I. The Play

A. Synopsis

Two soldiers stationed at the Naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, are accused of murder. The dead man is William T. Santiago, a Private who was disliked by even his commanding officer. When the two accused – Lance Corporal Dawson and Private Downey – plead guilty, Lt. Daniel Kaffee and Lt. Cmdr. Joanne Galloway are assigned to be their lawyers. Galloway doesn’t believe Dawson and Downey came up with the idea to kill Santiago; she has suspicions that they were following orders. Kaffee, on the other hand, couldn’t care less – about this trial, about the Navy, or, at first, about Galloway’s opinion. The two need to work together to figure out what exactly happened in Guantanamo Bay – but before they can bring anyone to justice, they need to learn how to work with one another.

B. Setting & Characters

Setting

The action of the play occurs in the summer of 1986, in various locations in Washington, D.C., and on the United States Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Characters

Lance Cpl. Harold W. Dawson  Accused of murdering Private William Santiago. Dawson is slightly faster on his feet than Downey, and tends to make decisions for both of them. Dawson has the utmost respect for military protocol and honor.

Pfc. Louden Downey  Accused of murdering Private William Santiago in conspiracy with Dawson. Downey usually follows Dawson’s lead. He believes completely in the military ideals of honor and integrity, and that makes it hard for him to admit that any of his commanding officers have led him astray.

Lt. j.g. Sam Weinberg  A good friend of Daniel Kaffee’s. Sam is not as involved in the case as Kaffee or Galloway, but he works on it with them nevertheless.
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<tr>
<th>Character</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lt. j.g. Daniel A. Kaffee</td>
<td>The son of a famous lawyer, Kaffee is afraid to try his best and not measure up. To escape this, he simply doesn’t try. At the opening of the play, he is far more concerned about his office softball team than the cases he’s working on. As he gets more involved in this case, his priorities start to change.</td>
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<td>Lt. Cmdr. Joanne Galloway</td>
<td>The only woman in the play, she’s worked hard to come as far as she has. Galloway first brings enough attention to the case to have Whitaker discuss it at a meeting, and then talks her way into being assigned as a second lawyer, so each defendant has one of their own. She is extremely intelligent, and sometimes gets into trouble for saying exactly what she thinks.</td>
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<td>Capt. Isaac Whitaker</td>
<td>Whitaker is in charge of the military lawyers in Washington, D.C. He allows Joanne Galloway to work on the case even though Kaffee was the only lawyer officially assigned to it.</td>
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<td>Capt. Matthew A. Markinson</td>
<td>A captain stationed on Guantanamo Bay, under Colonel Jessep who once worked with Dawson, Downey and Santiago. He suggested transferring Santiago off the base, but Jessep chose not to. Markinson has trouble with the fact that his C.O. is so much younger than he is.</td>
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<td>Pfc. William T. Santiago</td>
<td>Although he dies before the action of the play begins, Santiago appears in a few flashbacks. He was never a very good soldier, and didn’t appear to care about his buddies. At one point, he wrote a letter offering to turn another soldier in for a minor breach in protocol in exchange for being transferred off the base.</td>
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<td>Lt. Col. Nathan Jessep</td>
<td>As Joanne Galloway says, Jessep is the “Golden Boy of the Corps.” As the youngest Colonel in the North American Command, he makes sure everyone knows how good he is at being in control. Often, he chooses to appear powerful rather than to make prudent, life-saving decisions. He has the utmost faith in his own authority as a Marine, and in the sanctity of the Marine Corps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lt. Jonathan James Kendrick</td>
<td>Commander of the Windward wall (the side of the base where Santiago was stationed) on the Naval base in Guantanamo Bay.</td>
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Lt. Jack Ross  A lawyer assigned to prosecute Dawson and Downey. Emotionally uninvested in the case, he expects Kaffee to ask for a plea bargain. He sees his job as to save face for the military as much as possible – which entails punishing the accused just leniently enough that they won’t talk about any breaches of protocol.

Marines, Sailors, M.P.’s, Lawyers, et al.

