Event: “120 Years, A Film and Discussion about Wrongful Conviction and Exoneration,” November 28, 2018

Reflection:
I was very impressed with this screening. As someone who tries to stay informed about the injustices in the criminal justice system, I was still shocked by the stories and statistics presented, such as the sheer number of people who are falsely accused annually. As someone who strongly believes that the law can be used to promote human rights, this film reminded me that I should not only work at solving human rights abuses using the legal system, but also find ways to reform it simultaneously.

I like that this film balances both a unique story as well as provides an overview of the overarching issue. There was a final chapter at the end of the film giving an analysis of the problem at large. In this way it captured the viewers’ attention and allowed them to reflect, but at the same reminded us that this story is rare, and there is still much more work to be done. For every story we hear, there are many others that we don’t get to hear. This film is also strong in that it celebrates a victory in the wake of a large problem. In a field that can be emotionally taxing, it is essential to celebrate when a fight is won, even if there is much more work to do. I think the film did a wonderful job of emphasizing that hard work for justice will pay off, but also of reminding us that there is still more to fight for.

I also loved this event because the medium which they used to demonstrate their message was very powerful. The film was in and of itself artistically well-done. Oftentimes, documentaries carry the connotation of being boring and informative, but this one was extremely engaging. The creative outlet of film should be used more often because it can be incredibly captivating and leaves the viewer thinking about its themes long after seeing it, more so than other outlets.

Furthermore, I think this was a wonderful depiction of how stories can be incredibly moving, and can often inspire people more than textbook analyses of systemic injustice or outrageous statistics. I believe that narratives are underused in the human rights sphere, and are a strong way of making human rights more accessible and a tool to inspire change. This is one of the first rules of journalism: individual stories are more powerful than statements of facts. I think that if we want human rights abuses to be covered more thoroughly and to capture the attention of more people, we should think about the way we present them. Frameworks and human rights jargon are limiting and I think dissuade people from pursuing human rights in that human rights are presented as much more complex than they are. However, I strongly believe human rights affects everyone in some way, and the media, as well as the language we use, should reflect that. Using more individual narratives is one step in remedying this problem.

I really enjoyed this event because it showcased the hard work of students. I am continuously amazed by the things that my classmates in the program accomplish, and I rarely hear about their achievements. This event allowed me to see what another student in the program spent her time doing, and the panel after the film was extremely insightful. I loved hearing about Scott Lewis’s, the filmmakers’, and the lawyers’ thoughts beyond what they said in the film. I anticipate that the capstone symposium will be similar to this sort of event, and I am really looking forward to hearing more about what my peers are doing with the program next semester at the symposium, as well as next year.