



## **Integrating Literature and History into Construction Law Education: A Case Study Lesson Based on "The Bag Man"**

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This paper explores an innovative teaching strategy in construction law education by integrating Rachel Maddow's "The Bag Man." This lesson aims to enhance students' understanding of legal principles, ethical considerations, and the influence of American history on contemporary legal practices within the construction industry. "The Bag Man," which details the political corruption scandal involving former Vice President Spiro Agnew, is used as a case study to draw parallels between political corruption and ethical issues in construction. The lesson incorporates the book and podcast formats, offering a dynamic and accessible way to present complex legal concepts and real-world case studies. By examining the historical context of political corruption, students can relate these issues to industry-specific challenges, fostering a deeper comprehension and practical skills. This approach engages students and prepares them for the ethical and legal challenges they will face in their professional careers. The lesson's methodology, implementation, and evaluation are discussed, highlighting the effectiveness of multimedia resources and historical case studies in enhancing construction law education.

**Key Words:** Construction Law, Experiential Learning, Case-Based Teaching, Ethics, Multimedia Learning

### **Introduction**

Construction law is essential for preparing students to navigate legal challenges in the industry. It provides the necessary knowledge and skills to handle various legal issues that arise in construction projects, including contract disputes, regulatory compliance, and ethical dilemmas. However, traditional methods of teaching construction law often lack engagement and practical application. These methods, which primarily involve lectures and textbook readings, may fail to capture students' interest or demonstrate how legal principles apply in real-world scenarios (Garvin & Roberto, 2018).

One significant challenge in traditional construction law education is low engagement. Students may find connecting theoretical concepts to practical applications difficult, leading to a lack of interest and motivation. This theoretical detachment can hinder students' ability to fully grasp and retain complex legal principles, ultimately affecting their preparedness for professional practice (Kolb & Kolb, 2022).

There is a growing need for innovative teaching strategies that engage students and provide practical, real-world learning experiences. One such strategy is integrating multimedia resources, such as podcasts, into the curriculum. Podcasts can offer a dynamic and accessible way to present complex legal concepts and real-world case studies, making the material more relatable and engaging for students (Kay, 2012).

This paper introduces a case study lesson leveraging Rachel Maddow's "The Bag Man," a detailed account of the political corruption scandal involving former Vice President Spiro Agnew. "The Bag Man" is available as a book and as a podcast, providing a rich audio-visual resource that can enhance the learning experience. By incorporating this historical case study and its podcast format, the lesson aims to create a more interactive and impactful learning experience.

#### *History of the Agnew Case*

Spiro Agnew, who served as Vice President under President Richard Nixon, was involved in a major political scandal in the early 1970s. Agnew was accused of accepting bribes and kickbacks from contractors during his tenure as Baltimore County Executive, Governor of Maryland, and Vice President of the United States. The investigation, led by the U.S. Attorney's office, uncovered a pattern of corruption that ultimately led to Agnew's resignation in 1973. This case is a profound example of political corruption and the legal and ethical consequences that follow (Maddow, 2019).

Using the podcast format, students can engage with the material in a more flexible and immersive way. Listening to the podcast episodes allows students to absorb information during times that might otherwise be unproductive, such as commuting or exercising. This format also caters to different learning styles, as some students may find audio content more engaging and easier to understand than traditional text-based materials (Kay, 2012).

"The Bag Man" provides a rich historical context that allows students to draw parallels between political corruption and ethical issues in the construction industry. Through this approach, students can gain a deeper understanding of the importance of ethics and accountability in their professional lives while also learning to navigate the legal complexities of the construction industry.

