

Prof. Baumgartner  
POLI 203, Race, Innocence, and the End of the Death Penalty  
Spring 2016

Possible Paper topics, for paper due on March 9, 2016.

Pick one of the following topics for your paper:

- A. In your assigned book, *The Last Lawyer*, many things went wrong to lead to the wrongful conviction described there. List and describe those particular elements that seemed to have contributed to the error in that case. Now, pick one or more of the following cases, which you can easily find on-line for research: a) Cameron Todd Willingham; b) Michael Morton; c) Carlos deLuna; d) Henry McCollum / Leon Brown; e) Darryl Hunt; f) Fernando Bermudez; g) LaMonte Armstrong; h) Beverly Monroe; or i) Anthony Ray Hinton. Compare what went wrong in the cases you choose. Look at Brandon Garrett's book, *Convicting the Innocent* or other academic sources about how this can happen. Also review the causes of error listed in the National Registry of Exonerations (<https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx>) to place the case you focus on into context.
- B. The various states differ dramatically in their use of the death penalty. Pick two states that have the death penalty on the books but differ from each other in how they use it: California and Pennsylvania for example sentence but rarely execute; Virginia and Texas execute higher proportions of those they sentence. Pick any two states that differ in some important way, based on evidence shown in class or from other sources. What differs between the two states you have chosen, and what explains the difference? Is one system more constitutionally acceptable than the other?
- C. In *Gregg v. Georgia* the Court approved capital punishment but required that it be reserved for the "worst of the worst." Review the means by which the Court attempted to ensure that the death penalty would be reserved for those most deserving of it. In a second part of your paper, review the evidence about the degree to which the states conform to this standard. Make sure you present specific evidence about it, from one or more states. Conclude with a discussion, based on your evidence, about whether the "worst-of-the-worst" standard is being achieved, and a statement of what evidence would clearly demonstrate whether it is or is not.
- D. If you have a strong preference for a particular topic not covered above, and it can be designed in such a way that purchasing a pre-written term paper is impossible, you may make the suggestion to your TA and they will have the authority to agree or not. Our goal in these assignments is just that you go beyond the readings and lectures for class, and that you explore a relevant topic in some detail. At the same time, we don't want simple book reviews or topics that can easily be assembled from pre-existing sources. If you want to use this option, have it approved by your before February 22.

**Paper technical requirements:** Your name, date, section, title for your essay, the essay itself in 12 point font, 1 inch margins, 5-7 pages, at least some academic sources as well as any journalistic sources. Academic sources means books published by university presses, articles you find in JSTOR, or official statistical and other reports issued by government agencies. Journalistic sources means magazines, newspaper stories, opinion pieces, non-governmental web sites, blogs, etc. It's ok to use either footnotes or in-text citations, but you must have a list of references.