

HEADING

Project title:

Terrorism in Law and Culture: Reshaping Narratives and Engaging the Public

For each project leader:

- a. Name: Audrey J. Golden, J.D., Ph.D.
- b. Title: Assistant Professor
- c. Department or program: English
- d. Institution: Simmons University (formerly Simmons College)

ABSTRACT

Representations of terrorism are pervasive in our global moment, yet the specific legal and cultural contexts that give meaning to this term are less often understood. This course proposes that a study of terrorism through literature, cinema, and visual art can transform conceptions of “the terrorist” in popular culture and can begin to repair biases inherent in textual and visual renditions across media and jurisprudence. Students will meet with former detainees, investigate archival materials concerning counter-terrorist policies, visit sites, and learn from writers and filmmakers seeking to reshape knowledge of terrorism in contemporary culture. These experiences will illuminate shifting legal definitions of terror devised at various moments and points across the globe. In the process, students will work to reframe perceptions of terror, culminating in a public-facing digital exhibition that curates objects of material culture to expose racism, xenophobia, and other prejudices inherent in current frameworks for understanding terrorism.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Rationale:

Terror and terrorism are terms that pervade popular culture, but their definition and application are rarely understood by newspaper readers and news watchers, moviegoers and museumgoers, and tourists who visit and pass by memorials to victims of terror. This course will demonstrate the interrelated value of both legal and literary materials pertaining to terrorism in shaping students' knowledge and application of various formulations of global "terror."

This course is designed to interest students across disciplines who want to: 1) engage in public discourse about terrorism in popular culture; 2) gain detailed knowledge of the legal and historical constructions of these terms; 3) apply methods of literary inquiry so as to reveal and upend current xenophobic and racist constructions of "the terrorist"; and 4) hone skills for recentering and reframing public knowledge about terror and terrorism through digital humanities. As my long-running "Human Rights and Global Literature" course has shown (cited below), students are extremely interested in the relationship between literary texts and international laws, and the ways in which literary study can allow them to engage with political and legal constructs in praxis.

Through engagement with literary texts broadly conceived (i.e., fiction, poetry, cinema) and both domestic and international law, the course aims to consider some of the following questions that arise in cultural representations of terror and terrorism:

- What does it mean to identify an act of violence as terrorism?
- What role do religious and ethnic identity play in existing constructs of the terrorist in popular culture?
- How do the historical origins of these terms affect our understanding and application of them in the twenty-first century?

- What is extremism, and how has that particular word shaped contemporary understandings of terrorism in varying parts of the world?
- What is the difference between domestic and international terrorism, and how do these legal definitions differ from one another?
- How do cultural engagements with terrorism—through literature, film, art, and music—both challenge and obfuscate local and global policies for preventing and punishing acts of terror?

Students will shape answers to these questions in curating an online exhibit entitled “Material Objects of Terror and Terrorism in the 21st Century,” offering public exhibition-goers an opportunity to challenge and remake their own perceptions of “the terrorist” and acts of terrorism in the U.S. and across varied regions of the world.

Audience:

This course will be a mid-level seminar for students across disciplines who have an interest in terrorism and the law, and in applying methods of humanistic inquiry to public engagement. It will have no prerequisites and thus will encourage a variety of interested participants from across Simmons University. As a mid-level course (a 200-level course in our English Department), it will involve reading and application of theoretical materials, and will require a willingness to develop more in-depth knowledge of the subjects of terror and terrorism in law and culture.

Content and Design:

The learning objectives for this course include:

- Understand the cultural, social, and legal histories that have shaped knowledge of terror and terrorism both domestically and internationally;

- Analyze how literary and legal texts produce definitions of terror and terrorism that have framed cultural perceptions of “the terrorist” and “extremism” in domestic and international contexts;
- Consider the benefits and limitations of current legal and cultural knowledge of terrorism, thinking through necessary juridical applications while acknowledging how laws and the “War on Terror” have given rise to xenophobic, racist, and otherwise prejudiced discourse;
- Apply multiple methods of literary inquiry — including those developed through theoretical materials, experiential knowledge, and space-based inquiry — to cultural texts arising out of terror and terrorism;
- Develop oral and written arguments about how literary texts and other objects of material culture can reshape and recenter public knowledge about terror and terrorism, recognizing the value of certain domestic and international laws and the limitations of others; and
- Construct a portion of an online exhibition, “Material Objects of Terror and Terrorism in the 21st Century,” designed to recenter and reshape public knowledge and understanding of terror and terrorism in modern and contemporary life (to be crafted in partnership with Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), adjacent to the Simmons University campus).

