

Reporting the National Security State

Literary Journalism 103: Topics in Literary Journalism | Spring 2017

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Course Overview

On September 16, 2001, Vice President Dick Cheney sat down for an interview with *Meet the Press* host Tim Russert. Russert asked Cheney, a former secretary of defense, how the Bush administration planned to respond to the 9/11 attacks. “We’re going to spend time in the shadows in the intelligence world,” the vice president answered. “A lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussions, using sources and methods that are available to our intelligence agencies if we’re going to be successful. That’s the world these folks operate in.” Later that week, President Bush signed his first authorization for use of military force, or AUMF, which still, sixteen years later, remains in effect.

This course asks how reporters have tracked down leads, written books, and made movies in the shadows of the national security state. Jane Mayer, Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras, Fred Kaplan, and Alex Gibney take us into that covert “world” that Cheney wanted Americans to know existed—he alluded to it on national TV—but never *know*. Through reported books, articles, and documentaries, we will explore how writers and filmmakers have constructed stories out of material that, at least at first glance, seems to resist being told. This course spends time in the shadows, where we will read the national security state, wherever we can.

Readings on Course Website

5000 Feet Is the Best. Directed by Omer Fast. Commonwealth Projects, 2011.

Bamford, James. “The NSA and Me.” *Intercept*, 2 Oct. 2014.

<https://theintercept.com/2014/10/02/the-nsa-and-me/>.

Bearman, Joshua. “How the CIA Used a Fake Sci-Fi Flick to Rescue Americans from Tehran.”

Wired, 24 Apr. 2007. https://www.wired.com/2007/04/feat_cia/.

Citizenfour. Directed by Laura Poitras. Radius-TWC, 2014.

“Death of a Prisoner.” Directed by Laura Poitras. *New York Times*, 11 Jan. 2013.

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000001998311/death-of-a-prisoner.html>.

Gladwell, Malcolm. “Daniel Ellsberg, Edward Snowden, and the Modern Whistle-Blower.” *New*

Yorker, 19–26 Dec. 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/19/daniel-ellsberg-edward-snowden-and-the-modern-whistle-blower>.

Greenwald, Glenn. “Contact.” *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*, Metropolitan, 2015, pp. 7–32.

- . "Ten Days in Hong Kong." *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*, Metropolitan, 2015, pp. 33–89.
- Kaplan, Fred. "Could Something Like This Really Happen?" *Dark Territory: The Secret History of Cyber War*, Simon and Schuster, 2016, pp. 1–20.
- . "Cyber Wars." *Dark Territory: The Secret History of Cyber War*, Simon and Schuster, 2016, pp. 145–70.
- Kirn, Walter. "If You're Not Paranoid, You're Crazy." *Atlantic*, Nov. 2015.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/11/if-youre-not-paranoid-youre-crazy/407833/>.
- Lipton, Eric, David E. Sanger, and Scott Shane. "The Perfect Weapon: How Russian Cyberpower Invaded the U.S." *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 2016.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/us/politics/russia-hack-election-dnc.html>.
- Mayer, Jane. "Detainee 001." *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*, Doubleday, 2008, pp. 72–100.
- . "Inside the Black Sites." *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*, Doubleday, 2008, pp. 139–82.
- Michel, Arthur Holland. "How Rogue Techies Armed the Predator, Almost Stopped 9/11, and Accidentally Invented Remote War." *Wired*, 17 Dec. 2015.
<https://www.wired.com/2015/12/how-rogue-techies-armed-the-predator-almost-stopped-911-and-accidentally-invented-remote-war/>.
- Packer, George. "The Holder of Secrets." *New Yorker*, 20 Oct. 2014.
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/20/holder-secrets>.
- Paik, A. Naomi. "Living in a Dying Situation: Preserving Life at Guantánamo." *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II*, U of North Carolina P, 2016, pp. 188–215.
- Power, Matthew. "Confessions of an American Drone Operator." *GQ*, 22 Oct. 2013.
<http://www.gq.com/story/drone-uav-pilot-assassination>.
- Reitman, Janet. "The Rise and Fall of Jeremy Hammond: Enemy of the State." *Rolling Stone*, 7 Dec. 2012. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/the-rise-and-fall-of-jeremy-hammond-enemy-of-the-state-20121207>.
- . "Snowden and Greenwald: The Men Who Leaked the Secrets." *Rolling Stone*, 4 Dec. 2013.
<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/snowden-and-greenwald-the-men-who-leaked-the-secrets-20131204>.
- Sanger, David E. "Olympic Games." *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power*, Crown, 2012, pp. 188–225.
- Slahi, Mohamedou Ould. "Jordan–Afghanistan–GTMO." *Guantánamo Diary*, Little, Brown, 2015, 3–68.
- "When Yasiin Bey Was Force-fed Guantánamo Bay–Style." Directed by Asif Kapadia. *Guardian*, July 8, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2013/jul/09/yasiin-bey-force-fed-guantanomo-bay-mos-def>.
- "Why Care about the N.S.A.?" Directed by Brian Knappenberger. *New York Times*, 25 Nov. 2013.
<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000002571435/why-care-about-the-nsa.html>.

