Course Description: The course explores the relationship of the mass media to our perceptions of crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system. The mass media generates a "social construction of reality" which influences public opinion, public policies and general social attitudes toward violence. While both the print and electronic media will be examined as purveyors of social perceptions of criminals, victims, law enforcers, lawyers, judges, prisoners, and the like, emphasis in the course will be placed on the electronic and film media. Research knowledge about crime causations, justice, due process, deterrence, victimization, social control, and penology will be discussed from the context of viewing several films dealing with murder, violence, vigilantism, and efforts to control these phenomena.

Course Texts and Other Materials:


5. William Thornton. Investigative (Psychological) Profiling

Course Requirements: 1. Cinematic psychopathic paper, (2) Scott Peterson position paper, (3) Media position paper, (4) Media Crime Log, (5) Class participation/attendance/mini-assignments from class - brief presentations of readings will be assigned to individuals on course materials each class

Course Grading: A - 100-90, B - 89-80, C - 79-70, D - 69-60
Class Meeting Dates: May 31, June 7, June 14, June 21, June 28, July 5, July 12, July 19

Course Outline: (as a rough guide)

I. The Social Reality of Crime in the Media (Surette, Chp. 1; film: A&E Media and Crime)
   1. The Social Construction of Media Reality
      Some of the issues
      a. The media is ubiquitous
      b. Number of television sets, computers, cable, films, cds, etc
      c. Amount of time devoted to media for entertainment, information, etc.
      d. "New" cyber media (Cecil Greek: Using the Internet as a Newsmaking Criminology Tool) http://www.fsu.edu/~crimdo/asc-sd.htm
      e. Mean world view (or mean world syndrome)
      f. Society composed of wolves, sheep and sheepdogs
      g. Media criminals are more animalistic, irrational, and predatory
      h. Crime is more violent, random, senseless and sensationalistic

Is there a direct or indirect relationship between viewing violence in the media and engaging in those activities (copycat crimes)?

Is there a direct or indirect relationship between news reports of crime in the media and engaging in those activities (e.g., school crime "crime wave")?

Do the media provide false information about the context and nature of crime in the real world?

Are producers of films and other visual media depictions of senseless violence legally and/or morally responsible for replication of media violence in the real world? Should they be held legally responsible for their work products influencing people to commit crimes in the real world? (A shock tort is a cause of action based on acts of violence causally linked to the perpetrator's exposure to shockingly violent forms of mass entertainment that, on their face, appear to be calculated primarily to appeal to persons with an appetite for killing or sociopathic behavior particularly of an unlawful nature.)

Can the media stimulate crime waves or moral panics?
(Read #1, Good and Ben-Yehuda, "Enter Moral Panics," and #3, Fishman, "Crime Waves as Ideology")

   i. The mass media (p. 16 Surette)
   j. The study of media, crime and criminal justice
   k. The Blumer Model

the Scope of Social Problems: Apparent Inconsistencies Across Estimates of Family Abductions")

   a. Theories of mass communication
   b. Patterns of selective exposure
   c. Individual differences, social categories, and social relationships
   d. Aggression and violence
   e. Modeling, imitations and social learning
   f. Disinhibition
   g. Catharsis
   h. Specifying factors
      Social controls
      Personality
      Experience
      Education

3. The Entertainment Media and the Social Construction of Crime and Justice (Surette, Chp. 2)
   a. Crime and justice in the early popular media
   b. Crime and justice in 19th century print media
   c. Crime and justice in film and television
   d. Development of the film industry
   e. Historical trends in the portrayal of crime and justice
   f. Television's emergence
   g. Reality programming (Read #4 Cavender and Bond-Maupin, "Fear and Loathing on Reality Television: An Analysis of America's Most Wanted and Unsolved Mysteries") -- yes, I know that reality shows have changed a bit since these early programs.)
   h. Portraits of crime and justice in modern entertainment media
   i. Cops, courts and corrections

II. Crime, Criminals, and the Criminal Justice System in the "Real" World: The Facts, and Nothing But the Facts
1. The measurement of crime - Is there more crime in the media than in the real world?
   Official statistics, victim surveys, and self-reports

2. Violent Offenders
   a. Homicide, robbery, rape, assault
   b. Definitions and types
   c. Trends over time
   d. Social correlates
   e. Offender profiles
   f. Offender specialization and escalation
   g. Planning and spontaneity
h. Motivation and circumstances
i. Target selection strategies
j. Youth group offending
k. Chronic violent offenders - the 6%
l. Sexual offenders

