

# Killers and Cults

## Leadership Gone Awry

LDST 350 (12837)

**Class Meetings:** Jepson Hall 107, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00-10:15am

**Instructor:** Dr. Lauren Henley (she/her)

**Office Hours:** Jepson Hall 234 (Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00pm)

**Contact Method:** Email (lhenley@richmond.edu)

### Course Description

Ted Bundy might be America's quintessential postmodern serial killer, but he also displayed many characteristics society affixes onto its most recognizable and respected leaders: charisma, intelligence, and attractiveness. Similarly, Jim Jones is often regarded as a heinous cult leader who facilitated unthinkable atrocities, but he was also appointed to the Indianapolis Human Rights Commission. This class takes seriously the preoccupation American society has with cults and serial killers as a productive lens for us to study the phenomenon of leadership. Approaching these topics from a historical lens will help us dismantle tropes we have about people who fit into these categories and force us to reckon with the uncomfortable truth that the line between "us" and "them" isn't as bifurcated as we might initially believe.

### Content Learning Objectives

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Defend a working definition of *cult* and *serial killer*.
2. Apply a leadership studies lens to cults/serial killers.
3. Contextualize cults and serial killers (and coverage of these topics) using a socio-historical framework.

### Historical Inquiry Learning Objectives

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Analyze questions about past events, ideas, and human worlds (political, cultural, social, economic, and/or physical).
2. Demonstrate historical thinking by contextualizing and analyzing primary sources and evaluating the nature and limits of historical evidence.
3. Apply interpretations and methods employed in the given area of historical study.
4. Formulate, advance, and properly document historical arguments, drawing on a combination of primary sources, secondary sources, and other research materials appropriate to the given area of historical study.



# What this class is...

## Necessarily unsettling

We will talk about violent and heinous acts...often. Be respectful and be intentional, but please know that nearly everything about this class carries a version of a trigger warning, so I will not be preempting discussions with disclaimers unless I believe the materials under consideration are *particularly* disturbing. Topics that may appear frequently in readings and class discussion include: murder (obviously), sexual assault/rape, cannibalism, dismemberment, necrophilia, child abuse, torture, mutilation, etc. If at any point during class you need to step away from the conversation, please display emotional intelligence by discreetly removing yourself from the trigger. If you need to step away for the entire class period, please send me an email as soon as possible so we can chat.

## Reading intensive

Seriously. You will notice that most of our class periods have 50+ pages of reading (typically from two different sources). While these readings tend to be accessible and often follow a narrative structure, there is no ignoring that 50 pages is 50 pages. If you are a slow reader and worry about keeping up, come see me during office hours so we can strategize. If you do not want to read a fair bit about cults and serial killers, please drop this class.



## Selective

There are lots and lots of groups that could be considered cults that we could be discussing. There are plenty of serial killers who make ripe fodder for classroom conversation. We're touching the tip of the iceberg in the time we have together. If you don't see someone or something on the syllabus that you expected us to cover, let me know. There's no guarantee we'll get to it this semester, but I am certainly open to modifications. I have tried to present a diversity of types of cults and types of killers, but there is only so much ground we can cover in a single semester.

# ...What this class isn't

## An academic version of *Mindhunter*

I'm not John Douglas. I have no desire to be. As such, though we will look into the way the FBI has shaped public perception of violent crime, we will not be tracking any contemporary serial killers or trying to infiltrate cultish organizations.



## An indictment of religion

If you or anyone in your orbit is or has been a member of any of the communities under consideration, do not view our course materials as condemnation of their experiences or yours. The cults we are covering have been given that title by scholars who approach these groups with differing agendas and expertise. By the end of the semester, you should be able to determine for yourself whether you believe this label has been appropriately applied.

## A true crime fan club

I get it. These topics are intriguing. But part of our goal is to figure out *why* and *how*. As such, I expect you to conduct yourself in a manner commiserate with the gravity of the subjects at hand. Be curious and open, but don't make crude or offensive jokes about the violent acts we will discuss.

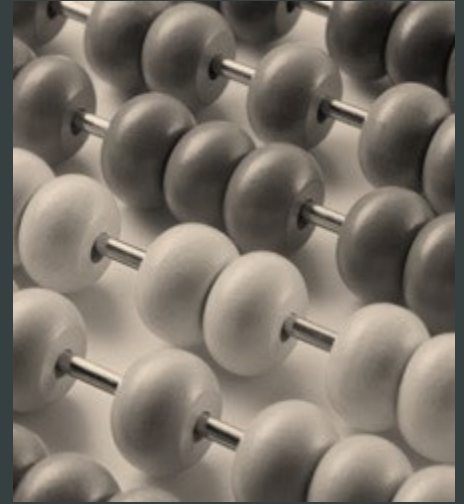


## Deliberately scary

I get that the topics under consideration can be frightening. I have not deliberately selected materials to elicit a fear response. That said, it is not fair to your peers to use fear as a reason you were unable to complete an assignment on time. If you know you scare easily, plan to do your reading in broad daylight and/or in public places until you get comfortable with the kind of materials that have been assigned.

# Assessment

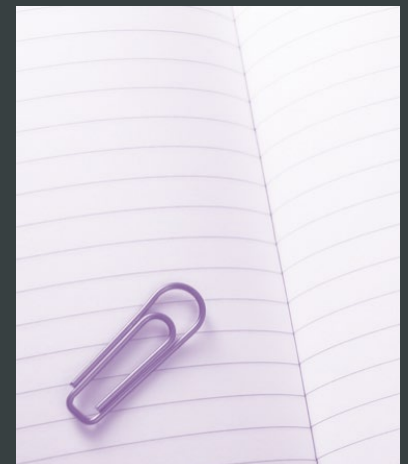
This class approaches assignments and grading differently from many other classes. Research shows that traditional grading can hinder students' willingness to learn for the sake of learning. Instead, students tend to focus on the end result—the grade—and often prioritize getting a certain score or number of points. Because this class has the potential to be generative, enlightening, and rigorous, we owe it to one another to embrace learning for the sake of learning. To that end, this class is rooted in a low-stakes assessment philosophy. This means that every assessment contributes 10% of your overall class grade and can only be connoted by a letter grade (A, B, C, D, or F, without pluses or minuses).



