Course Description

This seminar focuses on biographical and autobiographical writings and oral interviews in a historical examination of the role of the individual in the American legal process. We will seek to understand how specific African Americans (as lawyers, judges, and litigants) made a difference—how their lives and legal challenges serve as a “mirror to America”—and also to understand the ways personal experience informs individual perspectives on law and justice. We will listen to firsthand accounts of lived experience through our exploration into the digital archive theHistoryMakers at https://harvard-thehistorymakers-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/home. We will also go to the Schlesinger Library to see the documents in the Pauli Murray Papers.

Course Requirements and Other Activities:

(1) Participate in an informed way in class discussion of assigned readings. (20% of grade)

(2) Present to the class once either with a partner or individually on a recommended reading, document, court case, and/or any other sources of your choice that are relevant to the weekly topic. Use of Power Point is required and should be submitted after the presentation. (15% of grade)

(3) Respond to a weekly question on the class message board. Your blog must be posted no later than noon on the day the class meets. You should write no more than 300 words (10% of the grade). A discussion leader will not be responsible for blogging on the day of his/her specific presentation.

(4) Write and make a formal presentation in the form of an analytical review of selected research that includes information from theHistoryMakers (25% of grade)

(5) Submit a final paper (12-14 pages) on a topic related to biography and the law. (30% of grade). I will work closely with each of you in developing your project topics, in identifying research methodologies and sources, and in presenting your arguments and evidence.

(6) Collaboration Policy Statement: Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on a similar or related topic as your classmate. However, you
should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in the discipline of History and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

**Required Autobiographies and Biographies for Purchase**
Boyle, Kevin. *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (2004) [Ossian Sweet case]

**Topics and Readings:**

January 23. Introduction

**January 30. History Makers—Studying Law and/as Personal Stories**
Click on link below and log onto the eight stories in my Playlist from *theHistoryMakers:*--  


http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=bglj

**Recommended:**

February 6. Robert Morris—Prequel to Brown: Desegregating Education in Antebellum Boston
Kendrick and Kendrick, *Sarah’s Long Walk*, especially Introduction, ch.1, 5-6, 8-16
*Sarah C. Roberts v. City of Boston* (see PDF in Modules Section of Canvas)

**Recommended:**
February 13. Buck Colbert Franklin—The Tulsa Race Riot and Justice Denied
   My Life and an Era: The Autobiography of Buck Colbert Franklin, ed. by John
   Whittington Franklin and John Hope Franklin (1997), especially ch. 9-12 (pp.192-247)
   John Melvin Alexander et. al v. Oklahoma et. al. (2004) at link:
   http://ca10.washburnlaw.edu/cases/2004/09/04-5042.htm
Search HistoryMakers database for “reparations.” Listen to three persons who discuss it.

Recommended:
   Tulsa Race Riot: A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race
   Scott Ellsworth, Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921

February 20. Ossian Sweet—Self-Defense and the Politics of Respectability
   Kevin Boyle, Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz
   Age (2004), especially ch.3-6, 8-10
   Closing Argument of Clarence Darrow in the Trial of the People of Michigan v. Ossian Sweet et
   al. (Oct.-Nov., 1925) at:
   http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/fttrials/sweet/Darrowsumm1.html
See Darrow’s Summation (May 1926) at:
   http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/fttrials/sweet/darrowsummation.html

Recommended:
   Phyllis Vine, One Man’s Castle: Clarence Darrow in Defense of the American
   Dream (2005), especially ch. 7, 9-18
   Search HistoryMakers database for “housing discrimination.” Listen to three persons who
   discuss it.

February 27. Charles Hamilton Houston—Social Engineering
   Genna Rae McNeil, Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights
   (1983), especially ch. 1-7, 10

Recommended:
   Amina Hassan, Loren Miller: Civil Rights Attorney and Journalist (2015)
   Fred Gray, Bus Ride to Justice: Changing the System by the System, the Life of Fred Gray
   (Revised Ed. 2012)
   Gilbert Ware, William Henry Hastie: Grace under Pressure (1984)

***Paper Topics Due***

   Charles L. Zelden, Battle for the Black Ballot: Smith v. Allwright and the Defeat of the All White
   Primary in Texas (2004)
Search HistoryMakers database for “voting rights.” Listen to three persons who discuss it.

Recommended:
   Darlene Clark Hine, Dark Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas (1979)

March 13. Spring Break
March 20. Pauli Murray—Gender Matters **Class Meets at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Room**


Recommended:

March 27. Nathaniel Jones—Civil Rights Post-Brown v. Board


Recommended:

April 3. Analytical Review Due—Presentation and Discussion in Class


Bryan Stevenson. *Just Mercy*, especially Introduction, especially ch. 1-4, 10-16, and Postscript

Recommended:

April 17. The *Loving* Case—Biography as Film (Marriage across the Color Line)

Recommended:

April 24. Paper Presentations

Final Paper Due - TBA