3. Victims of Crime -- Do media victims portray the same types of individuals who are victimized by crime in the real world?
   a. Relative risk of vulnerability to crime
   b. Victim culpability or relative responsibility
   c. Victim types
   d. Victims and the criminal justice system

4. The Criminal Justice System
   Police
   a. History of police
   b. Police agencies and personnel
   c. Police roles and functions
   d. Due process legal constraints
   e. Police crime and lawlessness

   Adjudication Process
   a. Courts
   b. The criminal justice process
   c. Arrest to trial
   d. Public prosecutors
   e. Defense attorneys
   f. Judges
   g. Juries

   Corrections
   a. Corrections or punishment
   b. Punishment ideologies
   c. History of prisons
   d. Capital punishment
   e. Inmate roles
   f. Prison riots

   Causes of Crime
   a. Etiological theories - Biological, Psychological and Sociological

   Psychopathy
   a. Clinical predictions of psychopathy
   b. Characteristics of psychopaths
   c. Measuring clinical psychopathy
   d. The Hare Psychopathic checklist
Factor 1: Measures a selfish, callous, and remorseless use of others and contains most of the personality characteristics considered central to the traditional clinical conceptions of the disorder.

Factor 2: Measures social deviance, as manifested in a chronically unstable and antisocial lifestyle.

e. Crime as a symptom of personality disorders
f. DSM Manual

III. Serial Murder in Fact and Films (Read Philip L. Simpson, Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer Through Contemporary American Film and Fiction.)

Facts about serial murder from the field of criminology
a. Serial murder - fact and fiction
b. Incidence of serial murder in the U.S.
c. Typologies of serial murderers.
d. The male serial murderer
e. Team killers
f. The female serial murderer.
g. Victims of serial murderers.
h. Profiling serial murderers.

Points about serial murder from films
1. Why is serial murder so popular in the media?
   a. It promotes individual masculine terrorism against female victims.
   b. The fictional serial killer confirms the links between murder, misogyny, and masculinity.
   c. Sexual serial murder continually reenacted accompanies the patriarchal backlash reaction to social reforms and advances designed to empower women.
   d. Beginning in the 1960s reported cases of serial murder gave right wingers a chance to talk about the diminishment of personal responsibility and the need for stricter sanctions in the criminal justice system.
   e. A fascination with the "wound culture" began where the public is fascinated with torn and open bodies.
   f. It is a part of urban legends.
   g. The serial killer achieves legendary, nearly mythic status by providing contemporary society with a refreshingly unambiguous villain which nearly everyone can agree to unite.
   h. The fear from serial killers creates a "verbal social control" which threatens people with death should they transgress against community standards.
   i. The serial killer as a type never really dies in the narratives of multiple murders.
   j. The serial killer in fiction has developed its own subgeneric conventions and plot formulas, while overlapping with and borrowing from a variety of genres, such as horror and detective noir.
k. The serial killers are coded as monsters, but a tragic personal history of abuse and neglect is also usually foregrounded as part of the narrative, humanizing them to at least some extent and making them capable of earning our sympathy. 
l. Early FBI profilers caught the attention of the popular media and culture fueling our pseudo-psychological and sociological conceptions of criminal types operating in our society. 
m. The mass media purveyors of the serial killer legends in contemporary society responded quickly to their perceptions of the public's interests, fears, and concerns exactly because the media's economic survival is chained so thoroughly to the need to retain an audience that demands an extraordinary mix of the culturally forbidden and the socially conservative.

Serial Killer Genre Classics
Silence of the Lambs
Hanibal
Manhunter
The Red Dragon
American Psycho
Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer
Citizen X
The Alienst
Kalifornia

IV. The Social Construction of Crime and Violence (Surette, Chp. 5; Charles Starkweather and Caril Fugate - go to the website and read the case history) (Film: Natural Born Killers; possibly Badlands)
1. Media as a cause of violence
   a. Studying the media as a cause of crime - methodological problems
   b. Summary of media effects on aggressions
   d. Court case - Patsy Ann Byers et al versus Sarah Edmondson, et al (Suit against Oliver Stone's film Natural Born Killers) (Natural Born Killers "mini-assignment" in class - to be discussed)