A low-stakes grading philosophy does not mean that assignments are easy, but that no single assessment disproportionately hurts or helps your overall grade. It also helps you assess how to allocate your time for different assignments in our class *and* in comparison to other obligations you have.

Given the nature of one of our activities (To Catch a Killer, outlined below), I will be giving out letter grades for this aspect of class in a *semi-competitive format*. As you will see in the explanation, the grades are not punitive but designed to replicate real-world expectations without significant consequences.

As a point of reference, it is worth knowing that I have high expectations. I want to see you succeed and will push you to think deeper, take risks, and hone your opinions. I believe you are all capable of immense growth this semester, regardless of where you're starting out. That's what I want to see and I will nudge you to step outside of your comfort zone. Many of the topics we cover this semester elicit a visceral response and cause us to reflect on the values we believe we hold, the assumptions we make about others, and the kind of world we think we inhabit (or perhaps wish to inhabit). Do not confuse a low-stakes assessment philosophy with this class being an easy A.



# Standards

modified from Dr. Thad Williamson

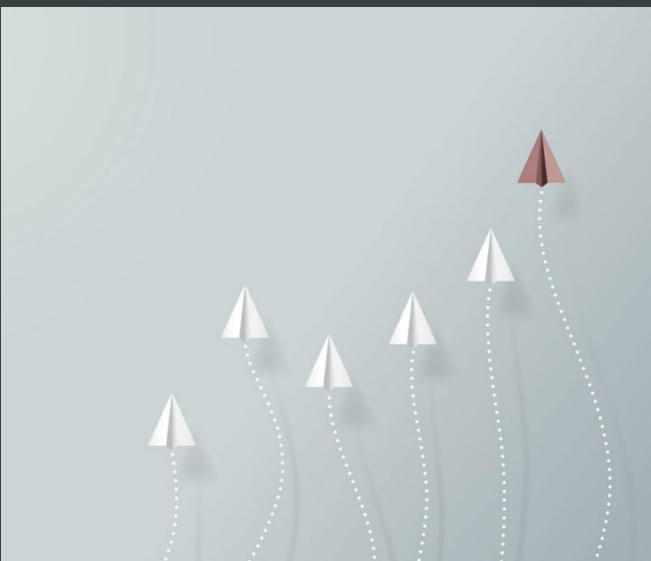
**A (exceptional):** A-range work far exceeds the requirements of a given assignment by demonstrating critical thinking, a comprehensive grasp of the material, and astute attention to detail. A-range assignments advance coherent and original arguments, present compelling evidence, and anticipate potential questions/weaknesses. Work of this quality is incredibly well-written with few-to-no grammatical mistakes, has impeccable organization, and adheres to formatting guidelines, as required. Written assignments that earn this grade are exemplary, distinctive, and evince exceptional insights.

**B (good):** B-range work is considered good and very good, amply meets the assignment's requirements, and shows sincere engagement with course material. B-range papers demonstrate significant effort to address all assignment aspects and avoid obvious pitfalls in logic, argument, and/or organization. Written assignments that earn this grade are typically well-written and easy to follow, make solid arguments, and show acceptable attention to detail.



**C (sufficient):** C-range work meets most of the requirements of a given assignment but is lacking in some significant or noteworthy manner. Engagement with course materials is present but might fall short in terms of comprehension or coverage. C-range assignments may espouse noticeably flawed arguments, fail to present content in an organized manner, and/or demonstrate poor quality writing (or proofreading).

**D and F (insufficient):** D- and F-range work does not meet the requirements.



# Assignments

Participation

Packback

Cult Conversation  
*Outline*  
*Final Paper*

To Catch a Killer

Open-Note Exam

Homicide Investigation

Serial Killer Exhibit  
*Outline*  
*Final Product*

Reflections



# Participation

I expect that you will attend all classes. More importantly, I expect that you will participate in class. I recognize that participation looks different for everyone. Some people will feel comfortable jumping into a conversation from the beginning, others will want to sit back and observe for a bit, and still others might find that any kind of speaking in a group setting makes them anxious. Part of this class is learning how to participate in ways that encourage you to grow. **This is NOT a lecture-based class.** We will have large and/or small group discussions nearly every class and do a variety of in-class activities. Some of the course material we're covering will be controversial and your opinions may differ significantly from those of your peers. That's great. We'll debate various sides of different arguments and reflect on the value of civil discourse.

All of this means that you will be expected to contribute to the intellectual growth of the class, to interact with your peers respectfully, and to engage with course material in meaningful ways. **You should be present in class.** We have 75 minutes each class to work through some of the world's most disturbing, confounding, and problematic phenomena. Put your phone out of sight, take handwritten notes, and only use your computer to pull up our readings (even better, don't use your computer at all). We should respect one another's time out of class, and I expect you to respect our time in class.



## **You may exercise two absences from class without consequence.**

These absences are automatically excused and carry an implicit no-questions-asked policy. You are young adults and I expect you to be able to manage your own commitments, health, familial situations, etc. Out of respect for our class dynamic, please communicate with me before you intend to miss class, if at all possible. Four tardies equals one absence.

Emergencies happen. If you unexpectedly have to miss class, please reach out to me as soon as you are able, but not before you are safe and/or well enough to do so.

# Packback

Participation is a requirement for this course, and Packback will be used for online discussion about class topics. Packback is an online community where you can ask open-ended questions to build on what we are covering in class and relate topics to real-world applications. Packback requires you to cite at least one source (i.e. assigned reading) in your posts.



