COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course focuses on popular trials - or judicial proceedings that engage the interest of a general audience usually sustained by some form of mass communication. Such trials - whether or not they result in establishing new legal norms - are public events that can serve as cultural reference points for beliefs that unite or divide the community. To analyze these events, we will draw upon works in cultural studies and interpretive sociology to look at trials as social enactments that make use of ritual and dramaturgy to achieve their effects. Popular trials will also be approached from the vantage point of communication studies and critical semiotics to show how these events filter experience and how they generate representations of social reality that in turn become the focus of intense public debate and discussion.

Concepts developed in the course will be applied to specific trials each of which will be looked at in historical context and in relation to the legal culture of the period. We will look at these trials variously in terms of their social representations, their use of ritual and dramaturgy, their narratives, and their use of competing discourses.
Course Materials:

* Course kit. Available for purchase at Glendon Bookstore

** Denotes electronic access from York University Library Site. It is your responsibility to access these articles either as e-copies or hard-copies. To include them in the course packet would substantially raise the cost of the kits.

Videos: Throughout the year, we will be viewing several videos which are an important part of the course material and will be referenced on tests, exams, and in lectures. Attend these classes as a few of these documentaries or movies are not available online or at York.

Course format: The course will consist of a two-hour lecture with a one-hour tutorial in which students will engage the materials and ideas for the course.

Course Evaluation:

1) Courtroom observation- to be given out October 27 and due on November 10, 2015- 20% Details to follow

2) Short Essay- topics to be given out October 20 and due on November 24, 2015- 30%

3) In-class test(3 hours): December 1, 2015- 40%

4) Tutorial Participation: - 10%

This will be based upon the quality of the student’s engagement with the weekly readings and topics. Each student will be expected to prepare one seminar based on topics to be handed out on September 9. The evaluation will only be partially determined by the student’s regular attendance. Regular attendance does not guarantee a strong participation grade but poor attendance will insure a weak grade. Students should come to the class having read the required readings and having prepared at least one question or point of interest to be raised in the tutorial. Grades for participation will only be counted if they raise the grade you receive from your written work for the course.
Students are responsible for: all assigned readings, whether or not such readings are specifically covered in class.

**Missed Tests:** Generally, missed tests will be assigned grade of zero, unless prior notification is given to the instructor AND there are legitimate medical or compassionate circumstances involved. You must have your doctor use the “Attending Physician’s Statement” form provided by the office of the registrar at [http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/services/petitions/forms.htm#6](http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/services/petitions/forms.htm#6)

Late assignments: There is a penalty of 2% per day for assignments handed in late, unless prior arrangements with the instructor have been made. With proper documentation, medical and compassionate grounds may waive the penalty. Late assignments need to be handed in as hardcopy with your name on the cover of the essay to the Glendon drop box in rm. C213. At the same time, submit an electronic copy of your essay as I will use this as for date submission verification. Never slip your paper under my office door. Always keep a copy.

*Centre for Academic Learning:* [http://www.arts.yorku.ca/caw/](http://www.arts.yorku.ca/caw/)

**Access/Disability:**
York provides for students with disabilities (including physical, medical, learning, and psychiatric disabilities) needing accommodation related to teaching and evaluation methods/materials. It is the student’s responsibility to register with disability services as early as possible to ensure that the appropriate academic can be provided with advanced notice. You are encouraged to schedule a time early in the term to meet with each professor to discuss your accommodation needs. Failure to make these accommodations may jeopardize your opportunity to receive academic accommodations.

[http://www.yorku.ca/dshub/](http://www.yorku.ca/dshub/)
[http://www.yorku.ca/opd/](http://www.yorku.ca/opd/)
[http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/](http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/)

*Academic Honesty - Policies & Explanations of Breaches & Their Consequences*
York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty; please review the following website:
http://www.arts.yorku.ca/faculty_and_staff/policies_and_procedures_for_faculty/academic_honesty_students.php

**Religious Observance Accommodation:**
York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents. Should any of these dates specified in this syllabus for an in-class test pose such a conflict for you, contact me within the first 3 weeks of class.

**Course Withdrawal Date:**
Last date to drop ‘Y’ courses without receiving a grade: November 9, 2015
Please verify all add/drop dates on the York website:
http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/importantdates/fw09.htm

September 15- Introduction and Orientation

September 22- Popular Trials- Procedural and Substantive Justice; Legal and Substantive Rationality
Readings: News items on case of Robert Latimer*
(See Hein online for law journals- e-resources- York library.)

Kadri, Sadakat, “From Eden to Ordeals,” Chapter 1 in *The Trial: A History from Socrates to O.J. Simpson, 2005*
Film: Inside the Jury

September 29- Popular Trials and Popular Culture- Law and the media


Video- We will look at selected extracts from current representations of law on TV both in the genres of TV series and reality TV shows such as Judge Judy, Judge Joe Brown, and People’s Court.

October 6- Popular Trials- the Political Trial


Contemporary accounts of Q.v. Riel(1885)*


October 13- Popular Trials- Legal Discourse, Narrative, and Social Representation:


October 20- Popular Trials as Cultural Reference Point- Film Documentary- Scottsboro- An American Tragedy

October 27- Popular Trials as Dramaturgy-


First assignment on courtroom observation will be given out at this time.

November 3- Moral Performance at Trial- Showing Remorse-

Readings:


Will include videos of parole hearings as illustrations of what is at stake in this process.

November 10- Popular Trials- Narrative, Social Representation, and the Media- an illustration-


November 17- Truth Commissions and the Rituals of Transitional Justice

Film: *Long Night’s Journey into Day*


November 24- Theorizing trials- Perspectives from grand theory- Trial as Collective Ritual of Solidarity; Trial as Ideological Weapon in Support of Status Quo; Law as Disciplinary Regime


December 1- In-class test