

# POLITICS OF THE UNDEAD

**PSC 480: Special Topics**

**Instructor:** Dr. Jess Morrissette

**Office hours:** Tu/Th 9:00-10:30, W 9:30-11:30, or by appointment

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**Spring 2014, Tu 4:00-6:20**

**Location:** Smith Hall 108

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** An exploration of political thought, international relations theory, and political economy through the pop cultural lens of vampires, zombies, and other undead creatures (3 credit hours).

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

By the end of the semester, students should be able to...	How we will practice this outcome	How we will assess this outcome
<i>Demonstrate how popular culture can contribute to the study of political science.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Exams, essays, term paper
<i>Analyze depictions of power and powerlessness in fictional portrayals of the undead.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Exams, essays
<i>Assess key theories, concepts, and debates in the field of political science (including feminist thought, the Marxist critique of capitalism, social contract theory, international relations theory, etc.) using the undead metaphor.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Exams, essays
<i>Produce an original analytical work utilizing the undead metaphor to explore a political question.</i>	Discussions, research presentations, in-class activities	Term paper
<i>Effectively combat the undead menace through the power of critical thinking.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Survival

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

- Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (ISBN: 9780307346612)
- Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (ISBN: 9780691147833)
- Kirkman et al., *The Walking Dead: Compendium One* (ISBN: 9781607060765)
- Additional readings will be distributed in PDF format on MUOnline during the semester.

**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY:** Your grade will be based on your performance on one short essay, a take-home midterm exam, a take-home final exam, a term paper (and accompanying research presentation), and class participation. Failure to complete any component of the course will result in a failing grade for the semester, regardless of the missing assignment's point value. There will be no extra credit offered for this course—no exceptions. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

5%	Participation	A = 90-100%
10%	Essay of the Living Dead	B = 80-89%
20%	First Exam	C = 70-79%
20%	Second Exam	D = 60-69%
10%	Research Presentation	F ≤ 59%
35%	Term Paper	

**WARNING:** Over the course of the semester, we will encounter content that some would consider violent, gory, disgusting, and otherwise disturbing. Furthermore, indelicate language and explicit sexual content may creep into some of the creative works we study. If you feel uncomfortable reading, viewing, and discussing this kind of material, I encourage you to consider a different class.

**SERIOUSLY, YOU GUYS:** If things that go bump, “Bleh!”, or “Braaaaaaaains!” in the night tend to upset you, please don’t take this course.

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** Attendance is required in this class, and students are expected to have read and be ready to discuss all assigned readings prior to class. Students will also be graded based on their class participation—engaging in discussion of the readings and current political events, asking questions, and so forth. Once again, attendance is clearly important; if you aren’t in class, you can’t participate. If you feel that you are having trouble getting your voice heard in our discussions, please contact me as soon as possible and we will work together to get you more involved.

The participation grade will be determined as follows: 5 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and make valuable contributions to class discussion on a regular basis; 4 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and contribute to discussions occasionally; 3 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently, but seldom participate in class discussions. Attendance grades of 2, 1, and 0 points are reserved for those students who fail to attend class regularly and therefore cannot participate meaningfully in class discussions.

**PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES AND THE SIREN OF DOOM:** Please silence and stow your cell phone prior to class. Texting and other inappropriate forms of cell phone usage during class time are strictly prohibited. If I see you playing around with your phone during class, I will activate the dreaded **SIREN OF DOOM**. In order to achieve maximum public embarrassment, the **SIREN OF DOOM** will continue to sound until you have put your cell phone away. Furthermore, I will track how many times I have deployed the **SIREN OF DOOM** over the course of the semester. After five infractions, I will administer an unreasonably difficult on-the-spot pop quiz to the entire class. The **SIREN OF DOOM** tally will then reset and the process will begin anew.

Students are welcome to use a laptop or tablet to take notes, but I ask that you please refrain using class time to update your Facebook status, tweet, or watch BitTorrented episodes of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. If I catch you using your laptop or tablet for purposes unrelated to our class, I will not hesitate to activate the aforementioned **SIREN OF DOOM**.

**A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT SPOILERS:** Nobody likes having a work of popular culture spoiled for them. For instance, if you had never seen the *Star Wars* movies, and I revealed that Jar Jar Binks is actually Boba Fett's father, that would ruin the entire second half of *Return of the Jedi* for you. However, if we're going to meaningfully discuss and analyze undead fiction, it's virtually impossible to avoid spoiling certain plot elements along the way. Therefore, I'm establishing the following spoiler policy: books, films, or television programs released prior to the beginning of the semester are "fair game" for spoiling. Anything that is released or begins airing after the semester is underway, we will do our best not to spoil. For example, since *True Blood* aired its Season Six finale in August 2013, feel free to openly discuss the pivotal scene where Lafayette uncovered Eric's foul plot to unleash an army of robot vampires on the unsuspecting residents of Bon Temps and then ninja kicked the robo-vamps to smithereens. On the other hand, since Season Four of *The Walking Dead* premieres in February 2014, we should do our best to avoid spoilers to the greatest extent possible (unless there's something really, *really* good that we just can't resist talking about).