V. The Construction of Crime and Justice in the News Media (Surette, Chp. 3)
   a. Early crime and justice news
   b. Present day news
   c. Crime and justice in contemporary news
   d. The content and relative prominence of crime news
   e. The criminal in the news
   f. The criminal justice system in the news
   g. Info-Taintment: Reality programming and media trials
VI. Media and the Construction of Criminal Proceedings (Surette, Chp. 4).
   a. News media and the courts
   b. Issues related to news coverage and publicity
   c. Due process and pretrial publicity (p. 240 Surette)
   d. Social science research concerning publicity and trials
   e. Media access to government information
   f. Televised trials
   g. Controlling knowledge

VII. The Media and the Social Construction of Crime and Justice Attitudes and Polices (Surette, Chp. 7)
   a. Constructing public attitudes and beliefs about crime and justice
   b. The role of experts (Read #5, Welch, et al, "State Managers, Intellectuals, and the Media: A Content Analysis in Experts' Quotes in Feature Newspaper Articles on Crime")
   c. Constructing crime and justice public policies
   d. Problems in determining media effects on criminal justice policy
   e. Prospects for media's social reality of crime and justice

VIII: The Construction of Crime and Justice: The Media as a Cure for Crime (Surette, Chp. 6)
   a. Constructing less crime
   b. Media based anti-crime efforts (Read #15, Reinerman and Suskin, "Dominant Ideology and Drugs in the Media")
   c. Offender deterrence programs (Read #12, Surette, "A Serendipitous Finding of a News Media History Effect")
   d. Media technologies applied to crime prevention and control
   e. Judicial uses of media technology

Guidelines for Course Assignments:

1. Psychopath Movie Analysis

We discuss in class the nature of psychopathic or sociopathic personality types and their assumed overrepresentation in violent behavior, particularly murder. Whether psychopathic personality types can be identified is perhaps one of the most controversial topics in modern forensic criminology. Opinions about the meaning and validity of the psychopathic personality take almost every conceivable form. Likewise, the actual representation of psychopathic killers, at least evidenced by U.S. homicide statistics, suggests that perhaps psychopaths commit no more than one percent of murders. Nevertheless, the psychopath is heavily represented in film, and is portrayed as the personification of evil who carries out his (and sometimes her) tasks, killing people indiscriminately and at will despite the best efforts of law enforcement. The media psychopath, true to form, indulges in malice aforethought. He engages in dark deliberations with an intent to inflict harm, using secrecy to buy time, gain ascendance, and through mental rehearsals, maintains the creative fervor to develop a venomous plan. The psychopathic murderer’s inner world encourages a safe rehearsal of future mayhem. But this mental carnival requires protection from exposure. A masquerade, a disguise, a pretense of charm and grace
becomes useful to take advantage of others’ honesty - all concocted to bring unsuspecting victims into the psychopath’s “comfort zone”. Psychopaths above all must abdicate responsibility, a trait allowing them to abandon any moral accountability for their actions taken. Often as not, the psychopathic killer seems indestructible displaying cunning intelligence and superior strength, endurance and stealth. His crimes are generally acts of twisted, lustful revenge or a random act of meaningless violence.

All this said, your task is to select a movie in which a psychopathic killer is plying his trade. Based on what you know about psychopathic personality traits, homicide in general (from class and from your reading), where it occurs, the nature of offenders, the nature of victims, and the victim-offender relationship, analyze the movie for deviations from reality. There may be, of course, things in the film that approximate some aspect of the real world (e.g., certain personality characteristics of the psychopath). Likewise, not all psychopathic killers are the same; some of these killers may be killing legitimately, in defense of country (James Bond), loved ones (Charles Bronson), or religion. Discuss the motives of the psychopath and speculate on whether the social construction of reality created by the writers and producers of the film uphold a “dominant political ideology” such as “law and order”. If the film you select is from the contemporary era, graphically depicting violent scenes, speculate on how it compares with a psychological drama such as Alfred Hitchcock’s “Psycho” which portrayed violence in more covert ways. A list of movies in which psychopathic killers can be found is listed in this syllabus. The paper should be about 7 - 10 pages, excluding the bibliography (Due date, June 14)