## Tips

- Curiosity scores take into account *when* you post—being one of the first can help boost your score
  - Consider posting your question early and coming back to do your responses
- Bring in references from the outside world—social media posts, news stories, anecdotes, opinions, etc.
- Spark questions and posts that you wish you had time to answer, that way we can chat about them in class
- Push yourself to disagree with a classmate (and mark it as a counterpoint in the platform)

## Format

- One question is due by 11:59pm ET on Wednesdays
- Two responses are due by the start of class on Thursdays
- All posts must have a minimum curiosity score of 80

The week's discussion will lock at the deadline. You cannot receive partial credit for submitting less than three posts in a week.



## Registration

An email invitation will be sent to you from [help@packback.co](mailto:help@packback.co) prompting you to finish registration. If you don't receive an email (be sure to check your spam), you may register by following the instructions below:

1. Create an account by going to this [link](#) and clicking "Sign up for an Account" (if you already have an account on Packback you can log in with your credentials).
2. Then enter our class community's lookup key (WQG-2SZ-7F16) into the "Looking to join a community you don't see here?" section in Packback at the bottom of the homepage.
3. Follow the instructions on your screen to finish your registration.

For our class, Packback requires a [paid](#) subscription. If cost is an issue, please speak with me ASAP so I can point you to the appropriate resource.

## Help

If you have any questions or concerns about Packback throughout the semester, please go [here](#). If you need more help, contact their customer support team directly at [help@packback.co](mailto:help@packback.co).

For a brief introduction to Packback and why we are using it in class, check out this [video](#).



# Cult Conversation

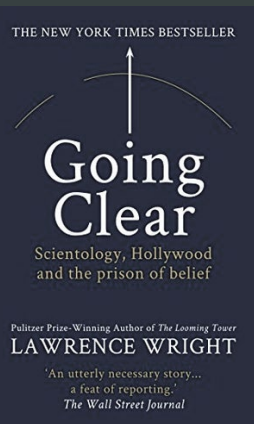
Outline by September 22

Final Paper by October 6

During the first part of the semester, you are expected to read one additional book beyond our assigned readings. You will select from the list below. Your goal is to put your given book in conversation with Stein's *Terror, Love, and Brainwashing* and a selection of additional materials. You should write a 10-12-page paper defending your argument. Details are available on Blackboard.

## Sarah Berman's *Don't Call it a Cult: The Shocking Story of Keith Raniere and the Women of NXIVM*

Steerforth Press summary: "Sex trafficking. Self-help coaching. Forced labor. Mentorship. Multi-level marketing. Gaslighting. Investigative journalist Sarah Berman explores the shocking practices of NXIVM, a cult run by Keith Raniere and many enablers. Through the accounts of central NXIVM figures, Berman uncovers how dozens of women seeking creative coaching and networking opportunities instead were blackmailed, literally branded, near-starved, and enslaved. *Don't Call It a Cult* is a riveting account of NXIVM's rise to power, its ability to evade prosecution for decades, and the investigation that finally revealed its dark secrets to the world."

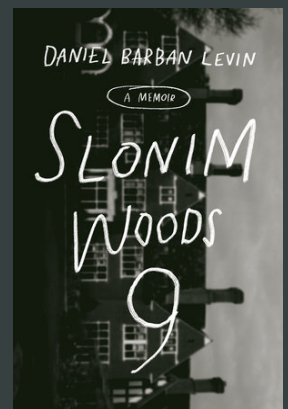


## Lawrence Wright's *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief*

Penguin Random House summary: "Scientology presents itself as a scientific approach to spiritual enlightenment, but its practices have long been shrouded in mystery. Now Lawrence Wright—armed with his investigative talents, years of archival research, and more than two hundred personal interviews with current and former Scientologists—uncovers the inner workings of the church. We meet founder L. Ron Hubbard, the highly imaginative but mentally troubled science-fiction writer, and his tough, driven successor, David Miscavige. We go inside their specialized cosmology and language. We learn about the church's legal attacks on the IRS, its vindictive treatment of critics, and its phenomenal wealth. We see the church court celebrities such as Tom Cruise while consigning its clergy to hard labor under billion-year contracts. Through it all, Wright asks what fundamentally comprises a religion, and if Scientology in fact merits this Constitutionally-protected label."

## Daniel Barban Levin's *Slonim 9: A Memoir*

Penguin Random House summary: "In September 2010, at the beginning of the academic year at Sarah Lawrence College, a sophomore named Talia Ray asked her roommates if her father could stay with them for a while. No one objected. Her father, Larry Ray, was just released from prison, having spent three years behind bars after a conviction during a bitter custody dispute. Larry Ray arrived at the dorm, a communal house called Slonim Woods 9, and stayed for the whole year. Over the course of innumerable counseling sessions and "family meetings," the intense and forceful Ray convinced his daughter's friends that he alone could help them "achieve clarity." Eventually, Ray and the students moved into a small Manhattan apartment, beginning years of manipulation and abuse, as Ray tightened his control over his young charges through blackmail, extortion, and ritualized humiliation. After a decade of secrecy, Larry Ray was finally indicted on charges of extortion, sex trafficking, forced labor, and money laundering. Daniel Barban Levin was one of the original residents of Slonim Woods 9. Beginning the moment Daniel set foot on Sarah Lawrence's idyllic campus and spanning the two years he spent in the grip of a megalomaniac, this brave, lyrical, and redemptive memoir reveals how a group of friends were led from college to a cult without the world even noticing."



# To Catch a Killer

One of the most important distinctions of serial murder is time. There is this frustrating tension investigators experience where they recognize that having more victims often provides more evidence regarding a killer's modus operandi, signature, and victimology. At the same time, law enforcement agencies do not want additional homicides to occur at all, let alone in their jurisdiction.



To allow you all to experience these tensions in real time, every week throughout the semester, there will be a clue placed somewhere on campus, mainly in Jepson Hall. If a clue is NOT in Jepson, you will receive a riddle to help you determine its location. You will know an item is a clue because it will be in either a red folder or red box and will include "Henley – LDST350" somewhere on it.

