“ONE THING THIS BOOK TAUGHT ME IS THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF INNOCENT PEOPLE IN PRISON . . . . ”

— JOHN GRISHAM

Cazenovia College Summer Reading Program

Cazenovia College’s first year students are introduced to the college’s academic expectations through the First Year Summer Reading Program. Each year, Cazenovia College’s First Year Program selects and assigns a significant book for first year students to read prior to their arrival at the college in the fall.

This year the Program has selected *The Innocent Man: Murder and Injustice in a Small Town* by John Grisham.

**John Grisham** is best known for a long line of novels about the law and lawyers, many of which have been turned into successful films. In his first non-fiction work, Grisham explores the case of Ron Williamson, a would-be baseball star from a small town in Oklahoma who was wrongly convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of a young waitress. With characteristic story-telling ability, Grisham follows Williamson from his youth, through the events that led to his arrest, the trial, conviction, prison experiences and finally release. He turns a revealing eye on the district attorney and others who developed the case against Williamson and another innocent man, Dennis Fritz. As we follow the case step by painful step, Grisham pokes at the concept of “proven guilty,” and raises profound questions about the role we all have in the criminal justice system and about the consequences, the very real consequences to individuals, when that system gets it wrong.

*The Innocent Man* will be introduced as part of Summer Orientation, and will be discussed during Fall Orientation. Following the fall discussion, students will submit an essay based on the book to their First Year Seminar instructor. All student work will receive credit in the First Year Seminar, and the best work will be awarded prizes by the First Year Program.

Turn this page over for more information about the essay assignment.
Essay assignment on The Innocent Man

For most of us, our understanding of the criminal justice process comes not from personal experience but from classes in school and the media, whether it be books, movies, newspapers and magazines, television news, true crime shows like “Cops” or “City Confidential”, or fictional television crime shows like “Law and Order.” After you have read, considered, and discussed The Innocent Man, craft an essay in which you compare your understanding of the criminal justice system before and after reading the book. You might consider some or all of the following:

• Has your understanding changed?
• If so, in what ways?
• Were there specific passages in the book that contributed to this shift? If so, which ones? Why or how did the passage contribute to the shift?
• If your understanding has not changed, what specific passages in the text reinforced your existing thinking?

You may use first person in your essay, but remember to keep your focus on the book and how it influenced or contributed to your thinking on the subject of the criminal justice system in America.

Essay format

• Your essay is to be a minimum of 750 words long.
• Your essay must be computer generated using Times New Roman and size 12 font.
• Double-space your essay using appropriate paragraph structure with valid topic sentences. Grammar and usage do count!
• Provide an introduction with a thesis statement, a body, and a conclusion.
• Cite a minimum of five specific passages from the book using either MLA or APA style citation to support your argument.

You are welcome to include computer-generated images or other written sources to help make your points but these sources must be included in a works cited or reference page.

Essay assignment timeline:

The Innocent Man introduced in summer orientation by Cazenovia College faculty member and students given essay assignment.

Sunday, August 29: Students share ideas about the book and the writing assignment with each other, faculty, and master students at fall orientation lunch.

Wednesday, September 1: Essays are due at the first class meeting of First Year Seminar. Essays are the first graded assignment for First Year Seminar. Best paper in each seminar gets prize and is entered into overall First Year essay competition. Best essays overall named by panel of judges and grand prizes awarded at a ceremony to be held by the end of September.