FYSEM-UA 205
UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM

Instructor: Tom Gerety

Wednesday, 11:00–1:30 p.m.

This seminar examines terrorist attacks and movements from an interdisciplinary perspective, seeking to reach a better understanding of the attackers themselves, their motivations and backgrounds, their plots and ideologies—whether secular or religious. We will also examine the challenges of countering terrorism in societies with many ‘soft’ targets and extensive global conflicts and entanglements.

We will read case studies of terrorism and counter-terrorism, including moral and legal arguments about torture, detention and targeted killings. We will also try to understand how and why young men and women can be so powerfully drawn to violence, particularly violence against non-combatant (and often randomly targeted) civilians.

We will visit various sites in New York City and meet with people with direct experience of terrorism and radicalization, including representatives of both the police and the immigrant communities who have suffered profiling, prejudice and mistrust. Looking towards the future, we will examine local, national and international strategies to prevent such attacks and to halt the radicalization that brings fresh recruits to terrorist movements.

This seminar will require several kinds of work from each student:

1. There will be a writing component, consisting of 4 submissions: a. A short essay of only two pages in the second week, counting for only 5% of your final grade; another such essay, but of four pages, for the fourth week, counting for 15% of your final grade; a longer essay of six
pages in the eighth week, counting for 25%; and a final, lengthier, paper of ten to twelve pages, on a topic chosen by each student in consultation with the instructor, at the conclusion of the course, counting for 35% of the overall grade. Thus, formal writing assignments will amount to between 22-24 pages, counting for 80% of each student’s grade, with the final paper counting for a little less than half of that.

1. The seminar requires attendance and active participation, both in class and at outside of class events. Each student will be required to speak to the issues in the reading at each seminar meeting. Preparation is essential: complete each weekly assignment (of approximately 60-80 pages) and note ideas that seem interesting and important to you in your own handwriting on a sheet to be submitted at the end of each meeting; these submissions will count for 10% of your final grade. In addition there will be required oral presentations, week by week, usually by two or three students. Occasionally we will stage more formal arguments--short debates--in class. These spoken contributions will count for another 10% of your work.

2. Students will be required to meet with the instructor individually to discuss written work and other concerns on a regular schedule during the semester.

SYLLABUS OF READINGS BY WEEK:

(In this field, developments can be shockingly rapid. The syllabus below is tentative and subject to changes, even during the semester of the seminar.)

1. Richardson's Basics, What Terrorists Want (30 pages offprinted).

2. The Breivik Case, Seierstad excerpts (20 pages); Knausgard, “The Inexplicable,” New Yorker Magazine online, (22 pages), http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/05/25/the-inexplicable; and
Flynn, GQ online (12 pages), http://www.gq.com/story/anders-behring-breivik-norway-massacre-story
3. Breivik and Norway, Capture and Punishment, Seierstad excerpts (25 pages); Fisher, The Atlantic online (5 pages),
https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/08/a-different-justice-why-anders-breivik-only-got-21-years-for-killing-77-people/261532/;

4. The Boston Marathon Attack, Immigration and Alienation: NYT, Boston Globe, Rolling Stone, etc. (Offprints, 70 pages)

5. The Question of Insanity and Free Will: Dylann Roof, Adam Lanza and the Insanity Defense, PBS Frontline, A Crime of Insanity,
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/crime/ (30 pages and some film), Selections from The New Yorker Essays on Dylann Roof,


7. Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Lawrence Wright, The Looming Tower, Part II (chh. 7-14, 100 pages).


9. Just Violence and the Killing of Innocents: A philosophical excursion...

10. Part II: Hiroshima and other extreme cases, Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, (Offprint of excerpts, 60 pages).

11. Suicide, Heroism and Martyrdom: Is Religious Motivation Different?
Excerpts from Glucklich, Pape and others (Offprint, 80 pages).

13. ISIS's Ideas--and Appeal: Articles, Video and Essays,
Graeme Wood, The Atlantic,
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/
Simon Cottee, The Atlantic,
https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/religion-isis-orlando/490958/
Harvard Law School Video Symposium,
https://today.law.harvard.edu/islamic-state-play/

https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/saudi-arabia/2009-12-21/mind-over-martyr

TOM GERETY, Collegiate Professor, joined the NYU faculty in 2005 to teach courses in law and the humanities. He first came to NYU to head up the Brennan Center for Justice at the Law School. He served as President of Amherst College from 1994 to 2003 and of Trinity College from 1989 to 1994. From 1986 to 1989 he was Dean and Nippert Professor at the College of Law of the University of Cincinnati. As a law professor he taught and wrote on constitutional law and political philosophy, with a special emphasis on First Amendment freedoms, including speech, privacy, and religious freedom. He wrote and narrated a PBS series, Visions of the Constitution, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. He is