It will be your responsibility to locate the clue at some point that week (our weeks will run Tuesday to Tuesday). I will not remind you to find clues beyond the first couple of weeks of the semester. There may be some weeks when more than one clue is available. You will be expected to solve the case during the last week of class. Details are in the provided debriefing booklet.

Given the competitive nature of this exercise, it does not necessarily behoove you to help your classmates locate clues. If you miss a clue one week, you will likely be at a disadvantage going forward. There are no "make up" clues. This exercise is designed to provide a real-world simulation that carries some risk (i.e. grades) but is neither overly punitive nor actually dangerous.

The first four people to correctly identify the killer(s) will earn an A for this exercise. The next ten people will earn a B. The remaining group will earn a C. You must submit your guess via Blackboard for it to count. I strongly encourage you to consult the debriefing booklet throughout the semester rather than the week guesses can begin.



**When you find a clue, photograph it but DO NOT remove it from its location.** If you move the clue, not only are you compromising the investigation, but you are robbing your peers of this experience. As this activity heavily relies on an honor system, if it goes awry, I will assign a traditional research paper instead.

**Note:** The only classroom where clues *could* be located is our own. Clues will never be located in a gendered bathroom or the Jepson Student Lounge.

# Open-Note Exam

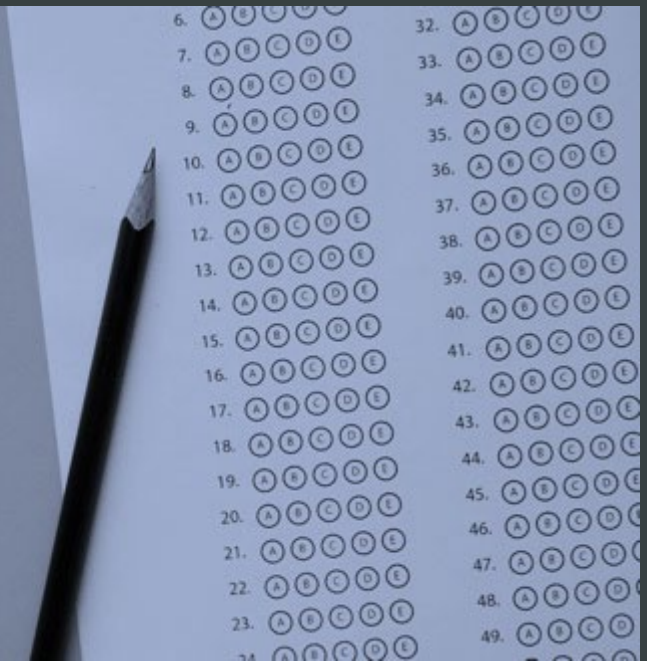
November 7

Just because this class embraces low-stakes assessments does not mean you are not expected to display mastery of course materials in multiple ways. Not every student is a strong writer, some students favor closed-ended assignments, and still others thrive under fixed time constraints. To balance the myriad learning styles that exist, we will have one open-note multiple-choice exam during class.

## Open Note Policy

For the exam, you can use any handwritten notes you have taken throughout the semester, including notes in the margins of the readings. By handwritten, I mean notes in a physical notebook/binder written in pen or pencil. Notes taken on a tablet, computer, phone, or typewriter do not count and will not be permitted as references during the exams.

You will be expected to flip through your notes at the start of the exam period to ensure you have followed the instructions.



## Materials Covered

Much of what we discuss in class will open conversations of opinion. Our exam does not require you to defend your opinion on controversial subjects. Instead, the exam covers basic reading comprehension and retention skills. Can you identify an author's argument? Can you define particular terms as covered in readings or class activities? Do you understand core components of cults? Do you know what characterizes a serial killer? Did you do the homework? Have you been engaging with class materials?

## Assessment

The exam will be comprised of 100 multiple-choice questions. Your grade will be determined relative to your peers, not based on an absolute 100-point scale. This approach helps correct for questions that may have stumped a majority of students.

## Tips

- Just because an exam is open-note does not mean it is easy
- Open-note does not mean you will have time to look up every single answer and still finish the exam in 75 minutes
- Keeping notes throughout the semester will serve you better than cramming the week before an exam

# Homicide Investigation

Prep November 19 and November 21  
Presentations December 3

The media has created a tidy image of criminal investigations that belies the on-the-ground experience of law enforcement agencies. While our To Catch a Killer assignment focuses on the big-picture nature of serial homicide, this assignment focuses on the inverse: the immediacy of processing a crime scene thoroughly, correctly, and efficiently. For this activity, your goal is to convince a jury that your team knows how the victims met their end. The jury's verdict will determine your grade: the winning team will earn an A, and the remaining teams will earn a B. Peer feedback has the potential to lower your grade if more than half of your teammates report you did not do your fair share of work.



At the end of the semester, you will be randomly assigned to one of three teams tasked with investigating two homicides. You will receive a random role within your team. Together, you need to process the scenes following proper police protocol.

Every role requires the utmost attention to detail. Failure to process the scenes correctly will result in a significant disadvantage moving forward. When you are processing the scenes, it will be advantageous to think like an investigator. Asking relevant questions of the Senior Director or Central Laboratory could yield more insights than you discern on your own.

Your team will have one class period to think through your case. During this period, you should think critically about the scenes you encountered. What information can you know, based on available evidence? What conclusions have you reached that are conjecture, rather than fact?

The last week of class, each team will have 20 minutes to present their findings in court. A jury vote will determine the outcome.



