PUNISHMENT, POLITICS AND CULTURE

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Austin Sarat

413-542-2308
adsarat@amherst.edu

Office Hours

Wednesday 3:30-5:00 and Friday 3:00-4:00

Other than war, punishment is the most dramatic manifestation of state power. Whom a society punishes and how it punishes are key political questions as well as indicators of its character. This course considers connections between punishment and politics in the contemporary United States. We will ask whether we punish too much and too severely, or too little and too leniently. We will consider the politicization and racialization punishment and examine particular modalities through which the state dispenses its penal power. Among the questions to be discussed are: Does punishment express our noblest aspirations for justice or our basest desires for vengeance? Can it ever be an adequate expression of, or response to, the pain of the victims of crime? When is it appropriate to forgive rather than punish? Throughout we will try to understand the meaning of punishment by examining the way it is represented in politics and popular culture.

Books for the course are available at the Jeffrey Amherst Bookstore.

Stephen Mitchell, The Book of Job
James Whitman, Harsh Justice
Herman Melville, Billy Budd
Fox Butterfield, All God’s Children
Austin Sarat, When the State Kills: Capital Punishment and the American Condition
Austin Sarat, Mercy on Trial: What It Means to Stop an Execution

Other readings are included in a course packet.

Please note that there are several films which will be shown as part of the course. All will be streamed except Noon Wine which will be screened on February 4 at 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. in Fayerweather 117.
I. INTRODUCTION: PUNISHMENT AND PAIN

1. Introduction (January 29)

Francis v. Resweber, 329 US (1947) 459 (M)
Ted Conover, “In the Land of Guantanamo,” NY Times, June 29, 2003 (M)

FILM: Noon Wine - This film will be screened, February 4, 2008 at 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. in Fayerweather 117

2. The Phenomenology of Suffering: If There Is Punishment There Must Be Guilt, But Without Punishment Can There Be Innocence? (February 5)

Stephen Mitchell, The Book of Job (P)
Elaine Scarry, “The Structure of Torture,” in The Body in Pain, 27-59 (M)

3. Punishment and the Constitution of Culture (February 12)

James Whitman, Harsh Justice, Introduction, Chapter 1, 2, 3, 5, Conclusion (P)

III. PUTTING PAIN TO WORK


Herman Melville, Billy Budd (P)
Herbert Morris, “Persons and Punishment” (M)
Robinson v. California, 370 US (1962) 660 (M)


Marc Klass, “Victim Impact Statement” (M)
Austin Sarat, “Vengeance, Victims and the Identities of Law,” Social and Legal Studies (M)
IV. THE PAINS OF PUNISHMENT

FILM: Sling Blade - This film will be streamed and available for viewing through E-Reserves.

6. **Imprisonment and Indignity-I** (March 4)

   Ruffin v. Commonwealth, 62 Va. (1871) 1024 (M)
   Fox Butterfield, *All God’s Children* (P)

FILM: Shawshank Redemption - This film will be streamed and available for viewing through E-Reserves.

7. **Imprisonment and Indignity-II** (March 11)


8. **The Violence of Imprisonment: Is the State of Nature Inside Law?** (March 25)

   Hudson v. McMillan, 503 US (1992) 1-12, 17-29 (M)

V. COMPETING IMPULSES: SEVERITY AND ITS LIMITS

FILM: I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang - This film will be streamed and available for viewing through E-Reserves.

9. **Mandatory Sentences, Chain Gangs and The American Way of Punishment** (April 1)

   Joan Dayan, “Held in the Body of the State: Prisons, Memory, and the Law” (M)
   Fox Butterfield, “With Cash Tight, States Reassess Long Jail Terms,” *NY Times*
     (November 10, 2003) (M)

10. **"Three Strikes And You Are Out," Extending the Sphere of Control and The American Way of Punishment** (April 8)

    Ewing v. California, No. 01-6978 (2003) (O’Connor and Breyer) (M)
11.  *Execution Politics: America and the Future of Capital Punishment* -I (April 15)

William Connolly, “The Will, Capital Punishment, and Culture War” (M)
Austin Sarat, *When the State Kills: Capital Punishment and the American Condition* (P)

**FILM:** *Pierrepont: The Last Hangman* - *This film will be streamed and available for viewing through E-Reserves.*

12.  *Execution Politics: America and the Future of Capital Punishment* -II (April 22)

Alex Kotlowitz, “In The Face of Death,” *NY Times* (July 6, 2003) (M)

**FILM:** *Dead Man Walking* - *This film will be streamed and available for viewing through E-Reserves.*

**VI. BEYOND PAIN?**


Martha Nussbaum, “Equity and Mercy” (M)
Austin Sarat, *Mercy on Trial: What It Means to Stop an Execution* (P)

14.  Conclusion (May 6)