Student Course Syllabus

Accused: The Gap between Law and Justice
Sonja M. Spears

Course Overview

The law is all around us, but what about justice? What is justice? What kind of justice are we entitled to? Together we will explore the concepts, framework, systems and practices which comprise what justice is, with an emphasis on the perspective of the wrongfully accused. Through the use of drama, film, case studies, media analysis and other sources, we will consider the factors which shape our personal views of what justice is, decide how much these views really matter, and examine the many factors that determine how systems of justice impact society on various levels.

The class will look closely at the roles of some of the players in the justice system; the presence or absence of power; prosecutorial misconduct; the psychological impact of wrongful accusation and the relationship between law enforcement and the media. Together we will consider issues of race, class, gender and religion as we make connections between these issues, fundamental fairness, societal costs and freedom.

Goals and Expectations

Students in this class will be introduced to the basic structure of law and the United States justice system, including its administration and enforcement. Each student is expected to come to all classes fully prepared, having completed the assignments, and ready to engage in respectful, stimulating discussion. Students should come away from this class with a heightened awareness of the ways our justice system is driven by an interconnected web of rules, individual attitudes, choices and societal norms which do not operate purely on an objective level. Students will explore and test various assumptions and be better able to decide where compassion and empathy are appropriate and where personal action can make a difference.

In addition to the reading and listening assignments, students will be required to keep a responsive journal which will be read and evaluated; write one 3-5 page paper, participate in a debate and complete a final project of their choice. Attendance and class participation are extremely important and will count in formulating the final grade.
Course Assignment Materials

*The Exonerated,* a new play by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen
*The Exonerated,* a film produced by The Culture Project
*After Innocence,* a film by Jessica Sanders
*Blink,* by Malcolm Gladwell,
*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* by Michelle Alexander
*The House I live in,* a film by Eugene Jarecki
*Preventable Error: A report on Prosecutorial Misconduct in California,* by North California Innocence Project, Santa Clara University Law School

Selected podcasts

Due dates for assignments

- **Week 2**: Read *The Exonerated,* a new play by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen
- **Week 3**: Entire class read Introduction, chapter 1 and conclusion and one other chapter to be assigned and summarized with a partner. Prepare to share what you during class.
  - Journals due.
- **Week 4**: Watch *The House I Live in* and read *The New Jim Crow,* Introduction and chapter 1
- **Week 5**: First paper
- **Week 6**: Journals due - read *The New Jim Crow* chapters 2,3,4
- **Week 7**: *The New Jim Crow* chapters 5,6
- **Week 8**: Debate
- **Week 9**: Read selected articles on Gender and religion
- **Week 10**: Journals due - Read *Preventable Error* assigned segments, and articles on Aaron Swartz and Senator Ted Stevens
- **Week 11**: Journals and project proposal - Read select articles on media and law enforcement and prepare for project presentations
- **Week 12**: Project presentations
- **Week 13**: Project presentations and final journals