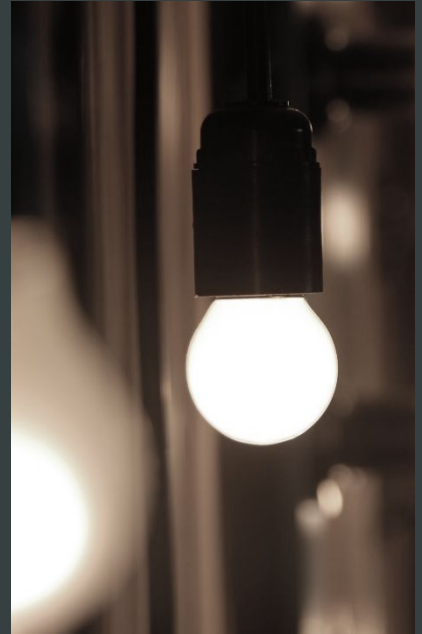
Disclaimer: On the first day of this activity, you will likely feel overwhelmed. Do not let this feeling cause you to slip up in your role. Doing so could be harmful to your team.



# Serial Killer Exhibit

Outline by November 17  
Final Product by December 9

Either in pairs or individually, you should curate an imagined museum exhibit about a serial killer of your choice (from a predetermined list). This exhibit should convey an argumentative narrative and be critical of the true crime genre. At the same time, it should present factual information about your selected serial killer that would provide a layperson with a comprehensive understanding of their crimes, victimology, punishment (if applicable), and popular culture image.



## Requirements

- Introductory statement highlighting the exhibit's purpose, importance, key takeaways, etc.
- Description of the exhibit layout and visual context
- Individual exhibit: 15 annotated artifacts/components
- Paired exhibit: 25 annotated artifacts/components



## Annotations

Every artifact or component you include should have an accompanying annotation, akin to the descriptions found in museum exhibits. Each annotation should include at least one peer-reviewed secondary source that supports its claims.

## Artifacts and Components

The artifacts you include do not have to be the exact items from your selected killer but should be *reasonable representations*. For example, if your killer is Ted Bundy, you could decide to include his Volkswagen beetle. To represent this artifact, you could research the color and year of his model and offer a picture of said vehicle. Conversely, you could include his actual car on display at the [Alcatraz East Crime Museum](#). In either case, you should be mindful of how this artifact interacts with true crime tropes. Your artifacts must be temporally appropriate (i.e. not an iPhone to represent a cellphone for a 1990s killer).

If desired, up to three (individual) or five (paired) of your submissions can be interactive components that you describe and/or draw. For example, maybe you want an audience member to feel the length of time it took for a victim to perish after being buried alive, so you create an immersive mini exhibit that simulates being suffocated with dirt. Obviously, simply putting a bucket of dirt in your exhibit would not be nearly as effective as providing an emotional experience, so detailing this kind of component might enliven your exhibit.

# Reflections



## Mid-Semester Reflection (October 11)

A key feature of humanistic enterprise is reflecting on *how* you know what you know, not memorizing facts to regurgitate at a specific moment in time. As a result, at the midpoint in the semester you will be asked to reflect on your experience in class so far. Your reflection should be honest, thoughtful, and suggest ways to grow.

## Final Reflection (December 13)

Your final reflection will be similar to the mid-semester one, but with more comprehensive questions. If you partnered with a peer for your Serial Killer Exhibit, you will also answer questions about the distribution of work between you too. If you worked individually, you will answer a few questions about your thought processes.



Note: Reflection grades are all-or-nothing, meaning that both assignments must be completed on time and have all questions adequately answered to potentially earn an A.

# Distribution

A+ 4.0	A 3.8-3.9	A- 3.6-3.7	Not Satisfactory
B+ 3.3-3.5	B 3.0-3.2	B- 2.7-2.9	F 0.0-0.6
C+ 2.3-2.6	C 2.0-2.2	C- 1.7-1.9	I 0.0
D+ 1.3-1.6	D 1.0-1.3	D- 0.7-0.9	V 0.0

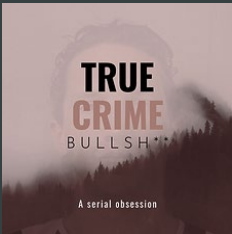
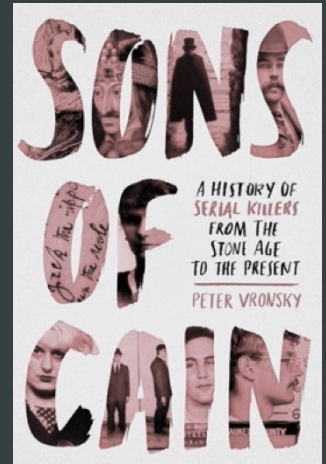
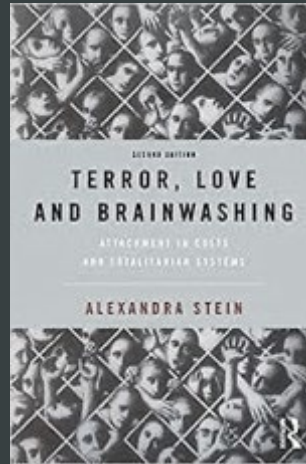
# Materials

## Books

Alexandra Stein, *Terror, Love, and Brainwashing: Attachment in Cults and Totalitarian Systems* (New York: Routledge, 2021)

Note: I prefer that you have the second edition but recognize it may be cost prohibitive for some

Peter Vronsky, *Sons of Cain: A History of Serial Killers from the Stone Age to the Present* (New York: Berkeley, 2018)



## Podcast

True Crime Bullsh\*\* (Season 1)

I don't care where you listen to this podcast, but make sure you have access to a reliable streaming platform throughout the semester. If this is a challenge for you, please reach out to me. Abbreviated as TCB below.

## Access to...

- Blackboard: Additional readings can be found here under the Weekly Schedule tab.
- Packback: This is our discussion platform for the semester.



## How to Read

Reading is not a passive activity and cannot be properly undertaken in simultaneity with other work. You should take notes while reading to process the materials: ask yourself questions, debate with the author(s), and make connections to other readings in real time. Whenever you approach new reading materials, you should try to discern the main argument. Then, you can assess how the author creates said argument, and whether or not it is one you find compelling. By actively reading and taking thorough notes throughout the semester, you will save time when completing your assignments. Strong notetaking will also lead to more productive class conversations as we talk through a variety of nuanced topics.