C. About the Playwright

Aaron Sorkin is probably best known for his work as a screenwriter. He wrote for *The West Wing* in 1999 and 2000, and has written the screenplays for many feature films, including *Charlie Wilson’s War* (2007) and *Enemy of the State* (1998). Nevertheless, he began his career in the theatre. Born and raised in New York in the 1960s, Sorkin struggled to find work as an actor after graduating from Syracuse University. As the story goes, when a friend asked him to housesit for a few days, and he discovered a typewriter, he simply began writing. His first play, *Removing All Doubt* was staged at Syracuse University in 1984. In 1989, *A Few Good Men* launched him to near-instant success. He wrote the screenplay for the movie only a few years later (it was released in 1992), and became a successful Hollywood writer. To date, his work on *The West Wing* has won him a Golden Globe Award, an Emmy, a Writers Guild Of America Award, and two Producers Guild of America Awards. Sorkin was also the creator, producer and head writer of the short lived, but well received, *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*.

D. Historical Context

The Naval Base on Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (GTMO, spoken as “Gitmo”) is in a precarious political position, given relations between the U.S. and Cuba. GTMO has belonged to the U.S. since 1903, but diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba have been cut off since 1961 (incidentally, the year of Aaron Sorkin’s birth). President John F. Kennedy ordered the base to be evacuated from October to December of 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Shortly thereafter, in 1964, Fidel Castro cut off water and supplies to the base. Since that time, Guantanamo Bay has been self-sufficient, decontaminating its own water and producing its own electricity. The military personnel stationed their need to be tough – and they are.

As the U.S. Marine Corps website states, to Marines, “three things matter.” The site lists these things as Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The Marines see themselves as bound by a code of honor that goes deeper than one’s commission. Former Marines are referred to as such, never as “ex-Marines,” because they are still connected to the Corps. This level of commitment is demonstrated by the Marine Corps Association, or MCA, which was formed at Guantanamo Bay in 1913. The MCA serves as a kind of union for Marines. As their Mission Statement espouses, they are “dedicated to providing professional development and special services to all those who have earned and worn the eagle, globe and anchor.” This is the kind of community in which the characters Lance Corporal Harold Dawson, Private Louden Downey, and Private William Santiago lived and worked every day in the months leading up to the action of *A Few Good Men*.
E. Production History

A Few Good Men was first presented at the Heritage Repertory Theatre of the University of Virginia, Department of Drama, and subsequently, in association with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, was presented at the Music Box Theatre in New York in 1989. Don Scardino directed the latter production. Dianne Trulock was the production stage manager, Ben Edwards designed the set, David C. Woolard designed costumes, Thomas R. Skelton designed the lights, and John Gromada was the sound designer. It performed with the following cast:

- Sentry: Ron Ostrow
- Pfc. Louden Downey: Michael Dolan
- Lt. j.g. Daniel A. Kaffee: Tom Hulce*
- Capt. Isaac Whitaker: Edmond Genest
- Capt. Matthew A. Markinson: Robert Hogan
- Pfc. William T. Santiago: Arnold Molina
- Lt. Jack Ross: Clark Gregg
- Cpl. Jeffrey Owen Howard: Geoffrey Nauffts
- Cmdr. Walter Stone: Fritz Sperberg
- Marines, Sailors, M.P.'s, Lawyers, et al.: Stephen Bradbury, Jeffrey Dreisbach, Michael Genet, George Gerdes, Joshua Malina

*Timothy Busfield replaced Tom Hulce on May 14, 1990.

A film version of A Few Good Men came out in December of 1992. It was produced by Columbia Pictures and directed by Rob Reiner, with the screenplay written by Aaron Sorkin. The cast was as follows:

- Lt. j.g. Daniel A. Kaffee: Tom Cruise
- Lt. Jonathan James Kendrick: Kiefer Sutherland
- Lt. Jack Ross: Kevin Bacon
- Cmdr. Walter Stone: Christopher Guest
City Lights Theater Company’s production of *A Few Good Men* performed from May 15th to June 15th, 2008. It was directed by Kit Wilder, with scenery designed by Ron Gasparinetti, lighting by Kit Wilder, and costumes by Joanne Martin. The Marine consultants were David Schurtz & Paul Garrett. Performing in it were:

- Lance Cpl. Harold W. Dawson: Andrew Moore
- Pfc. Louden Downey: Robert Campbell
- Lt. j.g. Daniel A. Kaffee: Thomas Gorrebeeck
- Capt. Isaac Whitaker/ Cmdr. Walter Stone: Dick Leatherman
- Capt. Matthew A. Markinson: K. Michael Riley
- Pfc. William T. Santiago: Stephen Sherwood
- Lt. Col. Nathan Jessep: Michael J. West
- Lt. Jonathan James Kendrick: Charles McKeithan
- Cpl. Jeffrey Owen Howard: Patrick D. Bridges
- Capt. Julius Randolph: Paul Garrett
- Lt. j.g. Sam Weinberg: Josh Sigal
- Tom/ Orderly/ M.P.: Sam Krow-Lucal
II. The Production

A. Style and Concept

Scenic Designer Ron Gasparinetti talks about his inspiration for design, and what audience members will see on stage.

1) Where did you search for inspiration?

I focused most of my research on the Guantanamo Bay facility. Drawings, photographs, articles all helped. I wanted the audience members to feel like they were in a facility themselves. Like they themselves are trapped, like the multiple characters on stage when they themselves get trapped.

2) What does your design do to enhance the piece?

This set allows for various locales without necessarily making a huge scene change. In that way the action is very fluid, there is not much stop and go. We don’t have to stop the action to move furniture on or off. The action moves quickly from one scene to another. We can see different characters in different places all at the same time, on the same stage.

3) The set is the first thing audiences see when they enter the theatre. What will they see?

They will see lots of barbed wire, platforms with different rises and other elements like that. However the most important thing is the audience should feel some like this is some sort of detaining area. And also that something sort of menacing is going to happen on stage, which it does.

B. The Director At Work

Director Kit Wilder talks about why the theatre has decided to produce the piece, why it is important and what the audience can take from it.

1) What is it about this play that is important to you? Why is it important that the play be produced?

The current political climate, in my view, is one that has encouraged and fostered a "carte blanche" attitude toward the military by our political leaders; there seems to be minimal accountability in what Eisenhower, years ago, labeled the "Military-Industrial Complex." And, it can be argued, that truth itself has become a casualty as a result. A Few Good Men deals directly with this issue, in a highly theatrical, compelling, and entertaining way. And, further, it does something quite remarkable: it tells a story, a fiction, about abuses of power within the military while, at the same time, demonstrating a great deal of respect for the military itself -- and the Marine Corps in particular. There are those who see A Few Good Men as critical of the military, a play guilty of "Marine-bashing" for the sake of entertainment. I couldn't disagree more; Aaron Sorkin is
always fair, circumspect, and balanced in his portrayal of what is not right by juxtaposing against it that which IS right. Indeed, far from being critical of the Marines, there is much in the play that can be considered an homage to the Corps. Also, I have taken great care to direct the play with respect for the Marines. I have invited on board, as actors or consultants, former active-duty Marines or Marine Reservists who have helped me, and the cast as a whole, understand the Marines far more, and present the characters with far more accuracy, than we would have without their presence and instruction.

2) Obviously *A Few Good Men* may be best known for its film. How do you differentiate from the film, or do you?

The play is actually quite different from the film. In watching interviews with playwright/screenwriter Aaron Sorkin and the director of the film, Rob Reiner, it was interesting to learn how the play -- a medium of words -- was transformed into a film -- a medium of pictures. Indeed, several key plot points in the play were changed dramatically for the film, simply because much more could be done in the film through visuals, or what the audience merely SAW. In the play, of course, which is simply mounted on a virtually bare stage with simple furniture, the WORDS must tell the story, so plot points must develop and be revealed in very different ways.

Also, I was adamant that the actors in the play not try to give the performances in the film. While comparisons will surely be inevitable and unavoidable, I am eager for the play to be seen on its own merits -- and the performances our actors are giving seen likewise.

3) What is one of your favorite parts of the production, and why?

I have found myself becoming more and more fascinated with what it "means" to be a Marine, and in the life led by those in this particular branch of the U.S. military. Quite distinct from my political views -- which, of course, have no place in the staging of this play -- I find that I have increased respect for not "the military" so much, as for those who choose to live their lives a part of it.