By integrating historical case studies and multimedia resources like podcasts into construction law education, educators can provide a richer educational context that fosters engagement and practical understanding. This approach not only enhances students' comprehension of legal principles but also prepares them for the ethical and legal challenges they will face in their careers. The following sections of this paper will discuss the theoretical foundations of this teaching strategy, the methodology used to implement the lesson, and the observed outcomes and implications for construction law education.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Experiential Learning in Construction Education*

Experiential learning is recognized as an effective approach in construction education, enabling students to engage directly with real-world scenarios. According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). This approach is particularly beneficial in construction education, where hands-on experience is crucial. Siddiqui and Khan (2020) found that experiential learning

significantly enhances students' understanding and retention of construction management concepts. They emphasize the role of hands-on projects and real-world problem-solving in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

#### *Case-Based Teaching in Legal Education*

Case-based teaching is a powerful pedagogical tool widely used in legal education. It involves analyzing real-world cases to help students develop critical thinking and decision-making skills. Garvin and Roberto (2018) highlight that case-based methods improve students' ability to apply legal principles to practical situations, enhancing their engagement and understanding. By examining detailed case studies, students can better grasp the complexities and nuances of legal issues.

#### *Integrating Historical Context in Education*

Incorporating historical context into education enriches students' understanding of contemporary issues by illustrating the development of concepts and practices over time. Research has shown that teaching history through case studies helps students make connections between past and present, enhancing their analytical skills. This method provides a deeper understanding of how historical events shape current practices and principles (Jankvist, 2009; Furinghetti, 2007).

#### *Ethics in Construction Law*

Ethics is a fundamental component of construction law education. Various ethical challenges in the construction industry, such as conflicts of interest, fraudulent practices, and bribery, necessitate robust ethical education to prepare students for the dilemmas they may encounter in their professional careers. Studies have highlighted that unethical practices are prevalent in the construction sector, impacting the industry's integrity and efficiency (Owusu, 2017; Mason, 2009). By understanding historical cases of corruption and their consequences, students can better appreciate the importance of ethical behavior (Owusu, 2017; Mason, 2009).

#### *Educational Benefits of "The Bag Man"*

Rachel Maddow's "The Bag Man" offers a unique case study for analyzing legal and ethical issues. Its detailed account of political corruption provides a rich historical context that can be used to draw parallels to similar issues in the construction industry. By studying such historical cases, students can gain a deeper understanding of the importance of ethics and accountability in their professional lives.

### **Methodology**

#### *Lesson Plan Design*

The lesson was designed to integrate experiential learning, case-based teaching, and historical context into a graduate-level Construction Law course at Oklahoma State University. The primary educational tool used was Rachel Maddow's "The Bag Man," which provides a real-world case study of political corruption and legal accountability.

#### **Implementation**

The lesson plan was implemented through a series of structured activities:

#### *Introduction to "The Bag Man"*

Students were assigned to read selected excerpts from Rachel Maddow's "The Bag Man" and listen to relevant podcast episodes. This preparatory work provided students with an in-depth understanding of the political corruption scandal involving former Vice President Spiro Agnew. In the subsequent class discussion, students summarized key themes from the readings and podcasts, such as the nature of corruption, legal accountability, and ethical lapses. The discussion aimed to connect these themes to the principles of construction law, setting the stage for the application of these concepts in the construction industry.

#### *Discussion of Legal Principles*

An overview of the legal issues in the Agnew case, including bribery, fraud, and the legal proceedings that led to Agnew's resignation, was presented to the class. This overview included a comparison of these issues with common legal challenges faced in the construction industry, such as bid rigging, fraudulent contracts, and unethical practices. The objective was to illustrate the similarities between political and industry-specific corruption and to highlight the importance of ethical behavior and legal compliance in construction projects.

#### *Case Study Activity*

Students were divided into groups and given a hypothetical construction scenario involving ethical and legal breaches. For example, a scenario might involve a general contractor accused of bribing a city official to secure a construction permit. Each group was assigned roles such as investigators, legal counsel, and company representatives to analyze the case and propose solutions. The groups were tasked with identifying the ethical and legal issues in the scenario, researching relevant laws and regulations, and developing strategies to address the breaches.

#### *Role-Playing Exercise*

After the analysis phase, each group presented their findings and conducted a mock investigation or trial. This exercise required students to apply the legal principles and historical insights discussed earlier to a simulated real-world context. For instance, the group acting as investigators might present evidence of bribery, while the legal counsel might argue for or against the charges based on construction law and ethical standards. This role-playing activity aimed to enhance students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills by placing them in realistic, high-stakes situations.