# Course Values

## Student Rights

- You have a right to a learning environment that supports mental and physical wellness.
- You have a right to respect.
- You have a right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- You have a right to privacy and confidentiality.
- You have a right to meaningful and equal participation.
- You have a right to learn in an environment that is welcoming to all people. No student shall be isolated, excluded, or diminished in any way.

With these rights come responsibilities:

- You are responsible for taking care of yourself, managing your time, and communicating with me and with others if things start to feel out of control or overwhelming.
- Your experience with this course is directly related to the quality of the energy that you bring to it, and your energy shapes the quality of your peers' experiences.
- You are responsible for creating an inclusive environment and for speaking up when someone is excluded.
- You are responsible for holding yourself accountable to these standards, holding each other to these standards, and holding me accountable as well.

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## Recording Policy

You may not record any portion of class, unless you have documentation requiring such for an accommodation. This includes but is not limited to all forms of audio or video recording technology. You may not take pictures of anyone in class without the express consent of the intended party. I will explicitly state when it is okay and/or encouraged to take pictures.

## Personal Pronoun Preference

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, nationality, ability, etc. Class rosters are provided to me with your official university name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name and/or gender pronouns. I will model best practices for naming preferred pronouns and recognize that not all students will feel comfortable with this approach. If this is the case, please advise me in whatever method is most comfortable for you as early as possible in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. If your pronouns and/or name change during the semester, please contact me so that I may address you as you desire.

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## Communication Policy

If you have questions that are not answered in the syllabus or on Blackboard, you are encouraged to reach out to me to seek clarification. **If the answer can be found in the syllabus or on Blackboard, my response will point you in the direction of the source.** This approach encourages you to actually look for answers before reaching out and gives me time to answer more substantive questions. I will respond to student emails within 24 hours of receipt during the week but will not respond to emails sent during the weekend (after 5:00pm ET on Friday through Sunday) until the following Monday.

Whenever you email me, do not address me as anything other than Professor Henley or Dr. Henley (i.e. no Ms./Miss/Mrs.). Your email does not need to be formal but should open with some sort of respectful greeting (i.e. Dear/Hello/Hi Professor Henley).

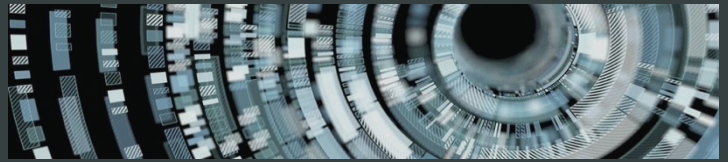


# Stance on AI

We're living in an unprecedented age of technological change. As a historian, I'm well aware of how these kinds of innovations have played out in the past. From the invention of the printing press to the creation of the internet, humanity has constantly been met with world-changing technology. Likely, artificial intelligence will be no different in the sheer amount of change it brings to our lives.

To that end, I am a cynic about our ability to "beat" it. I'm not even convinced that's the right approach to take. **So, here's my stance: you can use AI at your own risk to brainstorm assignments and think through your approach. You cannot use AI to draft, write, revise, or complete any assignment for our class. Using AI beyond brainstorming is considered unauthorized assistance.**

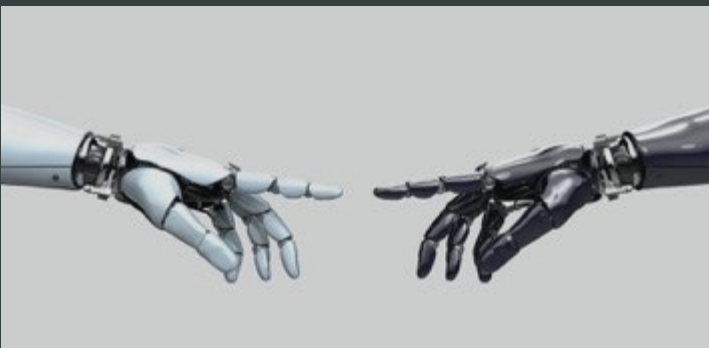
As a disclaimer, I have already spent many hours typing all of our class assignments into an LLM and asked numerous follow-up questions to try to replicate A-quality work. I have been unsuccessful.



So far, the evidence does not suggest that AI can actually "think." At their core, large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT are prediction machines. They scrape large amounts of textual data and repeatedly predict the next most likely word in a given sequence. While there are other types of AI, it is these LLMs that seem to pose the biggest challenge to a humanities-based class like ours. Image-based AI platforms like Midjourney also pose potential harm to unconventional assignments designed with human creativity and artistic aims in mind.

I believe there can be some utility to the responsible application of AI in a college setting. AI can help neurodivergent students process information, allow students with disabilities to engage more meaningfully with course content, and encourage all students to assess flawed arguments, ideally strengthening their own in the process.

Knowing these risks, if you choose to use AI in the process of brainstorming an assignment, you must cite your source using the Chicago Manual of Style. Refer to the last footnote on the library's link for the kind of footnote this class requires. **You must include the date the text was generated, the prompt you entered, and the name of the AI platform.**



Failure to properly cite AI sources will result in an F on the given assignment. This punishment is designed to ensure we are using AI in a responsible, mature, ethical, and honest manner.

# Common Course Policies

Jepson School of Leadership Studies

## **Awarding of Credit**

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.

## **Disability Accommodations**

Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.

## **Honor System**

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: "I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work."

## **Religious Observance**

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.

## **Addressing Microaggressions on Campus**

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.<sup>1</sup> Recent research has found that, when professors do not address microaggressions in class, microaggressions foster alienation of marginalized groups.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, both students and faculty that are exposed to microaggressions more often are more likely to have depressive symptoms and negative affect (a negative view of the world).<sup>3</sup> A comfortable and productive environment where meaningful learning happens can be collectively created through actions, words, or environmental cues that promote the inclusion and success of marginalized members, recognizing their embodied identity, validating their realities, resisting sexism, ableism, and racism.<sup>4</sup>

The University of Richmond is committed to building an inclusive community. To this end, the Student Center for Equity and Inclusion (SCEI) was created in 2021 and offers ongoing support and assistance for a diverse student body.<sup>5</sup> With this in mind, as a community member at the University of Richmond, I pledge to address microaggressions in the classroom by holding myself, other students, and faculty accountable for what is said and being receptive to criticism when perpetuating these slights, snubs, or insults.

