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Course Description:

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the birth of a new “enemy of the human race” (hostis humani generis): the modern political terrorist. Almost simultaneously in Great Britain and Russia, individuals who were willing to kill and die for their political beliefs appeared as a force to be reckoned with and a figure of radical hostility and mystery. As we will see, the question “Who is the terrorist?” is more a riddle than a question and may be answered in many ways, depending ultimately on how we define terrorism and who “we” are. Both the individual and the state may be terrorist actors. Our course examines both revolutionary (or insurgent) terrorism and state terrorism, and while our primary areas of focus will be the U.S. and Russia, we will dip into Europe and Northern Africa. Our historical trajectory begins in the 1870s, with the emergence of populist terrorism in Russia and white supremacist terrorism in the U.S.A., and we conclude with the Putin administration’s destruction of the political opposition in 2021 and the violent insurrection at the U.S. capitol on January 6.

This is a First Year Seminar, and so we will intensively engage these questions through writing, broadly conceived as developing, articulating, and refining our ideas in written form. Writing, talking about writing, and writing instruction are a central part of our course and key to making sense of and assimilating the ideas we will encounter. We will be challenged to analyze the
rhetoric, the narratives, and the first premises of our course’s texts. Our ultimate purpose is to enable you to reflect critically upon received and preconceived answers to the question “Who is the terrorist?” and to synthesize your own historically informed and deliberated position from our class’s joint inquiry.

**Materials**

Our course materials encompass historical and contemporary primary and secondary sources, as well as film and literary fiction. In addition to philosophical essays by Albert Camus (from *The Rebel*), Franz Fanon (“On Violence”) and Hannah Arendt (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*), we will watch feature films that portray the complexities and ambiguities of terrorism, including *V for Vendetta*, *The Battle of Algiers*, *The Death of Stalin* and *Judas and the Black Messiah*.

**Evaluation and Grading**

Each of you has already attained a level of proficiency as a writer, and our objective is to continue to build upon the considerable ability that you already possess. Our goal is for you to develop your own academic style that effectively uses the terminology or conventions of a given field, but is engaging and accessible to a non-academic reader. Writing is about communicating your ideas in the clearest and most precise way possible, but this does not preclude personal style and expression. You will have three writing assignments, each with its own specific rubric, and your first drafts will benefit from peer review and workshops.

**Below is a list of assignments and the grade breakdown for this course:**

**#1** How can you use Crenshaw’s conception of terrorism as a rational choice or Post’s paradigm of terrorist psycho-logic to analyze Nechaev, Morozov, Kravchinsky, Booth (as portrayed by Sondheim), or Brown? 5-6 pages (15% = 5% for draft + 10% for final)

**#2** Film analysis: How does the director employ the visual and narrative resources of film to portray the terrorist self? 5 pages (15%)

**#3** Revision of Paper #1 or Paper #2 (10%)

**#4** Annotated bibliography on research topic (20%)

**#6** Final oral presentation with script (15%)

**#7** Class attendance and participation (25%)