A particular challenge of the play, and a fun one at that, is to help the actors lay in, piece by piece, the bits of information the audience needs to "ride" with the show -- to follow plot developments, and get caught up in the emotional drama of the characters. The play, ultimately, is nothing more than a wonderfully theatrical courtroom drama -- akin to "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial," for example. And as we all know -- and as the success of the *Law and Order* franchise and other legal TV dramas clearly demonstrates -- we LOVE our courtroom dramas. Instant conflict, instant drama, instant gratification. What a wonderfully entertaining and satisfying evening -- and one that may have people thinking and talking, to boot!
4) Have you read or watched any of Sorkin's other work? If so what, and what were your impressions?

Aaron Sorkin -- the creator and long-time writer of TV's smash hit series *The West Wing*. I am a fan of his work. His writing is thoughtful, intelligent, complex, multilayered, fair, and chock-full of some of the best dialogue being penned today. Sorkin himself would say that he doesn't write stories, that he writes dialogue; he writes conversations. Indeed -- but they make some great stories, too, that are compelling and interesting, and that inspire thought and conversation. What could be better?

5) In today's world some theatre's try and produce pieces that are non controversial, or safe. This piece comes with a lot of baggage, especially in today's world. Is that important?

The more "baggage" the better, in my view. There is a place for "safe" theatre, and every theatre company must do a "safe" piece now and then, if for no other reason than to fill the seats in a time of financial trouble, perhaps. But theatre is a place to push the boundaries, to test artists and audiences alike, to reveal and talk about things that people, to borrow a line from the play, "don't talk about at parties."
C. The Actors At Work

Four actors from City Light’s production of A Few Good Men took time to answer questions regarding their specific characters, Sorkin and the piece in general.

1) What are some of the ways in which you are like your character? How are you different? What must you do, as an actor, to bridge the gap between these differences?

Nichole Hamilton (Joanne Galloway): I think I am similar to my character in that I will use my heart, passion, and experience to pursue my goals. But also, much like Joanne, I sometimes have poor hindsight. My differences are the more obvious ones. I have never served in the military and have never studied law, nor do I have her abundance of discipline. I think the way to gap the differences is through research, true person (people in military) character study, and trying to be a little stricter with myself in my daily routine.

Stephen Sherwood (William T. Santiago): The differences are probably so long and detailed that I can't even think of them. Obviously everyone has their own lives, with own experiences that they might not be able to relate to someone else, and that is what makes them unique. But the easiest way for me to relate to my character is to find the one thing that all people have in common. We are both human beings, with feelings, desires, and goals. And that basic human strive to obtain those goals is what every actor can relate to, with any role.

Robert Campbell (Pfc. Downey): I would have to say that my character and I are not too closely related. I mean we both like Batman, and he has an arguably over developed sense of honor. However, we are much different in our overall confidence, the way we interact with people, and our reliance upon these strict rules that govern Marines. As an actor, it is my job to bridge this gap by giving myself over to the character. This story doesn't include me, it includes my character. So, the only way to truthfully tell this story I can only become my character, to invest myself in who this other person wants to be. Simply, it is a "giving up" of oneself in order to become someone else.

K. Michael Riley (Matthew Markinson): We both believe in honesty and doing the right thing. We both believe in telling the truth, no matter how difficult that may be. I have never been in the military and shooting myself would never be an option in my life. I have never devoted my entire life to one job. There is a bit of an age difference as well. I have never lived a very structured life, with doing certain things at certain times day in and day out. Well, I have already started with the hair cut! I have also started to structure my day as it might be in the military. I am reading up on the Marine Corps and what they stand for and what the code is. I am also drawing on my past experience playing football and working as one unit to complete a goal in a "man's world". I am talking to some friends who have been in the Marine Corps to better understand the difference between code and the truth.
2) Have you read or watched any of Sorkin's other work? If so, what were your impressions?