2. Court Television Assignment

Log onto the Court Television website www.courtv.com and go to Trials section, on the left hand side of the page. Here you will find extensive information on the Scott Peterson trial including media coverage, police reports and some trial transcripts. If you recall, Laci Peterson, was a 27-year-old wife who was eight months pregnant and disappeared on Christmas Eve. Her disappearance prompted a nationwide search, which eventually resulted four months later in the finding of the Modesto, California mother and her unborn child. Her husband, Scott, was charged with the double murder and received the death penalty. The prosecution presented evidence concerning Scott’s motives for committing the crime (e.g., large life insurance policy on Laci, another woman (Amber Frey), and an unwanted baby) and evidence of premeditation. The defense team brought in consultants including tidal experts, DNA and forensic anthropology analysts, and authorities on dog tracking, boating, fishing and cement. Scott’s lawyer acknowledged that Scott was a “14 carat ass hole” for cheating on his pregnant wife but urged jurors to set aside their disgust on what he said were reasonable interpretations of the circumstantial evidence against him. In his closing argument, defense attorney Mark Geragos said prosecutors painted the fertilizer salesman as the “biggest jerk to walk the face of the earth” in an effort to distract the jury from tenuous evidence linking him to the murders of his wife and unborn son. Gregaros had hoped to exonerate his client and find the true killers but conceded that after five months of hinting at involvement by Satanists, burglars, Frey, transients, and even Laci Peterson’s relatives as possible culprits, the defense was unable to identify a perpetrator. The defense argued that the police’s rush to judgment that Scott was the murderer led to their failure to solve the case. He said that police overlooked evidence that the 27-year-old mother-to-be was alive Christmas Eve morning when prosecutors claim he took her body to San Francisco Bay.
Her remains and that of her fetus were found on the bay shore in April 2003. Gregaros waged a piece-by-piece attack on the prosecution case, from dog evidence of Laci Peterson’s scent at the Berkeley Marina to the defendant’s sale of her car a month after she went missing to the brown hair police found in pliers in his boat.

Some people say that the case was tried in the media. There is no doubt that the media covered the case extensively as evidenced by the material on Court TV website. Your assignment is to read enough of the material presented by the media to get a feel for the case, and then take a position for one side of the case or the other. You must support your views with the positions taken by each side in the original case as presented by the media. The paper should be about 7 pages and use citations, when appropriate, from the “Court TV web site. (Due date, July 5)

3. Media Position Paper

Select one of the following topics and write a position paper. A position paper is one in which you take a side of an issue, e.g., you may take the view that the media is a significant cause of violent crime or that the media is not a significant cause of violent crime, and then support your views and opinions. The paper should be about 7 pages and use appropriate references when necessary. (Due date, July 19).

Select one of the following positions/topics and write your paper:

1) Are the media more effective as a cure for crime or more damaging as a cause of crime?

2) Increasing “entertainmentization” of crime and justice media are good entertainment versus increasing “entertainmentization” of crime and justice media are possible causes of violent crime or, at a minimum, desensitize individuals to violent crime.

3) Posting sex offenders’ names and addresses on the web is a way to protect society against pedophiles versus posting sex offenders’ names and addresses on the web is an invasion of a person’s privacy and personal freedom.

4) Media spots on drug use are effective in preventing kids from using drugs versus media spots on drug use are ineffective in preventing kids from using drugs and may actually propel them to drug use.

5) The media generates copycat crime versus the media does not generate copycat crimes.

6) Media coverage of trials biases the criminal justice process versus media coverage of trials only better informs the public about the operation of the criminal justice system.

(I’m open to a topic of your choosing.)
4. Media Crime Log: Select a particular type of violent crime such as murder, rape, armed robbery, or pedophilia (encompasses several types of crimes) and maintain a media crime log of the crimes in your category (e.g., murder) during the length of the course. You should use the Internet to obtain a few media accounts (newspaper articles, news broadcasts, etc.) of crimes each week, print the articles out and give the following information about each "article."

(1). "Headline", date, source, (2). Type of crime (murder of spouse, murder of cashier, murder of child, etc.), (3). Nature of offender (16 year old, Spanish male), (4) Nature of victim (elderly Alaskan woman), (5) Place of crime (victim's home, convenience store, shopping center), (6) Type of weapon used, if any or threat of violence, (7) Whether perpetrator was arrested or not, and (8) Any possible media bias about the crime (e.g., sensationalistic prose, mention of ongoing problem in a city, prominent victim, bias characteristics noted about the offender - ethnicity, age, etc. (Due date, July 29)

5. Extra credit paper: Clockwork Orange Exercise (Handout to be given out in class). (Due date, July 29)