#### *Debrief and Reflection*

Following the role-playing exercise, a class discussion was held to debrief the outcomes and reflect on the lessons learned. Students were encouraged to discuss what went well, what challenges they faced, and how they applied the concepts from "The Bag Man" to the hypothetical scenario. This reflection aimed to reinforce the importance of ethics and accountability in construction law and to help students internalize the practical implications of the legal principles they studied. The debrief also provided an opportunity for students to provide feedback on the lesson and suggest improvements for future iterations.

#### **Evaluation**

The effectiveness of the lesson was evaluated through several methods to ensure a comprehensive assessment of student engagement, understanding, and the application of learned principles.

### *Student Feedback*

Surveys and informal feedback were collected to gauge student engagement and perceptions of the lesson's value. The surveys included questions designed to measure how engaging and relevant students found the lesson, as well as the effectiveness of the podcast format in enhancing their understanding of the material. Informal feedback was gathered through class discussions and individual conversations, providing qualitative insights into students' experiences and suggestions for improvement.

### *Survey Questions*

To effectively evaluate the impact of integrating "The Bag Man" into the Construction Law curriculum, a structured survey was administered to gather detailed feedback from the students. The survey aimed to assess various aspects of the lesson, including student engagement, the relevance and clarity of the material, and the effectiveness of the podcast format in enhancing understanding. The feedback collected through this survey was crucial in determining the strengths of the lesson and identifying areas for improvement.

The survey questions were designed to cover several key dimensions: engagement, relevance, understanding, and format effectiveness. Engagement measured how engaging students found the lesson, including the use of multimedia resources. Relevance assessed how pertinent students perceived the historical case study to be in relation to contemporary construction law issues. Understanding evaluated the extent to which the lesson helped students comprehend complex legal principles and ethical considerations. Finally, format effectiveness gauged the effectiveness of the podcast format in enhancing students' comprehension and learning experience.

The following questions were included in the survey to capture a comprehensive view of the students' experiences and perceptions:

1. On a scale of 1-5, how engaging did you find the lesson?
2. How relevant did you find the historical case study to contemporary construction law issues?
3. Did the podcast format enhance your understanding of the material? (Yes/No)
4. How well did the lesson help you understand the importance of ethics in construction law?

These questions were carefully crafted to provide quantitative and qualitative data, offering insights into the lesson's overall effectiveness and the students' learning outcomes. The responses gathered from the survey played a critical role in evaluating the teaching strategy's success and informing potential enhancements for future implementations.

### *Performance Assessments*

Students' analyses, presentations, and role-playing performances were assessed to measure their understanding of legal principles and ethical considerations. Rubrics were used to evaluate each group's performance based on specific criteria. These assessments provided a quantitative measure of student learning and highlighted areas where students excelled or needed further development. The use of rubrics ensured a standardized and objective evaluation process, allowing for consistent and fair assessment across all groups.

The first criterion, analytical depth, evaluated the students' ability to identify and analyze legal and ethical issues in the scenario. This criterion assessed the thoroughness and insightfulness of the students' analysis, looking at how well they identified key issues and understood the underlying legal and ethical concepts. High marks were given to students who demonstrated a deep understanding of the case, identified subtle nuances, and provided a comprehensive analysis of the ethical and legal implications.

The second criterion, presentation clarity, assessed the clarity and organization of the group's findings and arguments. This included how well the students organized their thoughts and presented their analysis, ensuring a logical flow of arguments and effective communication. Effective presentations were clear, logically structured, and persuasive, making it easy for the audience to follow and understand the group's conclusions.

The third criterion, application of legal principles, measured the students' ability to take what they had learned about legal principles and apply it to the specific details of the hypothetical scenario. This demonstrated their understanding and ability to use these concepts in a real-world context. High-performing students successfully linked theoretical knowledge with practical application, showing a clear understanding of how legal principles operate in practice.