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<sup>1</sup>Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The Case for Cultural Competency in Psychotherapeutic Interventions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651>

<sup>2</sup>Bergom, I., Wright, M.C., Brown, M.K. and Brooks, M. (2011), Promoting college student development through collaborative learning: A case study of *hevruta*. *About Campus*, 15: 19-25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.20044>

<sup>3</sup>Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x>

<sup>4</sup>Rolón-Dow, R. (2019). Stories of Microaggressions and Microaffirmation: A Framework for Understanding Campus Racial Climate. *NCID Currents*, 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.106>

<sup>5</sup> <https://inclusion.richmond.edu/>

# Updated Policies

## **Artificial Intelligence Technology & Honor Code**

All assignments are expected to be the student's original work. The Jepson School follows the provisions of the Honor System as outlined by the School of Arts and Sciences. This means that no student is to use, rely on or turn in work that was paid-for, copied, excessively summarized without citation, created in collaboration (without permission), produced by AI, or is otherwise not the original work of the student for the specific assignment (without explicit permission).

## **Disability Services**

The University of Richmond's office of Disability Services strives to ensure that students with disabilities and/or temporary conditions (i.e., concussions & injuries) are provided opportunity for full participation and equal access. Students who are experiencing a barrier to access due to a disability and/or temporary condition are encouraged to apply for accommodations by visiting: [disability.richmond.edu](http://disability.richmond.edu). Disability Services can be reached at [disability@richmond.edu](mailto:disability@richmond.edu) or 804-662-5001.

Once accommodations have been approved, students must

- 1) Submit their Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN) to each of their professors via the Disability Services Student Portal available at this link: [sl.richmond.edu/be](http://sl.richmond.edu/be), and
- 2) Request a meeting with each professor to create an accommodation implementation plan.

It is important to complete these steps as soon as possible because accommodations are never retroactive, and professors are permitted a reasonable amount of time for implementation. Disability Services is available to assist, as needed.

Sometimes things don't go to plan. I get that. I also recognize that, when things aren't going well, it can be hard to reach out. I can't know what you're going through unless you feel comfortable sharing. But, if you do share, I promise I will use my resources to help you and/or connect you to folks who can help.

If at any point during your college years you experience an emergency and don't have the funds to address it, use this [Student Support Form](#) (and chat with me if you feel comfortable doing so).

All students have the right to come to class without worrying about basic needs. If you experience food or housing insecurity during your time at UR (even after our class has ended), please arrange a meeting with me so I can help.

*I reserve the right to modify this syllabus according to the needs of the class.*

If you've read this far into one of my syllabi, send me an email with the subject line "I Read Syllabi." The first three students who send this email will win a prize.

# Campus Resources

## Weinstein Learning Center

The Weinstein Learning Center is your go-to destination for academic support. Our services are tailored to help you achieve your academic goals throughout your time at University of Richmond. To learn more and view service schedules and appointment times, visit [wlc.richmond.edu](http://wlc.richmond.edu). Available services include:

### Academic Skills Coaching

Meet with a professional staff member who will collaborate with you to assess and develop your academic and life skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, and more).

### Content Tutoring

Peer consultants offer assistance in specific courses and subject areas. They are available for appointments (in-person and virtual) and drop-in sessions. See schedules at [wlc.richmond.edu](http://wlc.richmond.edu) for supported courses and drop-in times.

### English Language Learning

Attend one-on-one or group consultations, workshops, and other services focused on English, academic, and/or intercultural skills.

### Quantitative and Programming Resources

Peer consultants and professional staff offer workshops or one-on-one appointments to build quantitative and programming skills and provide statistical assistance for research projects.

### Speech and Communication

Prepare and practice for academic presentations, speaking engagements, and other occasions of public expression. Peer consultants offer recording, playback, and coaching for both individual and group presentations. Students can expect recommendations regarding clarity, organization, style, and delivery.

### Technology Learning

Visit our student lab dedicated to supporting digital media projects. Services include camera checkout, video/audio recording assistance, use of virtual reality equipment, poster printing, 3D printing and modeling, and consultation services on a variety of software.

### Writing

Assists student writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Meet with peer consultants who can offer feedback on written work and suggest pre-writing, drafting, and revision strategies.

# Course Schedule

Unit	Day	Theme	Materials
Cults: We All Seek Community			
	August 27	Semester Overview	
Introduction	August 29	Cults Assumptions	<p><u>Read</u>: Alexandra Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing: Attachment in Cults and Totalitarian Systems</i> (xiii-30)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 1</p> <p><b>Sign up for Cult Conversation books</b></p>
Religion or Cult?	September 3	Early American Messiahs	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (31-50)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Philip Jenkins, "Overrun with Messiahs" in <i>Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History</i> (3-24)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 2</p>
	September 5	Ann Lee	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (51-75)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Priscilla Brewer, "The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee" in <i>America's Communal Utopias</i> (37-56)</p>
Destructive Cults	September 10	Branch Davidian	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (76-105)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: John Corrigan and Lynn S. Neal, "The Branch Davidians and Waco" in <i>Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History</i> (215-246)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 3</p>
	September 12	Peoples Temple	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (106-130)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Catherine (Hyacinth) Thrash, "Introduction" and "End Times in Jonestown, Guyana" in <i>The Onliest One Alive: Surviving Jonestown, Guyana</i> (xi-xiv, 83-123)</p>

