

Greg Garrett

War, Torture, and Popular Culture
(English / Arts and Sciences)

Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the most substantive debate about 9-11 was conducted not in the courts, the news, the pulpits, or the public square, but through our popular culture. While we were never invited to debate, for example, the torture carried out in our names, our popular culture anticipated the revelations about Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, expressing—and sometimes satisfying—our deepest fears, concerns, and desires, and later, responding to the news. In my next book-length project, in addition to studying the political, legal, and religious aspects of torture, rendition, and domestic surveillance, I intend to “read” recent popular texts to determine their theological and ethical stances, and to compare them with formative religious and civic documents to write a substantive but accessible cultural and theological history of the War on Terror. Among the texts I intend to study are the television shows *24*, *CSI*, and *Battlestar Galactica*, the “Bourne” and “Lord of the Rings” film series, the Harry Potter novels, *The Dark Knight*, Green Day’s *American Idiot*, U2’s *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, Bruce Springsteen’s *The Rising*, and other pertinent works with substantial audiences in the US and Great Britain. While books on political, ethical, or religious dimensions of 9-11 and its aftermath are emerging, none has focused on the mediating factor of culture, one of the most important avenues for meaning-making in our society. Support for this research will help shed new light on such facts as shifting public sentiments for the war and on the overwhelming support for torture expressed by American Christians by allowing me to examine cultural depictions of the War, the methods America and Britain have employed to prosecute it, and legal and ethical dimensions of those methods.