The final criterion, role-playing performance, evaluated the students' realism and engagement in the mock investigation or trial. This included how convincingly they portrayed their assigned roles and how engaged they were in the process, such as their ability to think on their feet, respond to questions, and interact with other participants in a realistic and professional manner. Successful role-players displayed confidence, adaptability, and a thorough grasp of their character's responsibilities and perspective.

The rubrics provided a structured way to assess each aspect of the students' performance, ensuring that all important elements of their work were considered. By focusing on these criteria, the assessments helped to identify both strengths and areas for improvement, guiding future learning and development.

### *Reflective Essays*

Students were asked to write reflective essays to explore the connections between the Agnew case and the construction industry, and to articulate the importance of ethical behavior in their future careers. The reflective essays were designed to encourage deep thinking and personal insight, allowing students to internalize the lessons learned and apply them to real-world contexts.

The essay prompts guided students to focus on several key areas. First, they were asked to discuss the similarities and differences between the Agnew corruption case and ethical issues in the construction industry. This prompt aimed to help students draw parallels between the political corruption detailed in "The Bag Man" and similar ethical challenges they might encounter in the construction industry. Students were encouraged to analyze the nature of corruption, the legal implications, and the broader impact on public trust and professional integrity.

Second, students were invited to reflect on how the historical context of the Agnew case enhanced their understanding of ethical and legal challenges in construction. This prompt encouraged them to think about the lessons that can be learned from history and how these lessons apply to modern-day legal and ethical challenges in construction.

Finally, students were asked to explain the importance of ethics in construction law and how this lesson influenced their perspective on professional accountability. This prompt aimed to make students reflect on the broader significance of ethical behavior in their profession. They were asked to engagement, understanding, and ethical awareness were met.

### **Discussion**

The case study lesson demonstrated several strengths, including enhanced student engagement and practical application of theoretical concepts reinforced by historical context. Integrating "The Bag Man" provided a unique and compelling way to connect historical events with contemporary issues in construction law, making the material more relatable and engaging for students. Using multimedia resources, such as podcasts, catered to different learning styles and allowed for flexible learning opportunities, further increasing student engagement.

One of the lesson's key strengths was its ability to foster a deeper understanding of ethical considerations in construction law. By examining the ethical lapses and legal consequences in the Agnew case, students could draw direct parallels to the construction industry, enhancing their awareness of the importance of ethical behavior and accountability in their professional lives. The role-playing exercises and case study activities also helped students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills by placing them in realistic, high-stakes situations.

However, the lesson also had some limitations. The time required for preparation was significant, both for the instructor to develop the lesson plan and for students to engage with the podcast episodes and readings. Additionally, while the Agnew case provided a rich context for discussion, relying on a single historical case study may limit the scope of learning. Diverse scenarios and additional case studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various legal and ethical issues in construction law.

Future implementations of this lesson could benefit from incorporating a broader range of case studies, including more recent examples from the construction industry. This would provide students with a wider perspective on the challenges they may face in their careers and the evolving nature of legal and ethical standards. Refined exercises based on student feedback can also enhance the learning experience, ensuring that activities are engaging, relevant, and effective in achieving the educational objectives.

By continuously adapting and improving the lesson, educators can provide a dynamic and impactful learning experience that prepares students for the complexities of construction law and the importance of maintaining high ethical standards in their professional practice.

### **Conclusion**

Integrating literature and history into construction law education offers a valuable approach to teaching complex legal concepts. The case study lesson based on "The Bag Man" provided students with a practical and engaging learning experience, enhancing their understanding of legal principles, ethical issues, and historical context in the construction industry. Future research should explore the long-term impact of such lessons on students' career readiness and professional success.

Educators can create a more immersive and effective learning environment by leveraging historical case studies and multimedia resources. This approach helps students grasp theoretical concepts and prepares them for the ethical and legal challenges they will face in their professional careers. As construction law continues to evolve, innovative teaching strategies like these will be essential in equipping the next generation of professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

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