While the concept of terror has centuries-old roots in anarchic and revolutionary acts, contemporary assumptions about terrorism tend to center discourse around particular global regions, as well as religious and ethnic identities. This course will introduce students to the cultural and historical underpinnings of terror and terrorism, offering new way to engage with this terminology through humanistic inquiry and to reframe public knowledge. The class will be constructed according to four key units: Revolutionary Terror, Terror and Nationalism, The War on Terror, and Extremism in Domestic and Global Space.

The course will introduce students to a wide variety of texts and materials across the semester, which will provide them with the knowledge and expertise to select relevant

objects of material culture for the online exhibit and to draft compelling and publicly accessible catalog descriptions to reshape knowledge of terrorism in domestic and global culture. Materials and experiences to be included in the course include but are not limited to:

- Discussion with Mohamedou Ould Slahi, former Guantanamo detainee and author of *Guantanamo Diary* (conversation will take place via Zoom)
- Discussion with Dara Kell and Veena Rao, documentary filmmakers of *Ode to Sea* (short film based on Guantanamo detainee Moath al-Alwi's confiscated prison art)
- In-person visit to Boston's MFA museum and meeting with curator
- Virtual visit to Mass MOCA to experience Jenny Holzer's "Secretary of Defense" and "We're at War" exhibits
- Site visit to Boston Marathon Bombing Monument
- Site visit to Boston Massacre Site
- Virtual site visit to Markale Market in Sarajevo, site of the Markale massacres tried as terrorism at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
- Selection from "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" (1789), a French Revolution document that initially defines terror
- 1937 Terrorism Convention [international law]
- Convention on Terrorism for the ICC [international law]
- Offences Against the State Acts 1939-1998 [Irish domestic laws on terrorism]
- USA PATRIOT Act [U.S. law on terrorism]
- Operation Demetrius digital archive [detainment operation in Northern Ireland]
- Frantz Fanon, "On Violence," from *The Wretched of the Earth* [theoretical text]
- Hannah Arendt, selection on terror from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [theoretical text]
- Mohamedou Ould Slahi, *Guantanamo Diary* [written non-fiction text]
- Sergei Stepniak, "Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life" [written non-fiction]
- Anna Burns, *Milkman* [written novel]

- Henrik Rehr, *Terrorist Gavrilo Princip: The Assassin Who Ignited World War I* [written graphic novel]
- Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers* [film]
- Andrzej Wajda, *Ashes and Diamonds* [film]

Assignments will include a semester-long reflection journal, student presentations, class participation, and the major assignment of an object contribution to the online exhibition “Material Objects of Terror and Terrorism in the 21st Century” (to include selection of a relevant object, development of accompanying catalog and text material for public viewers and digital exhibition-goers, and collaboration on overarching exhibition description and Welcome page).

The students will have multiple opportunities across the semester to work collaboratively to brainstorm ideas for the exhibition and the objects each will include, as well as drafting and workshopping exhibit catalog and text material.

Participant/ Instructor Expertise and Experience:

My research and teaching focus on the interrelation of international law and global literature. As both a lawyer and literature scholar, my expertise allows me to provide a unique perspective to students on terrorism in both juridical and cultural frameworks. In 2015, I designed a Human Rights and Global Literature course that I have been teaching annually for the past six years that is routinely popular with students across disciplines and consistently fills all seats available, often with a waitlist. It draws students from humanities disciplines like communications and English, as well as from the sciences, political science and IR, sociology, nursing, and numerous other majors offered at Simmons. Similar to the type of materials and course structure I am proposing for “Terrorism in Law and Culture,” my Human Rights and Global Literature course brings together legal, literary, and cinematic materials to provide students with a broad

understanding of the language of “human rights” and how it can be applied in varied contexts, both within and outside the classroom.

