ANTHROPOLOGY OF CRIME

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In this seminar we will take an anthropological perspective to challenge “common-sense” and legalistic notions of contemporary criminality, comparing ideas about and representations of lawbreaking and violence in different communities. For now we will limit the category of crime we study to prosaic or non-“political” (or non-state) acts of violence variously defined as illegal or immoral (though we must always question such a definition). Our goal is to find new ways to understand something that quickly becomes sensationalized, stereotyped and simplified as it enters public debate.

We start by recognizing that violence is always already part of the fabric of life and culture (though it is often categorized as interruption). Experiences with violence produce and reproduce distinct ways of seeing and being in the world. Our focus is on social marginality and fear, as approached through ethnography. We begin our inquiry by examining the way people talk about violence in their lives. Locally meaningful categories of difference (gender, “race,” ethnicity, social class and age) structure those experiences, which in turn contribute to larger, dominant (as well as opposing, subversive) social constructions of criminality and criminalized “others.”

After studying storytelling, we’ll read some legal anthropology, considering how conceptions of morality and responsibility are differently managed in different cultural contexts, particularly through spatial and policing practices. Next, we will focus on issues of identity: race, gender and class. Then we’ll delve into some works on the mass media, the powerful force-space in which we encounter crime and criminals. Finally, we will apply the concepts we have been learning to the analysis of a series of ethnographic works, with a particular focus on Latin American examples, that aim to shed light on problems of criminality as they occur in specific times and spaces within particular communities.
Course Structure and Assignments:
This is an undergraduate seminar, focused on interactive learning and
discussion. During our meetings, you’ll hear lectures, participate in (and lead)
discussions and debates, watch several films and listen to guest speakers.
Between classes, you’ll read articles and chapters from the course pack as well as
occasional handouts (averaging 100 pages per week; I will likely narrow down
assignments as discussion focus emerges); write commentaries on five class units
(weeks); do short writing assignments, and carry out final projects.

SYLLABUS

Week 1: WAYS OF SEEING/THE OTHER
Monday, January 7
Introductions
Anthropology and crime: A brief history
Image of the criminal

Wednesday, January 9
Old stories: Born criminals and criminological myths
Apishness of Undesirables.” In The Mismeasure of Man. New York: W.W. Norton:
113-145.

of Crime.” In Pepinsky, Harold E. and Richard Quinney, eds. Criminology as

Weeks 2-3: STORYTELLING: EXPERIENCE, VICTIMS AND HEROES
Monday, January 14
Anthropologies: Translation and translatability of language, culture and
experience
Rosaldo, Renato. “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage” and “After Objectivism” in

Bohannan, Laura. “Shakespeare in the Bush.” In Natural History, August-
September 1966. Reprinted in Annual Editions Anthropology 97/98, edited by Elvio
Angeloni, 53-57. Guilford, Conn.: Dushkin Publishing.

Short writing assignment due today:
Drawing on Rosaldo’s and Bohannan’s articles, discuss the possibility of cross-
cultural understanding. Can we ever fully understand someone else’s
experience, especially one narrated from a different cultural context? Incorporate an account of your own experience with crime (2 pages).

Wednesday, January 16

**Stories, social worlds and worldviews**


**Short writing assignment due today:**

Write a 1-page description of an experience with crime – either yours or that of someone you know (interview him or her!). Or imagine an experience with crime. Then think about who the criminal was; what he or she looked like, what background he or she might have had. Write another page describing that. Draw a picture to illustrate it (or find a magazine or newspaper photograph).

