

**GET3930/LIT3400/JST3930**

**The Poetics of Justice: Law, Literature and Film**

Instructor: Eric Kligerman

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Time: Tuesday, Period 4 (10:40 AM - 11:30 PM) and Thursday, Periods 4-5 (10:40AM-12:35PM) Location: Matherly 0117

Office Hrs: Tuesday 5th Period, Thursday 6th period or by appointment

In his brief yet complex parable “Before the Law” Kafka describes how a man from the country searches for the law but is stopped outside the gates by a menacing guard, never to gain entrance to the law. What is the significance of this failure to grasp the law? How does Kafka’s perplexing tale shed light on questions pertaining to the interplay between justice, law and violence, and how do we as individuals encounter these conflicts within the social and political spaces in which we live?

This interdisciplinary course sets out to explore these very questions and collisions by juxtaposing shifting modes of representations. By turning to the works of history (Thucydides), Religion (Book of Job), philosophy (Nietzsche and Arendt), literature (Sophocles, Dostoyevsky and Kafka) and film (Tarantino and the Coen brothers), our objective is to trace the narrative of justice through ancient Greece, the Enlightenment, the modern and postmodern periods. In particular, we will examine the realm of trials (both real and imaginary) to probe the relation between justice and ethics along with the various questions pertaining to law, guilt, responsibility, violence and punishment. How do writers critique the institutions of law and justice through works of literature and art? Our goal is to rethink these dynamic relationships by turning to the spaces of history, philosophy, political thought, literature and film.

Grading will be based on in-class participation (25%), take-home midterm (25%), takehome final (25%) and an 8-10 page final paper (topic of your choice, 25%).

- 1) Students are allowed 7 absences. If you miss more than 7 classes in the semester, you will automatically fail the course. Participation will play a major part of the final grade and students are expected to partake and contribute daily to class discussions. **If you miss a Thursday class, that is equal to 1 and 1/2 classes.**
- 2) **If you do not bring to class the text we are discussing for that day, you will be marked as absent. You are not permitted to read the text on your phone in class.**
- 3) Do not text message in class.

4) There will be a take home midterm and take home final exam comprised of identification and short answer essay questions.

5) There will be a final research paper on a topic of choice selected by the student in consultation with me. Late papers will not be accepted.

### **ZOOM POLICY**

When attending a Zoom class or meeting:

Arrive/Zoom in on time or a few minutes early if possible. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class session, and tardiness will be marked.

Set up and mount the webcam video at the level of your eyes to show your full face. If you are using a laptop, you may need to place a book or two under it.

Test the audio of your webcam. For any technical difficulties, please contact the UF Computing Help Desk (352-392-4357). <https://elearning.ufl.edu/media/elearningufl.edu/zoom/How-to-Join-a-Meeting.pdf>

During class session, set yourself on mute unless you want to speak or you are called upon.

If you want to speak, you can raise your hand (click the "raise hand" button at the center bottom of your screen) and wait to be called upon. You are encouraged to keep your webcam on throughout the class hour and to unmute yourself to participate in class discussion, ask questions, etc.

The participation portion of your grade for this class will be calculated on the basis of your attendance and your participation in class activities. Normally you will satisfy this requirement through your participation through video and audio presence on Zoom. However, you may also satisfy this requirement through written comments in chat and discussion assignments in Canvas.

Our class sessions may be audio visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.

During unrecorded group work sessions we expect students to interact with each other using audio and their webcam whenever possible. If you have a reason to keep your webcam and audio off, please communicate that reason with me or through the Dean of Students Office.

Dress appropriately for class. Even though you may be alone at home your professor and classmates can see you. Find a quiet indoor space with stable internet connection to attend class. The study space does not need to be a separate room; a chair and desk/table set for school work in a quiet corner should be sufficient. The space should be conducive to work, including pair/group work. Make sure you are uninterrupted by other household members, including pets.

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students who enroll at the University commit to holding themselves and their peers to the high standard of honor required by the Honor Code. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. Violations of the honor code include, but are not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, bribery, misrepresentation, fabrication, and conspiracy. Such violations may result in the following: lowering of grades, mandatory 0 on assignments, redoing assignments, a final failing grade in the course, expulsion from the course, referral to the student-run Honor Court. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment. For more information, refer to: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/>

#### Students with Special Needs:

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

#### Syllabus subject to change:

##### Week 1: Introduction: Kafka's "Before the Law"

1/12 and 1/14

We begin with a close reading of Kafka's *Before the Law* to examine how the text discloses an allegory of reading: the quest for law is analogous to our attempt to grasp the meaning of the story. In what ways does our approach to understanding a literary work reflect our desire to uncover either the meaning of law or an abstract concept like justice?

##### Weeks 2-3: Sophocles, *Antigone*

1/19, 1/21 and 1/26

How do we as rational and free subjects engage with laws that might conflict with our own systems of belief or values? How do we make judgments about laws that we might not agree with?

##### Week 4: Thucydides, "Pericles Funeral Oration" and "The Melian Dialogue" from *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

1/28 and 2/2

In addition to probing how the politics of war are configured as a debate between concepts of justice and self-interest of the state, how is this model reflected in an individual's own actions within a community?

Week 5: Bible, *Book of Job*

2/4 and 2/9

We frame our exploration of biblical justice through the themes of evil, suffering, punishment, and divine justice.

Weeks 7-8: Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

2/11, 2/16, 2/18 and 2/23

The psychology of the criminal will be examined in relation to the overstepping of morality: how nihilism encounters our system of ethics.

**Take home midterm will be due on 2/24**

**2/25-- Wellness Day/ No Class**

Weeks 9-11: Kafka's *The Trial*

3/2, 3/4, 3/9 and 3/11:

We will return to Kafka and try to rethink the notions of law, enlightenment and power in relation to the problems associated with the individual's experience within the modern state.

Weeks 12-13: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

3/16, 3/18, 3/23 and 3/25:

We situate the German Enlightenment's upholding of the tenets of reason alongside Arendt's study of the Eichmann trial, where the courtroom attempts to frame the limits of legal understanding: the Holocaust.

Weeks 14-15: Quentin Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds*

3/30 and 4/1:

Our analysis of Tarantino will explore how Hollywood cinema engages with the legacy of the Holocaust and the question of justice in the 21st century.

4/6 and 4/8

Screening: Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men*

Conclusions:

4/13, 4/15, 4/20

**Final exam due 4/21 Final paper due 4/30**