Nichole Hamilton (Joanne Galloway): Unfortunately, the only other piece he has written that I have seen is The American President starring Annette Benning and Michael Douglas. I found it very appealing and surprisingly charming. I would like to see his more recent work, Charlie Wilson's War. Because his premises and dialogue are so enthralling, he obviously draws big name stars into production. Very impressive stuff.

Stephen Sherwood (William T. Santiago): I haven't read any of Sorkin's work, except of course for this, but I have seen A Few Good Men the film. I really enjoy his use of language. He writes, as characters having actual conversations, with tangents, jokes, and feelings coming through very distinctly.

Robert Campbell (Pfc. Downey): I have not seen any of his other plays. I have, however, on many occasions, watched The West Wing. I loved the quick wit and complex social issues and critiques that he presented in the show; not to mention the intricate writing style.

K. Michael Riley (Matthew Markinson): Yes. And my impression is that he is fair. What I mean by that is he presents both sides and lets the audience make up their own mind. I also enjoy the speed of his work. All the dialogue is quick, fast banter. He keeps an actor on his feet. You can't do his work in a slow fashion, it would just die. It must be performed fast. His subject matter is different than the screwball comedies of the late 30s and 40s but the delivery from the actors must have that same type of speed.

3) This play can tie easily into today's political arena. Is it right for us as an audience to make those assumptions?

Nichole Hamilton (Joanne Galloway): Of course make the assumption that his political themes are universal, however, let biased opinions wane (or be swayed while watching) in order to see the bigger picture of the story.

Stephen Sherwood (William T. Santiago): I do believe that the play ties into today's issues. And I think that audiences should see that and should be interested in what they are watching. Some of the best plays have always been written about current and past issues, The Crucible, Angels in America, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Cats, for example. Okay maybe not Cats.

Robert Campbell (Pfc. Downey): I personally it is right for the audience to make any assumptions they can. I mean that is what theatre is all about, making someone think: "What is this play saying? Is it entertaining and educational at the same time?" Theatre has been a conduit for social and political commentary and criticism since the beginning of time. It, theatre, brings a certain topic to a very broad audience causing people to think in different ways and evaluate their lives. So, yes, it is right for the audience to make any and all assumptions; the hope is that they will walk away with a new look into their own lives and the events that are prevalent in their society.
K. Michael Riley (Matthew Markinson): I hope that the audience realizes that it is very important to today's political arena. It is about truth, telling the truth, being honest. In an election year this is very important, everyone says they will tell the truth, but will he or she when things get tough or will they cover up.

4) What do you most hope that the audience will take away from their experience in watching this production?

Nichole Hamilton (Joanne Galloway): I hope that stout republicans, liberals, ex-marines, and ex-hippies are able to make up a collective audience. Where else but theatre can this happen? I also hope each person walks away with a larger understanding of the other side. For example, I am not a huge military patriot, but I can appreciate and respect men and women who sacrifice their lives for our freedom.

Stephen Sherwood (William T. Santiago): I hope that the play makes the audience think. As long as they leave with an experience that made them think outside of their worlds. That got them to be involved with the story, to feel, to allow art to really penetrate them.

Robert Campbell (Pfc. Downey): Like all shows, I hope that the audience walks away content that they have seen a quality show and were entertained. Other than that, of course I hope they walk away with an understanding of the continuous stress that Marines around the world have to deal with, and that they are not the devils that many people make them out to be.

K. Michael Riley (Matthew Markinson): How important telling the truth is. To me this play is not about the Marines covering up, it is more about not telling the truth, not being honest, breaking the Marine code of honor. Jessup could be the head of a country or just a guy working at a print company. He didn't tell the truth; he hung two of his own out to dry, to achieve his own agenda. I hope they walk away knowing we all can handle the truth, not matter how horrid it may be, but that is the only way to heal is by being honest.
III. For Discussion

A. What to Look For as You Watch the Play

1. Sorkin uses flashbacks to contribute not only to the plot, but also the atmosphere of the play. Note the differences between the scenes that happen in present time, and the flashbacks. Are the lights different? Do the actors portray their characters in different ways? Is the writing style different between these two types of scenes?

2. The military and the legal system each have their own jargon, much of which is included in this play. How does the use of this jargon contribute to the atmosphere of the play? Does it make the action of the play confusing, or does it give you a better sense of the world in which the characters exist?