Doomsday Cults	September 17	Aum Shinrikyo	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (131-153)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Robert Jay Lifton, "Aum Shinrikyo" in <i>Losing Reality: On Cults, Cultism, and the Mindset of Political and Religious Zealotry</i> (107-133)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 4</p>
	September 19	Heaven's Gate	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (154-193)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Robert W. Balch and David Taylor, "Seekers and Saucers: The Role of the Cultic Milieu in Joining a UFO Cult" (839-860)</p> <p><b>Cult Conversation outline due September 22 by 11:59pm ET</b></p>
Self-Help Cults	September 24	Church of Scientology	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (194-217)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Lawrence Wright, "Introduction" and "The Convert" in <i>Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief</i> (ix-19)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 5</p>
	September 26	NXIVM	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (218-236)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Vanessa Grigoriadis, "Inside Nxivm, the 'Sex Cult' That Preached Empowerment" in <i>The New York Times Magazine</i> (UR NYT access)</p>
Culpability	October 1	Manson Family	<p><u>Read</u>: Stein, <i>Terror, Love, and Brainwashing</i> (237-259)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Robert Dardenne, "The Case of Charles Manson" in <i>The Press on Trial: Crimes and Trials as Media Events</i> (159-171)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 6</p>
	October 3	Sarah Lawrence Cult	<p><u>Read</u>: Erza Marcus and James D. Walsh, "<u>The Stolen Kids of Sarah Lawrence</u>" in <i>The Cut</i></p> <p><b>Cult Conversation due October 6 by 11:59pm ET</b></p>

Before: Serial Killers by Another Name

Context	October 8	Introducing Serial Killers	<u>Read</u> : Peter Vronsky, <i>Sons of Cain: A History of Serial Killers from the Stone Age to the Present</i> (3-49) <u>Listen</u> : TCB, episode 7
	October 10	Pre-History	<u>Read</u> : Vronsky, <i>Sons of Cain</i> (50-85) <b>Mid-Semester Reflection due October 11 by 11:59pm ET</b>
"Firsts"	October 15	Fall Break	<u>Read</u> : Vronsky, <i>Sons of Cain</i> (86-179) <u>Listen</u> : TCB, episodes 8 and 9
	October 17	Servant Girl Annihilator & Jack the Ripper	<u>Read</u> : Vronsky, <i>Sons of Cain</i> (223-276) <u>Read</u> : Skip Hollandsworth, " <u>Capital Murder</u> " in <i>Texas Monthly</i>
Angels of Death	October 22	H. H. Holmes	<u>Read</u> : Vronsky, <i>Sons of Cain</i> (180-220) <u>Read</u> : Corey Dahl, "H.H. Holmes: The Original Client from Hell" in <i>Life Insurance Selling</i> (1-5) <u>Listen</u> : TCB, episode 10
	October 24	Jane Toppan	<u>Read</u> : Michael Kelleher and C. L. Kelleher, "Introduction" in <i>Murder Most Rare: The Female Serial Killer</i> (ix-xii) <u>Read</u> : Katherine Ramsland, "Historic Angels of Death" in <i>Inside the Minds of Healthcare Serial Killers</i> (11-27)
After: Naming "Them"			
Stereotyping	October 29	Ted Bundy	<u>Read</u> : Vronsky, <i>Sons of Cain</i> (277-303) <u>Read</u> : Vronsky, "Classifying Serial Killers: The Typologies of Monstrosity" in <i>Serial Killers: The Method and Madness of Monsters</i> (99-146) <u>Listen</u> : TCB, episode 11

	October 31	Dennis Rader	<p><u>Watch</u>: "Bind. Torture. Kill: BTK" in season 2 of <i>Catching Killers</i> (Netflix, 36 minutes)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Katherine Ramsland, "Introduction" in <i>Confession of a Serial Killer: The Untold Story of Dennis Rader, the BTK Killer</i> (1-20)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Philip Jenkins, "Popular Culture: Images of the Serial Killer" in <i>Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide</i> (81-100)</p>
Gatekeeping	November 5	John Muhammad & Lee Boyd Malvo	<p><u>Read</u>: Jack R. Censer, "Prologue" in <i>On the Trail of the D.C. Sniper: Fear and the Media</i> (1-19)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: Allan Branson, "African American Serial Killers: Over-Represented Yet Underacknowledged" (1-18)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 12</p> <p><b>Exam November 7</b></p>
	November 7	Exam	<u>Work</u> : Serial Killer Exhibit
Popular Culture vs. Reality			
True Crime	November 12	Murderbilia & Celebrity	<p><u>Read</u>: Vronsky, <i>Sons of Cain</i> (304-366)</p> <p><u>Read</u>: David Schmid, "Idols of Destruction: Celebrity, Consumerism, and the Serial Killer" in <i>Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture</i> (1-27)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 13</p>
	November 14	Serial Killers as Leaders	<p><u>Read</u>: Kevin Dutton, "Preface" and "Scorpio Rising" in <i>The Wisdom of Psychopaths: What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers Can Teach Us About Success</i> (xi-31)</p> <p><b>Serial Killer Exhibit outline due November 17 by 11:59pm ET</b></p>
Practice	November 19	Homicide Investigation	<p><u>Read</u>: Douglas et al., "Crime Classification: Past and Present" in <i>Crime Classification Manual</i> (3-20)</p> <p><u>Listen</u>: TCB, episode 14</p>
	November 21	Digesting Evidence	<u>Read</u> : Douglas et al., "Mass and Serial Homicide" in <i>Crime Classification Manual</i> (471-490)



Projects	November 26	No Class	<u>Listen</u> : TCB, episodes 15 and 16
	November 28	Thanksgiving	<u>Work</u> : Homicide Investigation Presentations
Wrap Up	December 3	Presentations	<u>Listen</u> : TCB, episode 17
	December 5	Course Evaluations + Reflections	<u>Listen</u> : TCB, episodes 18 and 19 <b>Serial Killer Exhibit due December 9 by 11:59pm ET</b> <b>Final Reflection due December 13 by 11:59pm ET</b>