Course Description: Politics and the law have played major thematic roles in American films. This course analyzes ten films that focus on justice, the law, and the legal system, to see what they tell us about political and legal culture, and what messages (if any) they have for contemporary legal issues. To that end, we will read about, watch, talk about, and write about films. Mostly we will be focusing on questions about the relationship between law and justice, the practice of law, and the role of courts and trials in a political system; however, many other issues will arise in the course of these discussions—race/class/gender and the law, legal ethics, legal education, the adversarial system, the relationship between law and popular culture, among others.

The Politics IN this Class: The films chosen for this class cover some major themes in American law, and most cover events or issues that you might already know something about – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and our litigious society. Other films carry interesting political content without parroting a real event – Twelve Angry Men for instance. In most cases, all of the necessary information is presented within the movie. I will supply additional information as needed for you to understand and appreciate the political messages of the movie.

The Politics OF this Class: Read assigned material, don’t fall asleep during movies, show up everyday, and participate in class and in small groups and your future is secure. Our discussions will take place AFTER the movies are shown.

Learning Outcomes. There are several learning objectives in this course: 1) Students will develop a more in-depth understanding of law and justice, the operation of the judicial process, the practice of law, and the role of courts and trials in our political system, as well as a better appreciation of race/class/gender and the law, legal ethics, and the relationship between law and popular culture; 2) Students will sharpen their critical thinking abilities by relating scholarly research on law and courts to popular culture.

Readings. I will put on Blackboard readings that go with each film; these may also be used for your papers.

Course Requirements. Students will write five papers. Each is worth 15% of the grade (for a total of 75% of your final grade). Participation and attendance constitutes the other 25% of the grade.

Papers: You will write five papers (one must be submitted each week except the first week). Papers should be between 2-3 pages. The topics are at the end of the syllabus. You may write about either of two movies (on Monday, you can submit a paper on the movie from the previous Wednesday; on Wednesday, you can submit a paper on the movie from the Monday class of that week). You can write about something not listed,
just ask me first. Submit the paper before class through SafeAssign on Blackboard. Also, bring a copy of the paper to class.

**Participation:** You will be graded on your contribution to class discussions about the movies and the assigned reading. Simply, you will receive credit for attending each class and participating in the discussion. However, two movies run long, and our in-class discussion will be abbreviated. For those movies, I will use a discussion board on Blackboard to supplement our in-class discussion. Participation in that online discussion will be used to assess participation for those films. I also will give a pop quiz occasionally on the assigned reading. Attendance and participation will each account for 10% of the course grade with 5% derived from the pop quizzes.

**Academic Integrity.** I personally support the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: [http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html)

**Support for Students Outside the Classroom.**

**DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)**
Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: [http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/](http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/)

**UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER (UCC) 202-994-5300**
The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:
- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
- confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals
  [http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices](http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices)

**Security.** In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

**Course Outline.** The following is a list of topics and readings for this course. If necessary, these readings will be altered to accommodate the dynamics of the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td><em>No Class</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 23</td>
<td><em>The Ox-Bow Incident</em> ‡</td>
<td>Lind &amp; Tyler, Chapters 2 &amp; 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 27</td>
<td><em>Memorial Day: No Class</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29</td>
<td><em>To Kill a Mockingbird</em> ‡</td>
<td>Hurwitz &amp; Peffley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 3</td>
<td><em>Miracle on 34th Street</em> ‡</td>
<td>Hall Aspin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 5</td>
<td><em>Pelican Brief</em> ‡</td>
<td>Segal &amp; Cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 10</td>
<td><em>My Cousin Vinny</em> ‡</td>
<td>Johnson, Wahlbeck, &amp; Spriggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12</td>
<td><em>Breaker Morant</em> ‡</td>
<td>Albonetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 17</td>
<td><em>A Civil Action</em> ‡</td>
<td>Babcock et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 19</td>
<td><em>Twelve Angry Men</em> ‡</td>
<td>Diamond &amp; Vidmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 24</td>
<td><em>The Wrong Man</em> ‡</td>
<td>Wells et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 26</td>
<td><em>Judgment at Nuremberg</em> <em>‡</em></td>
<td>Hagan, Levi, &amp; Ferrales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This movie is longer than our class session – we will begin at 2:10 and will run until 4:40 that day.
‡ This movie is available on Blackboard's Electronic Reserves
Many of these films are also available on-line.