Zero Days. Directed by Alex Gibney. Magnolia, 2016.

Assignments and Grading

Assignments:

Reading Quizzes	20%
Participation and Preparedness	15%
Presentation	15%
Midterm Paper	20%
Final Paper	20%

Grading Scale:

A	93–100%	C	73–76%
A-	90–92%	C-	70–72%
B+	87–89%	D+	67–69%
B	83–86%	D	63–66%
B-	80–82%	D-	60–62%
C+	77–79%	F	0–59%

Reading Schedule and Deadlines

Date	Readings	Deadlines
Week 1	Re-Reporting the Cold War	
Monday, April 3	Syllabus Bamford, “The NSA and Me”	
Wednesday, April 5	Bearman, “How the CIA Used a Fake Sci-Fi Flick to Rescue Americans from Tehran”	Presentation assigned
Week 2	Black Sites	
Monday, April 10	Mayer, “Detainee 001”	
Wednesday, April 12	Mayer, “Inside the Black Sites” “Death of a Prisoner”	
Week 3		
Monday, April 17	Slahi, “Jordan–Afghanistan–GTMO”	Midterm paper assigned
Wednesday, April 19	Paik, “Living in a Dying Situation” “When Yasiin Bey Was Force-fed Guantánamo Bay–Style”	
Week 4	Snowden	

Monday, April 24	Kirn, "If You're Not Paranoid, You're Crazy" "Why Care about the N.S.A.?"	
Wednesday, April 26	Reitman, "Snowden and Greenwald: The Men Who Leaked the Secrets"	Midterm paper due Friday, April 28 at 5 p.m.
Week 5		
Monday, May 1	Greenwald, "Contact"	
Wednesday, May 3	Greenwald, "Ten Days in Hong Kong"	
Week 6		
Monday, May 8	Gladwell, "Daniel Ellsberg, Edward Snowden, and the Modern Whistle-Blower"	
Wednesday, May 10	Packer, "The Holder of Secrets" <i>Citizenfour</i>	
Week 7	Cyber War	
Monday, May 15	Kaplan, "Could Something Like This Really Happen?"	
Wednesday, May 17	Kaplan, "Cyber Wars"	
Week 8		
Monday, May 22	Sanger, "Olympic Games" <i>Zero Days</i>	
Wednesday, May 24	Reitman, "The Rise and Fall of Jeremy Hammond"	Final paper assigned
Week 9		
Monday, May 29	No class (Memorial Day)	
Wednesday, May 31	Lipton, Sanger, and Shane, "The Perfect Weapon"	
Week 10	Drones	
Monday, June 5	Michel, "How Rogue Techies Armed the Predator" Course evaluations	
Wednesday, June 7	Power, "Confessions of a Drone Warrior" <i>5000 Feet Is the Best</i>	Final paper due Friday, June 9 at 5 p.m.