etc.)
    • video
    • other forms as appropriate (check with me if you are unsure)
  • Whatever form, please keep the clips short (under 2 mins)
• Discussants are required to post the image in whatever form they would like to present them to the class discussion board by 5pm in the evening on the day BEFORE the class in which they will be presented.
  • The post must include:
    • The date and topic of the class the image is for
    • A description of your perspective on how this image connects to the day’s topic and readings.
• In class, I will ask that day’s image discussants to present their image (I will assist in showing the image and the student will discuss the connection to that day’s topic). There will be days when we run out of time and have to skip the images. In these cases students can visit the discussion board to see the images and read the student’s perspectives on how they connect to the day’s topic.

Exams:
“Cramming” for an exam is an extremely ineffective way to learn or think about the material presented in a class. When cramming, the class becomes no more than a series of abstract terms and concepts for which you memorize simplified definitions. Further, you are unlikely to remember anything
you learned in the course three weeks from now, let alone a year or five years down the road. That makes this class a giant waste of your time, and, worse, a giant waste of my time.

However, if you have already read the material when the time comes to study for an exam, the process of studying is an opportunity to think about the material we covered in a broader sense (how did the material we addressed in one session relate to material we addressed in a different session? why would we be looking at this sequence of topics in particular?) and to review particular areas where you may have had more questions. In this class you will be required to read material and be prepared to discuss it at every class session, so by design your preparation for the exam should be more “studying” and less “cramming.” The exam, then, in addition to being a means for me to evaluate your level of understanding of the material, is also another opportunity (in addition to the class discussions and the writing assignment) to think about and learn from the material.

The course will include three exams. The exams will be semi-cumulative: each will predominantly address only the material from the preceding section of the course, but may also draw comparisons with material from earlier sections of the course. Each exam will have a series of short-response questions and longer “short answer” questions.

You will be allowed to bring one single-sided piece of 8.5”x11” paper to each exam covered in whatever kinds of notes you wish. The notes may be hand-written or typed. In addition, you may bring one completely blank piece of 8.5”x11” paper to each exam to jot notes or outline an answer before writing on the exam itself.

The first exam will be on Wednesday October 5th, in class.
The second exam will be on Wednesday November 2nd, in class.
The third exam will be at the university-appointed time during exam week.

Issue/Image Critique:
One of the learning goals for this class is to encourage you to think critically about popular images of crime in politics, the news, and popular media. To this end you will identify a topic in politics, the news media, or the popular media and write a critique of its portrayal or public discussion. The critique will be due at the end of the class. Further details on the content of this assignment can be found on blackboard.

Issues and Progress:
The three exams and the short paper are each opportunities to alert you that you’re having issues in the class. Please come and see me as soon as you are concerned about your progress in the class. The class has a quick pace, and falling a bit behind can put you at a serious disadvantage if not dealt with quickly. Real life often intrudes and forces you to divert your attention elsewhere. This is not (necessarily) a problem, and if you come to talk to me as soon as you realize there is a problem, we should be able to find a way for you to continue to be successful in this course. If you wait until the end of the semester to let me know you have fallen behind, our options will be severely restricted. In addition to my office hours, I am regularly available by email often well beyond “standard business hours.”

Course Policies:
Plagiarism of any kind is unacceptable. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, be sure to contact me and ask. In general, following these rules should work: If you directly quote OR paraphrase ANY source (another student, an internet site, an academic article, etc.), you must attribute the quote or paraphrase to that source. It should (but it won’t) go without saying that I expect every student will complete their own work.

For more information on this, Northeastern has an Academic Integrity Policy outlined on pages 36 and 37 of the Student Handbook (www.northeastern.edu/admissions/pdfs/UndergradHandbook.pdf). I encourage all students to review this policy and to contact me with any questions.
Students who miss exams will not be allowed to take a make-up exam without a documented medical or other emergency. Papers handed in late without a similarly documented medical or other emergency will be penalized for each day the paper is not received after the due date.

Technology. I allow the use of laptops to take notes in class or to refer to electronic copies of readings. Please do not use your laptop to surf the web, play games, or for any reason other than taking notes or referring to electronic copies of readings. If you use a machine with a vertical screen (laptop, etc.), and plan to display anything on that screen other than class notes or the class readings, please sit in the back row so that you do not serve as a distraction for other students. I reserve the right to ban computing devices at any point in the class if I believe they have become a distraction. There is never a valid use for cellphones during class time.

Accommodations. I am very happy to work to support and accommodate students in ways that will give them the best chance to succeed. If you will be requesting accommodations of any kind, please schedule a meeting with the DRC (http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/) if you haven’t already, and bring me the appropriate paperwork within the first few weeks of class. If you wait until the first exam is looming to notify me, there is a very good chance I will not be able to accommodate you.

Required Books:

This course will include a number of readings that can be accessed on blackboard. Additionally, there are two required books for this course. First, we will use Beckett and Sasson’s book on the politics of crime and punishment as a way to broadly bookend the course and think about representations of crime in politics in particular. Second, we will use Yvonne Jewkes overview of issues related to crime and media in our sections on representations of crime and justice in the news media and in popular media.

Course Schedule:
I have provided a detailed outline of the topics we will address each day of the semester in class. Note: given the topic and goals of the course, the course schedule may change to accommodate or react to events that unfold over the course of the semester. Any changes will be announced in class and over email, so be sure to check your Northeastern email account regularly. Each assigned reading is followed by its location in parentheses (either in one of the books or available via our class blackboard website). I hope that this detailed outline will serve to illuminate for you the structure of the class: what we’ve covered, where we’re going, and how they tie together. I have organized the course in a linked series of topical sections. This schedule can be found on blackboard.