---

**Daily Regimen**

- Class will begin promptly, and will end when we are finished, but it should not go more than 2 and a half hours. If discussion is going extra-well, we may extend class a little finish it
- We will watch the movies first then discuss them afterwards.
- Watching movies for content may demand more attention than you would normally use going to the theatre. **Therefore:**
  - You can eat, but consider your fellow students when doing so. Unwrap noisy candy before the movie starts.
  - Keep talking to a minimum during the movies.
  - You may want to take some notes during the films you want to write about. I hope there’s enough light for you to do so.

**Papers**

- As noted previously, they should be 2-3 pages in length. They must be typed, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins -- don't play the margin and font game.
- Do NOT include a title page or place the paper in a plastic binder, merely put the title at the top of your paper with your name and a date. Please number your pages.
- Make sure that your paper is free of grammatical and spelling errors and typos. That means that you should spell check and then read it through yourself. Perhaps have a friend read it through as well.
- If you happen to use outside references, **which are not required**, then you should cite the material properly, using either footnotes, endnotes, or my favorite in text citations. Citations are needed whenever the thought is not your own. If in doubt, cite it! If still unclear, ask me. You need not cite common knowledge, such as World War II lasted from 1939-1945. The notes should include full bibliographic information, though the in text cites should appear as follows. Say you read Ronald Reagan’s autobiography in which he said he liked jellybellys. The quote and cite would look like this:

  “I have always liked Jellybellys” (Reagan, 1992, 25).
You would use the same cite if you paraphrased the quote:
Reagan shows through his words and deeds that he likes Jellybellys (Reagan, 1992, 25).

Just notice the essential parts of the cite: (author’s last name, year of publication: page number). Don’t forget the period AFTER the citation.

• The bibliography should look something like this:


• PAPER GRADES are based primarily on the substance of your papers. A good paper does not merely summarize movies and their political content (or the articles that you read), but addresses a specific question, integrating the film and the scholarly article. Focus on themes and questions rather than on movies for your papers, although you should bring out details from the film and reading that help make your argument or that would counter your argument. A good paper also addresses the opposite viewpoint. For example, some might think that African-American racial understanding is not possible as shown in Mockingbird, but you do, so address the opposing side’s arguments. Papers should also be well-written and carefully proofread.

• Most of your papers are based on your personal observations and thoughts without support from outside references. You must justify your opinions, however, with more than “it’s just what I think.” Rather, you need to find support or evidence for your arguments in the movies, in society, or in your experience.
Essay Questions
(Pick Any Five)
Law and Justice: The View From Hollywood

Movie: *The Ox-Bow Incident*
Question: Based on the events in the movie, answer the following questions. What is justice? Was justice served by the posse at Ox-Bow? Can justice be served without a fair trial, overseen by a judge, in a court of law?

Movie: *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Question: *The Ox-Bow Incident* questions the meaning of justice in an abstract sense. *To Kill a Mockingbird* raises a specific issue of whether race interferes with the ability to obtain a just trial. Based on this movie and the article, do you believe that race interferes today with ability of individuals to have a fair trial? Why or why not?

Movie: *Miracle on 34th Street*
Question: To what extent is justice dependent on the judge’s electoral calculations?

Movie: *Pelican Brief*
Question: This movie’s plot is premised on attitudinal voting by Supreme Court justices. Is this an appropriate explanation of the decisions rendered by the Court? If not, what other factors might influence their decisions?

Movie: *My Cousin Vinny*
Question: Using both this movie and the articles, what role do attorneys play or what is their importance in court? Lawyers might assume that the outcome of a case is dependent on their arguments and tactics, is that borne out here or in the literature? What other goals, if any, might explain lawyer’s decisions?

Movie: *Breaker Morant*
Question: This movie explores a court martial, but one of the critical elements is the prosecutor’s decision to pursue these charges. What explains the exercise of prosecutorial discretion? Does this lend itself to the pursuit of justice? Why or why not?

Movie: *A Civil Action*
Question: Many court cases end in settlement. What explains the decision to settle a lawsuit? How do these decisions to settle or pursue the case to trial affect whether justice prevails?

Movie: *Twelve Angry Men*
Question: Imagine that you were on the jury in this movie. Prior to Henry Fonda’s arguments about the defendant’s innocence, how would you have voted on the first ballot? Would Fonda’s arguments have changed your mind if you initially voted to convict? Why or why not?

Movie: *The Wrong Man*
Question: Eyewitness identifications often are an important piece of evidence in a criminal prosecution. Given the article by Wells, how could these procedures affect justice? What role should we give to identifications?

Movie: *Judgment at Nuremberg*
Question: How should the international community handle crimes committed during wars? What should be the appropriate outcome in this case – do you agree with the verdict? Was justice accomplished?