

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
HONORS PROGRAM  
IDH2930, Section 2311, Class #29554  
**Just Mercy**  
Wednesdays, p.2 (8:30-9:20 am), LITTLE 0117

**SYLLABUS**  
Spring 2023

**INSTRUCTOR:**

Instructor: Dr. Alberto De Simoni  
Office Hours: Wednesdays 9:30-11:30 in Dauer 125 or by appointment.  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

*Course content and objectives:* This course invites students to reflect on the complex issue of justice and punishment in contemporary America. Through the eyes of the author of the book, we will journey from the early days of his experience at Harvard Law School to the struggles and challenges of running a pro bono law office in the American South. The overall question posed by the book is this: **how is our society implementing justice?** The author offers well-documented and thought-provoking insights into the issues of mass incarceration in the US, racial bias in prosecutorial practices, and the inability to provide competent counsel for poor defendants. Through personal stories and real cases, students will encounter actual problems that our justice system generates in the life of incarcerated people, and the seemingly inevitable contradictions that emerge in the attempt to balance justice and humanity.

Furthermore, the biographical component of the book allows students to connect the general problem to its human component. In the first pages of the book, the author's grandmother suggests: "You can't understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close." Such closeness, though at times painful for the reality it unveils, will provide the unparalleled benefit of asking questions that few in the public arena dare to ask.

Recent events in America have brought racial tensions to the fore. This book helps raise questions, before any political or ideological allegiance, that can better frame our understanding of the present.

*Resources:*

Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, Spiegel & Grau, New York, 2014 [Required]

**CONTENT WARNING:** Parts of the book for this course will include topics that some students may find offensive and/or disturbing. I'll aim to forewarn you about potentially disturbing content and to offer the proper accommodation. Should you have any question or concern, please contact your instructor in a timely manner.

### Grading Scale:

100- 94 A	76-73 C
93-90 A-	72-70 C-
89-87 B+	69-67 D+
86-83 B	66-63 D
82-80 B-	62-60 D-
79-77 C+	59- E

### Course Requirements

#### Attendance and class participation: 40%

Students are expected to come to every class and actively engage in class discussions. Readings must be completed ahead of time and a weekly reflection/journal entry online will be required.

#### In class presentation: 20%

Students will prepare a 3 to 5-minute introduction to the discussion on the weekly readings. The schedule of presentations will be arranged on the first day of class. Presentation guidelines are available on Canvas.

#### One Mid-Term Exam: 20%

A brief midterm exam on March 8<sup>th</sup> will assess the understanding of the first part of the book. A study guide will be compiled as we progress in the reading of the book. The format of the exam will be short essay questions.

#### Final Project: 20%

A final paper is due April 12<sup>th</sup> (first draft) and April 19<sup>th</sup> (final draft) at 3 pm. The final paper will be one individual entry to the classroom Chapbook. A detailed description of prompt and expectations will be available on Canvas and discussed in class.

### Classroom Expectation and Etiquette:

1. **Perfect attendance** is expected. For absence due to participation in an official university activity, observance of a religious holiday, performance of a military duty, or any other reason as per the [University policy](#), the student is required to notify the instructor **before** the day of the absence, and if possible at the start of the semester, in order to arrange make up time and procedures. No makeups allowed for unexcused absences.

2. **Common Courtesy:** Cell phones and other electronic devices not used for instructional purposes must be turned off or silenced and stored during class. Students who receive or make calls or text messages during class will be asked to leave and marked absent for the day.
3. **Late or Make-Up Assignments:** Homework which is found to be incomplete will be graded as incomplete (equivalent to a 0) and late work will not be accepted. You may receive an extension on an assignment only in extraordinary circumstances and **only if the request for the extension is prompt, timely, and accompanied by all necessary written documentation.**
4. **Classroom Accommodation:** The University of Florida is committed to providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, a student should present his/her accommodation letter to me supporting a request for accommodation. The University encourages students with disabilities to follow these procedures as early as possible within the semester. *Please provide the instructor with the necessary documentation at the start of the semester or no less than five business days ahead of a scheduled exam.*
5. **Evaluate your Instructor:** Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>
6. **Academic Integrity:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code." 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." [The Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. You are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.
7. **Counseling Resources:** Students who face difficulties completing the course or who need counseling or urgent help may refer to the following resources:  
*U Matter, We Care:* If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352 392- 1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.  
*Counseling and Wellness Center:* <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.  
*Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS):* Student Health Care Center, 392-1161. University Police Department: 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).  
<http://www.police.ufl.edu/>

- E-learning technical support*, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to [Learningsupport@ufl.edu](mailto:Learningsupport@ufl.edu). <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.
- Career Connections Center*, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://career.ufl.edu/>
- Library Support*, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- Teaching Center*, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
- Writing Studio*, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>
- Student Complaints On-Campus*: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honorcode-student-conduct-code/>
- On-Line Students Complaints: <http://distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process/>
8. **Please do not wait until the end of the semester to seek help.**

**Reading Schedule (dates are subject to change. The topics of the last three sessions will be determined according to the progress and the interests of the class).**

Here is the breakdown of the readings week by week:

**Week 1 (Jan. 11<sup>th</sup>)**

**Starting up the class: assignments, presentations, introductions.**

**Week 2 (Jan. 18<sup>th</sup>)**

**Introduction: *Higher Ground***

**Chapter One: *Mockingbird Players***

**Week 3 (Jan. 25<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Two: *Stand***

**Chapter Three: *Trials and Tribulations***

**Week 4 (Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>)**

**Chapter Four: *The Old Rugged Cross***

**Week 5 (Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Five: *Of the Coming of John***

**Chapter Six: *Surely Doomed***

**Week 6 (Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Seven: *Justice Denied***

**Week 7 (Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>) NO CLASS: this session is replaced by the screening of *Unguarded* on Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> at the Hippodrome Theater @6pm.**

**Week 8 (Mar. 1<sup>st</sup>)**

**Chapter Eight: *All God's Children***

**Chapter Nine: *I'm Here***

**Week 9 (Mar. 8<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Ten: *Mitigation***

**Midterm Exam**

**Week 10 (Mar. 22<sup>nd</sup>)**

**Chapter Eleven: *I'll Fly Away***

**Chapter Twelve: *Mother, Mother***

**Week 11 (Mar. 29<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Thirteen: *Recovery***

**Week 12 (Apr. 5<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Fourteen: *Cruel and Unusual***

**Week 13 (Apr. 12<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Fifteen: *Broken***

**Week 14 (Apr. 19<sup>th</sup>)**

**Chapter Sixteen: *The Stone-catchers' Song of Sorrow***

***Epilogue***

**Week 15 (Apr. 26<sup>th</sup>)**

**Final thoughts**