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Students are expected to adhere to the University's policies with regards to academic honesty (see pages 69-71 of the 2013/2014 undergraduate catalog). Cheating or plagiarism on any exam, quiz, or assignment will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent under University policies. The penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a failing grade for the course.

Cheating is defined by the University as "[a]ny action which if known to the instructor in the course of study would be prohibited" (Undergraduate Catalog, p. 69). This includes, but is not limited to, the use of any unauthorized materials or assistance during an academic exercise.

The University defines plagiarism as "[s]ubmitting as one's own work or creation any material or an idea wholly or in part created by another" (Undergraduate Catalog, p. 70). Furthermore, it is "the student's responsibility to clearly distinguish his/her own work from that created by others. This includes the proper use of quotation marks, paraphrase and the citation of the original source. Students are responsible for both intentional and unintentional acts of plagiarism" (p. 70).

**EMAIL POLICY:** Please check your Marshall e-mail account regularly. Articles, assignments, and other important announcements may be sent to your "@marshall.edu" e-mail address during the course of the semester. If you prefer to use a different e-mail service, please contact Computing Services for assistance with forwarding your Marshall e-mail to your preferred address.

**MAKE-UP POLICY:** There will be no make-up exams administered for students without a legitimate excused absence from the University (e.g. family emergency, illness, athletic commitment). Students who need to miss an exam should contact me prior to the scheduled exam period if at all possible.

**LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** All late assignments will be assessed a 10-percent penalty per day for the first three days after the missed deadline (including weekends). After three days, late assignments will no longer be accepted except in cases of a legitimate excused absence from the University.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY:** Students can review the policies for weather-related/emergency closings and delays at the University's website. If a closing coincides with an exam or other due date, the relevant assignment will be postponed to the following class meeting.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Students who require any special accommodations should contact the instructor at their earliest convenience. Please refer to the University's website for more information on relevant policies (<http://www.marshall.edu/disabled>).

## ASSIGNMENTS:

- **Essay of the Living Dead:** During the first week of class, we will watch the 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*. Your essay, due the following week, should define “politics” (in your own words) and discuss how *Night of the Living Dead* is “political,” citing specific examples from the film where appropriate. The essay should be approximately 3-5 pages long, and it is due on January 21.
- **Exams:** You will complete two take-home exams this semester. Approximately one week prior to the respective due-dates, I will distribute a set of essay questions. In turn, students will return the completed exams on the dates specified in the course schedule. Please note that while these are take-home exams, *they are still exams*. In other words, students are not allowed to collaborate with one another in the completion of the exams. I will provide more details as the exams approach.
- **Term Paper:** Students will write a term paper that advances an original argument about intersection of politics and the undead. For example, you might choose to apply the undead metaphor in order to illustrate and/or explain a political concept or theory (e.g. How might vampire fiction better help us to better understand Marx’s critique of capitalism?). Or, you might choose a work of undead fiction and analyze some aspect of its political content, whether explicit in the work or subtextual (e.g. What does *The Walking Dead* tell us about the politics of gender?). Alternatively, you might trace a common political theme through a series of different fictional works (e.g. How does George A. Romero’s treatment of race evolve over the course of his films?).

Regardless of how you approach your topic, be creative in your analysis! Please submit your proposed topics by email for approval no later than March 4. The term paper is due on May 6.

- **Research Presentations:** We will devote the last few weeks of the semester to research presentations. I will provide more details as the presentations approach.

## TIPS FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

- ✓ All papers and exams are due *in class* on the due dates listed in the syllabus. No e-mail submissions will be accepted.
- ✓ Be sure to include a brief introduction that states the purpose of your essay, as well as a concise conclusion that sums up what you have written.
- ✓ Always cite your sources! For this class, I request that you use the APSA style guidelines. In turn, be sure to make it clear where you found any “outside” information in your essay. This includes not only citing direct quotations, but also any paraphrased material or statistics. Also, include a “works cited” page at the end of your essays and exams. Failure to properly cite your sources constitutes **PLAGIARISM**.
- ✓ Be judicious in choosing online sources, and do not cite Wikipedia or other online encyclopedias.
- ✓ Proofread your essays! Most grammatical and typographical errors can be easily caught with a simple read-through before a paper is submitted.
- ✓ Papers should conform to the suggested lengths provided above (title pages and works cited pages do not count toward the suggested length). Papers should be double-spaced with 1” margins and typed using the standard 12-point Times/Times New Roman font (or the Macintosh equivalent).

**COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:**

⇒ **Week of January 14: Introduction**

- Film: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)

**ESSAY OF THE LIVING DEAD DUE**

**Tuesday, January 21**

⇒ **Week of January 21: Open graves, open minds—the scholarly study of pop culture and the undead**

- Sellnow, “What Is Popular Culture and Why Study It?” (PDF)
- Danesi, “Explaining Pop Culture” (PDF)
- Mio, “Metaphor and Politics” (PDF)
- Vargas, “Dead Serious: Evil and the Ontology of the Undead” (PDF)

⇒ **Week of January 28: The undead, truth, and social science**

- *Visum et Repertum* (PDF)
- Tucker, “The Great New England Vampire Panic”
- “2012 Zombie Apocalypse” (PDF)
- Popper, “Science as Falsification” (PDF)
- Newitz, “War May Lead to Increase in Zombie Movie Production” (PDF)
- Kirkman et al., *The Walking Dead Compendium*

⇒ **Week of February 4: The political economy of the living dead**

- Film: *Dawn of the Dead* (1978)
- Walker, “When There’s No More Room in Hell, the Dead Will Shop the Earth” (PDF)
- Kirkman et al., *The Walking Dead Compendium*

⇒ **Week of February 11: Vampire capitalists and zombie consumers**

- Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (PDF)
- Sellnow, “A Marxist Perspective” (PDF)
- Moretti, “A Capital *Dracula*” (PDF)
- Neocleous, “The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx’s Vampires” (PDF)
- Whitman, “The Political Economy of Non-Coercive Vampire Lifestyles” (PDF)
- Kirkman et al., *The Walking Dead Compendium*

⇒ **Week of February 18: “A war of all against all”—zombies and the social contract**

- Hobbes, “Excerpt from *Leviathan*” (PDF)
- Locke, “Excerpt from *Second Treatise on Government*” (PDF)
- Sheppard, “Realistically, Nice Guys Finish Last” (PDF)
- Murray, “When They Aren’t Eating Us, They Bring Us Together...”
- Barkman, “I Don’t Think Those Rules Apply Anymore” (PDF)
- Kirkman et al., *The Walking Dead Compendium*

**FIRST EXAM DUE**

**Tuesday, February 25**

⇒ **Week of February 25: *Dracula*, “the other,” and Orientalism**

- Said, “*Orientalism*: Introduction” (PDF)
- Arata, “The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization” (PDF)
- Senf, “Traveling to Transylvania: Race, Space, and the British Empire” (PDF)
- Mikdadi, “Orientalism and the Representation of ‘Others’ in *The Mummy*” (PDF)
- Hamako, “Zombie Orientals Ate My Brain! Orientalism in Contemporary Zombie Stories” (PDF)

**TERM PAPER TOPIC DUE**  
**Tuesday, March 4**

- ⇒ **Week of March 4: Race, ethnicity, and the undead**
  - Storey, “‘Race’, racism and representation” (PDF)
  - Saunders, “Zombies in the Colonies: Imperialism and Contestation of Ethno-Political Space...” (PDF)
  - Bishop, “The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie”
  - Ahmad, “Gray is the New Black: Race, Class, and Zombies” (PDF)
  
- ⇒ **Week of March 11: Gender politics and the undead**
  - Sellnow, “Feminist Perspectives”
  - Patterson, “Cannibalizing Gender & Genre: A Feminist Re-Vision of Romero’s Zombie Films”
  - Barkman, “Women in a Zombie Apocalypse” (PDF)
  - Pye and O’Sullivan, “Dead Man’s Party” (PDF)
  - Jenson and Sarkeesian, “Buffy vs. Bella: The Re-Emergence of the Archetypal Feminine...”
  
- ⇒ **Week of March 18: Spring Break**
  
- ⇒ **Week of March 25: Zombies and international relations**
  - Drezner, “Preface” through “Neoconservatism and the Axis of Evil Dead”
  - Brooks, “Introduction” through “Turning the Tide”
  
- ⇒ **Week of April 1: Zombies in a globalized world**
  - Drezner, “The Social Construction of Zombies” through “Conclusion”
  - Brooks, “Home Front USA” through “Good-Byes”
  - Beck, “The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited” (PDF)

**SECOND EXAM DUE**  
**Tuesday, April 8**

- ⇒ **Week of April 8: Crisis management and the undead threat**
  - TBA
  
- ⇒ **Weeks of April 15, 22, and 29: Research Presentations**
  - Sellnow, “Writing a Popular Culture Rhetorical Essay”

**TERM PAPER DUE**  
**Tuesday, May 6 (by 5:00 pm)**

*Please note that assignments are tentative. Readings may be removed, added, or moved to a different day based on our progress in the semester.*