Monday, January 21

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. HOLIDAY**

Wednesday, January 23

**Whose hero/whose victim**

**FILM:** *Confessions of Bernhard Goetz* (1987) (80 minutes)


**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ISSUES WHILE WATCHING THE BERNARD GOETZ VIDEO. Choose one and write a three-page paper about it, drawing on your observations of the video and the readings assigned for class today and next**
Moodie
Crime syllabus

Week. Within your essay, try to compare the Goetz case to your own crime story (discussed Monday) as a cultural-historical artifact. Remember to use proper documentation of your sources (information on the Chicago style is provided in your course pack. You may use another style if you are used to it). DUE WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2002

1. What is the role of the CITY in this story? How do different players (especially Goetz) characterize the city? How do these stories produce the city, in the sense Teresa Caldeira writes of?
2. Does the Goetz story become a joint or communal/community story, in the sense Katovich describes? Why or why not? What roles do the mass media play?
3. What is the role of race? Why do some people argue that this was a racial issue, whites uniting behind a skinny white guy, while others—such as Roy Innis of CORE—defend him as non-racist?
4. What roles do “authenticity” and “sincerity” play? Why is Goetz perceived as honest, and not crazy, to so many people? What is the role of experience in constructing the stories, both for Goetz and for his supporters and opponents?
5. Would you consider Goetz a “modern criminal hero,” as Paul Kooistra suggests? Why or why not? Remember to refer to your own observations of the film.
6. How is Bernhard Goetz’s story a cultural story? What does Michael Brooks mean when he writes, “When the actual Bernhard Goetz arrived on the scene, he stepped into a story that had already been told?”

Monday, January 28
Robin Hoods and heroes

Meetings with writing partners

Writing assignment due today:
Goetz analysis (see above).

Weeks 4-5: THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL ORDER: SOCIETY, STATE, SPACE
Wednesday, January 30
Cultures, law and justice


Writing assignment due today:
Goetz rewrite.

Monday, February 4
Policing


PROPOSALS FOR FINAL PROJECTS DUE

Wednesday, February 6
Space and surveillance
CHOOSE TWO:


Writing assignment due today:
Describe a public place in which you may feel the possibility of danger; then contrast this with a place where you sense you are safe. You may want to
describe the neighborhood you grew up in, and/or a shopping area you frequent: are there invisible (or visible) barriers that keep out outsiders, that obstruct intrusion? Relate your experience to issues discussed in Davis, Caldeira and Piccato. (3 pages)

Weeks 6-7: IDENTITY AND CRIME I: FEMINISM AND MASCULINITIES
Monday, February 11
Gendered space
FILM: Thelma and Louise

Wednesday, February 13


Monday, February 18
Masculinities


TAKE-HOME MID-TERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED

Weeks 7-8-9: IDENTITY AND CRIME II: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACE AND CLASS IN HISTORICAL MOMENTS
Wednesday, February 20
Race, racism, representation and self-representation

Friday, February 22

TAKE-HOME MID-TERM EXAM DUE
Monday, March 4


Wednesday, March 6
Mass media, crime and criminalizing


Short writing assignment due today:
Bring in a news article or series of articles about a crime or crimes. Write a 2-page paper and be prepared for a brief (5-minute) presentation about how the crime was “reconstructed”; whether the article perpetuates any kind of stereotypes (gender, race, ethnicity, age); and what kind of “world” is assumed and “created” in the text.

Monday, March 11
Inequalities: Media and meaning flow

Wednesday, March 13
Inequalities: Culture of poverty, culture of wealth
Weeks 10-11-12-13: ETHNOGRAPHIES OF CRIME, COMMUNITY AND EVERYDAY VIOLENCES

Monday, March 18

Doing ethnography: Issues


Wednesday, March 20


Monday, March 25

Ethnography: Marginalized community

Wednesday, March 27

Ethnography: Groups and gangs

CHOOSE ONE:


Monday, April 1

FINAL PROJECT WORK DAY. Bring in drafts and outlines of final projects, to be discussed with student working on similar project (I will assign you).

Wednesday, April 3

CHOOSE ONE:


**Monday, April 8**

**Ethnographic case study: Colombia**

Film: Gaviria, Victor, “Rodrigo D: No Future,” 1986. (92 minutes)

**Wednesday, April 10**


**Week 14: Limits of “crime”? Structural violence**

**Monday, April 15**


**Wednesday, April 17**

Share final projects: Due today.