3. This play takes place in 1986, but is nevertheless relevant today. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? If you agree that it is relevant, how is it relevant?

4. Note the design aspects of the play – the set, the lighting, the costumes, the way the Marine songs are sung, etc. How do these aspects add to the production?
B. Quiz

1. When we first meet her, what does Lt. Cmdr. Joanne Galloway “recommend” to Capt. Isaac Whitaker (Daniel Kaffee’s boss)?

2. As a lawyer, what is Kaffee known for?

3. Is Lt. Kendrick a religious man?

4. Joanne befriends one of Pfc. Downey’s relatives in order to become his attorney. Who is this relative?

5. When Pfc. William Santiago began bleeding, who called an ambulance?

6. What type of room does Joanne love?

7. What is Kaffee’s favorite drink?

8. At the beginning of the play, has Joanne ever won a court case?

9. Which character has a child?

10. What is a Code Red?

11. What document does Joanne receive in the mail?

12. Why does Lt. Jack Ross (the prosecuting attorney) want to keep Dawson and Downey’s case out of court?

13. Which character resigns his commission from the Marines over the course of the play?

14. At one point in the play, we see Pfc. William Santiago writing a letter. To whom is he writing?

15. Who do Dawson and Downey salute at the end of the play?
B. Quiz Answers

16. When we first meet her, what does Lt. Cmdr. Joanne Galloway “recommend” to Capt. Isaac Whitaker (Daniel Kaffee’s boss)? *That she defend Dawson and Downey.*

17. As a lawyer, what is Kaffee known for? *Plea bargaining – settling cases out of court.*


19. Joanne befriends one of Pfc. Downey’s relatives in order to become his attorney. Who is this relative? *Downey’s Aunt Ginny.*


22. What is Kaffee’s favorite drink? *Kaffee always drinks Yoo-hoos.*

23. At the beginning of the play, has Joanne ever won a court case? *No.*

24. Which character has a child? *Sam has a baby girl.*

25. What is a Code Red? *A disciplinary action that exists only among Marines stationed at Guantanamo Bay. In Code Reds, soldiers are physically punished for misconduct. These disciplinary actions are strictly off the record, and illegal.*

26. What document does Joanne receive in the mail? *The Tower Chief’s log from Guantanamo Bay, which includes records of flights to and from the base.*

27. Why does Lt. Jack Ross (the prosecuting attorney) want to keep Dawson and Downey’s case out of court? *Because a trial will make the Marines look bad.*

28. Which character resigns his commission from the Marines over the course of the play? *Capt. Matthew A. Markinson.*

29. At one point in the play, we see Pfc. William Santiago writing a letter. To whom is he writing? *A Senator.*

30. Who do Dawson and Downey salute at the end of the play? *Lt. j.g. Daniel Kaffee.*
C. Study Questions

1. Note that there is a difference between the way characters change and the way the audience's opinion of them changes. For example, it is always true that Lionel Kaffee is Daniel Kaffee's father, but the audience only learns that fact part way through. However, Kaffee's opinion of Joanne Galloway changes drastically from the beginning of the show to the end. Choose one character, and give a character sketch of who they are at the beginning of the play – including facts we learn throughout – and a sketch of who they are at the end. How do they change over the course of the play? Why?

2. One of the themes in A Few Good Men is the concept of honor. What does it mean to be honorable? Do you think Dawson and Downey act honorably? What about Colonel Jessep? William Santiago?

3. Joanne Galloway and Daniel Kaffee's relationship is particularly interesting because it is not romantic. They are, respectively, the main female and male characters, and there is certainly a level of sexual tension between them, but they never become romantically involved. Trace how their relationship grows and changes throughout the play – how would you characterize it? (Also – why do you think Sorkin chose to avoid a romance? How does this affect the overall meaning of the piece?)

4. Why is it so important to Joanne Galloway that she be assigned to work on Dawson and Downey's case?

5. Do you think William Santiago was justified in asking to be transferred away from Guantanamo Bay? Why or why not? Do you think he was honorable? How or how not?
D. Further Reading/ Bibliography