Given that this proposed course has an online museum exhibition component, my experience developing courses with similar exhibitions is also relevant. In my previous position as Assistant Professor and Film Studies Program Director at Coe College (2015-2018), I partnered with the Cedar Rapids Public Library to develop an on-site exhibit of Global Indigenous Literature texts, for which students raised funds to supply these books to the library and curated the exhibit. The curatorial work required students to select books and films to contribute to the exhibition and to write catalog and exhibit descriptions for public library-goers. The goal of the exhibition was to enhance public awareness and knowledge about Indigenous literatures in the midwest in relation to global texts, particularly given Coe College’s proximity to the Meskwaki Settlement in Tama, Iowa. The exhibition also involved a field trip to the Meskwaki Settlement, where students met with Meskwaki historians and community leaders in developing their catalog and exhibition materials. As recently as last fall (2020), my Simmons University course on The Global Novel engaged with The British Museum’s “I, Object!” exhibition from 2018, which gathered materials from the museum’s holdings at the curatorial direction of Ian Hislop to reveal the hidden histories of objection and resistance within the museum. Due to the pandemic and remote coursework, students in my class each selected an object from an existing museum collection and worked collaboratively to put together an “I, Object” exhibition online that demonstrated hidden histories of resistance within the framework of global novels and global literary circulation.

The “Material Objects of Terror and Terrorism in the 21st Century” online exhibition that I am proposing as a key component of the “Terrorism in Law and Culture” course will build on the knowledge I’ve gained in guiding students to construct publicly accessible and valuable in-person and online exhibitions that reframe public knowledge of cultural issues and concerns. In each of these exhibitions — as will be the case for the “Material Objects of Terror and Terrorism in the 21st Century” online exhibition — a goal will be to

demonstrate that methods of humanistic inquiry extend far beyond the classroom and allow students to engage with their communities in various ways.

After years of teaching my Human Rights and Global Literature course, as well as designing a variety of other courses with public museum exhibition and civic engagement components, I have seen the ways in which students are eager to gain knowledge about juridical and political texts and practices through the study of literatures and other products of material culture, and to apply them to a public audience. The “Terrorism in Law and Culture” course I am proposing here will build on my scholarly expertise and the experience I have gained teaching the courses mentioned above, and it will offer a new kind of innovative, multi-disciplinary seminar for students interested in melding work in law and the humanities with an eye toward public outreach.

Impact and Assessment:

The course will have short-term and long-term impacts. In the short-term, students will gain detailed knowledge about representations of terror and terrorism in law and culture, and will engage with a wide variety of texts in constructing an online exhibition that will aim to reshape public conceptions of terror and terrorism in the twenty-first century. In the long-term, students will be able to apply the knowledge they have gained in the class — both the textual and experiential knowledge from readings/viewings/visitor discussions, as well as from development of the public exhibition — to questions of terror and terrorism as they relate to a wide variety of fields and professions in the years that follow. In addition, students’ work on the online exhibition will have the long-term impact of continuing to reshape public knowledge of the subject matter given that the exhibition will be a long-running online site that will be maintained by Audrey Golden (through Simmons University).

The course goals will be assessed through surveys aimed at public exhibition-goers, as well as through follow-up interviews with students upon course completion and graduation, about their expanded and deepened knowledge of terror and terrorism in law and culture, and the ways this knowledge can be packaged for public consumption.

Timeline:

(Course to be taught in Fall 2022)

- January-February 2022: Begin communications with the Boston MFA to develop community partnership for online exhibition “Material Objects of Terror and Terrorism in the 21st Century”
- March-June 2022: Work with Simmons University webmaster and student technology worker to design online exhibition website and to prepare it for student content in the fall
- June 2022: Confirm virtual discussions with Mohamedou Ould Slahi and filmmakers Dara Kell and Veena Rao
- June-August 2022: Confirm student site visits and finish putting together course materials for September course start date

BUDGET

- \$500 speaker honorarium for Mohamedou Ould Slahi
- \$500 shared speaker honoraria to be shared by filmmakers Dara Kell and Veena Rao
- \$750 budget for online exhibition website design and content management by student technology worker at Simmons University (50 hours of work at \$15/hour)
- \$100 budget for web hosting (\$20 annual domain purchase for five years, looking to the long-term goals of the online exhibition)

- \$100 budget for advertising the online exhibition in local community print and online venues in Boston, as well as in larger US and international online venues (with aim of having the online exhibition visited by a broad community audience, both domestically and globally)
- \$50 Boston travel budget for student T-passes (public transit) to Boston Marathon Bombing Monument and Boston Massacre Site
- \$1000 stipend for faculty course development

Total: \$3,000