

**SELECTED TOPICS: LAW, LAWYERS, and POPULAR CULTURE**  
**HAMLIN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW**  
**Spring Semester 2011**  
**Friday 6:00 PM-7:50 PM**  
**Room 06**

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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

American popular culture literature and visual media, commonly grouped as “texts” (fiction, autobiography, memoir, films, television series, news programming) have described and interpreted law and lawyers in different ways over the course of the last 200 years. From the slick “Philadelphia lawyer” of the nineteenth century to the imposing Perry Mason of the 1950s, popular culture has presented to the public images of the law and lawyers that reflect and shape our perceptions. As law students you are now “inside” the law, learning the nuts-and-bolts of legal principles and procedures. You now know that the popular descriptions of law and lawyers rarely match up with the practice of law. Yet many, if not most of you, relied on at least some aspects of popular culture to help make your career choice. Why did you decide to attend law school? What books, films, or TV shows have made an impact on your views about the law?

This course will examine how popular culture has created many lawyer types, what these types contain in terms of values and attitudes about the law, and why these types continue to shape public consciousness. I am not interested in teasing out ethical and moral lessons from books and films, nor am I very much concerned about the truth or falsity of particular stereotypes. I *am* committed to working with you on examining the different roles lawyers play in popular culture, whether as subjects of books and films, or real life participants. The materials used in this course can be described as unconventional for a law school class: no appellate opinions, no law review articles, and no professorial commentaries. In their place we will read popular texts, watch movies and television episodes, tell each other lawyer jokes, and look at cable news channel programs.

**READINGS**

You will read a number of texts that will be available in the bookstore. In addition, I may email PDF files of short articles or excerpts of chapters of material long out of print.

**Buffalo Creek Disaster**, Gerald Stern

**One L**, Scott Turow

**Trial by Jury**, D. Graham Burnett

**Letters to a Young Lawyer**, Alan Dershowitz

**A Lawyer’s Life**, Johnnie Cochran

**Too Close to Call: The Thirty-Six-Day Battle to Decide the 2000 Election**, Jeffrey Toobin

**The World’s Funniest Lawyer Jokes**, Steven Price

## REQUIREMENTS

I have designed this course to maximize student participation. I require the following: (1) That you attend every class and come prepared. You will need to commit hours outside of class for reading required texts and watching of visual media. I will use DVDs—some will be for in-class viewing; however, you will have to rent and view several DVDs outside of class and watch assigned television programming. (2) That you bring to each class a short essay (typed, 1-2 pages) that deals with some aspect of the assigned work for that week. These will be turned in at the end of each class. (3) That you fully participate in class discussion. (4) That you write an essay on a topic approved by the instructor (approximately 10-12 typed pages). You will choose a text or film or particular genre or role-type for an in-depth examination. (5) That you make a brief presentation on your paper to the class as part of a panel. The essay will be due on the last day of class.

In grading, I will take into account your class participation and preparation. For strong participation, I will raise your grade according to law school policy.

## SCHEDULE

January 13	Introduction, Overview, Theory, Terminology
January 20	The Education of Lawyers: The Paper Chase, 1L, Legally Blonde
January 27	No Class—Out of Class Assignment
February 3	The Courtroom Lawyer: Perry Mason, Law and Order, etc.
February 10	Insider Accounts of Cases by Lawyers: Buffalo Creek Disaster, Class Action, etc.
February 17	Lawyer as Educator and Mentor: A. Dershowitz Letters to a Young Lawyer
February 24	Insider Accounts of Cases by Non-Lawyers: Burnett, Trial By Jury

## PAPER TOPICS DUE TODAY

March 2	<b>Spring Break—No Class</b>
March 9	Lawyers as Heroes and Villains: The Verdict (DVD)
March 16	The Celebrity Lawyer: Johnnie Cochran
March 23	The Lawyer as Pundit and Commentator: From Court TV and the O.J. Trial to Nancy Grace

March 30            The Political Lawyer: Gore v. Bush

April 6             **Easter Weekend—No Class**

April 13            Lawyers as Objects of Ridicule: Lawyer Jokes

April 20            Panel Presentations

**Papers due via email by April 27**