

Prisons and Punishment in American Society



Esteban del Valle and Groundswell mural in Brownsville, Brooklyn

Professor

Marisol LeBrón / lebronm@dickinson.edu

Time and Location

Monday and Thursday: 3:00pm – 4:15pm
Denny Hall 303

Office Hours

Monday 11am – 2pm
Denny Hall 302

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The United States imprisons more people than any other country in the world. More than two million men and women are currently locked up behind bars, a population constituting roughly one in every one hundred American adults. What has led to this phenomenon of *mass incarceration* in the United States? This interdisciplinary course will examine the historical, political, economic, and social factors that have resulted in the growth of the prison system in American society. We will examine how race, class, education, gender, and sexuality shape the American legal system and impact the demography of prisons. We will also pay special attention to the intersections between the growth of for-profit prisons, the increasing criminalization of low-level drug offenses, and the rise of zero tolerance policing. We will conclude the course by considering alternatives to the current prison system and discuss whether we can envision a world without prisons.

COURSE MATERIALS

Dan Berger and Toussaint Losier, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

James Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time* (New York: The New Press, 2015).

Beth E. Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2011).

All other readings for this course will be available online [marked *]. You are expected to bring these readings to class. If you are having issues purchasing the books for class, please come speak to me.

EXPECTATIONS

During our time together, you will engage in discussion-based intellectual exchange with your fellow classmates and rigorous, original analysis of the weekly readings. Our class sessions will help you to develop critical thinking capacities that will prove indispensable both in the classroom and beyond.

We are collectively responsible for the quality of our time together. In other words, you will get out of this class what you invest in terms of preparedness and effort. Therefore, you are expected to arrive to each session on time, having read the assigned material, having determined relevant questions and points for discussion, and ready to engage each other respectfully in the classroom.

A NOTE ON DIFFERENCE, DISCOMFORT, & RESPECT IN THE CLASSROOM

Respect for difference, in all its forms, is essential to building a classroom environment where everyone feels able to learn and contribute to class discussions. The material covered in this course will engage with questions of how difference produces distinct forms of knowledge and diverse experiences. The experiences and ways of knowing discussed in the course materials may be similar or different from your own experiences, both of which can result in questions and possibly even feelings of discomfort. When these moments arise, I encourage you to view them as valuable and important components of learning.

Thus, this course will ask you to think critically and thoughtfully about social differences and societal inequalities in ways that may expand or challenge previously held ideas. That said, the goal of this class is not to “force” certain ways of thinking onto anyone, but, rather, to expose everyone to ways of thinking and being in the world that may or may not be different from their own. I expect and encourage students to disagree with the course material, fellow classmates, and me; however, I expect that everyone will remain respectful and willing to listen at all times. Although you are under no obligation to agree with the course materials, the instructor, or the other students, you are still responsible for displaying a comprehension of the texts assigned and the conversations taking place.

If you have concerns about course content or the expectations regarding the classroom environment, please consult with me during the first week to determine whether this class is a good fit for you. If you are uncomfortable with or uninterested in discussions of race, gender, sexuality, class, histories of colonization, exploitation, capitalism, and violence, this class may not be for you as these will be central themes covered throughout the semester.

COMMUNICATION

Email: You are welcome to email me with any questions or concerns. I expect, however, that you be timely and considerate with your emails. Requests or questions related to scheduled assignments that are received less than 12 hours before the assignment is due may not receive a response. Please be professional in your email communications with all your professors, including me.

Office Hours: Do not hesitate to come see me if you have any questions regarding the course materials or your written work. If you are unable to attend my scheduled office hours, contact me to set up another time by appointment.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

Attendance at all classes is required. Students will be allowed **two** absences without penalty. All other absences will lower your participation grade for the course. ***Students with 4 or more absences will automatically receive a ZERO participation grade for the course.*** Students are expected to arrive to class on time; students arriving to class more than 15 minutes after the class has started will be marked absent for the day.

If an extenuating circumstance requires that you be late or miss a class session, please consult with me ahead of time. Please note that, in addition to contacting me, it is ***YOUR*** personal responsibility to attain and review notes for any missed classes from your fellow students.

You are expected to attend every class and be fully present in our collective space. Therefore, ***cell phones must be put on silent and remain out of sight. Additionally, all laptops, iPads, tablets, and digital notebooks are prohibited in class,*** unless there is a documented need for students who require specific learning accommodations. Because this is a discussion-based class, you will not need to take digital notes. Also, you must remember to bring the readings with you to class in order to appropriately reference and engage them during our discussions.

LATE PAPER POLICY

No Late Papers Will Be Accepted Without Penalty. A FULL letter grade will be deducted for every day that a paper is late (i.e., B+ to C+). Late papers also may not receive written comments. Papers cannot be rewritten. If you are having difficulty with an assignment, please come see me during my office hours.

PAPER FORMAT

All papers must use 12-point font, Times New Roman, double-spacing, and 1" margins on all sides. All students must use the following header:

Your name
The class title
The assignment (i.e. midterm essay)
The date you handed in the paper (not the due date)

Students should use either Chicago or MLA style citations in a consistent manner throughout their written assignments. For more see the Library's Guide to Citing Sources: <http://libguides.dickinson.edu/citing>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any breach of academic integrity will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary review. I expect all students to familiarize themselves with and adhere to Dickinson College's policies regarding academic misconduct, which can be accessed here: [http://www.dickinson.edu/student-life/resources/dean-of-students/content/Conduct---Community-Standards/#Academic Misconduct](http://www.dickinson.edu/student-life/resources/dean-of-students/content/Conduct---Community-Standards/#Academic%20Misconduct)

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is the appropriation of someone else's work or ideas – whether they are written or not – without acknowledgement, proper identification of the source, or citation. It is irrelevant whether this was done intentionally or not. Further, a lack of knowledge about U.S. standards of academic citation is not an excuse or explanation. While the most egregious forms of plagiarism use entire phrases, sentences, or paragraphs verbatim without quotation marks or citation, paraphrasing someone else's work without attribution *and* altering a few words to pass someone else's ideas off as your own also constitute equally serious forms of plagiarism. The inclusion of non-textual images (i.e. drawings, maps, graphs, charts, and photos) in a paper is also considered plagiarism if the images are not properly cited.

It is *YOUR* responsibility to consult with your instructor, a librarian, or writing tutor if you are unsure or unclear about how to properly use citations.

For more information about plagiarism, please consult the Purdue Online Writing Lab's webpage dedicated to avoiding plagiarism: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

NEED HELP WITH WRITING ASSIGNMENTS?

I strongly recommend visiting the Eberly Writing Center. At the Writing Center, you can work one-on-one with a trained writing tutor. Please avail yourselves of this wonderful resource – you will not regret it. For more information and to make an appointment:

http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20158/writing_program/2829/the_norman_m_eberly_multilingual_writing_center

ACCESSIBILITY & ACCOMMODATIONS

Dickinson College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must make their request and provide appropriate documentation to Disability Services in Biddle House. Because classes change every semester, eligible students must obtain a new accommodation letter from Director Marni Jones every semester and review this letter with their professors so the accommodations can be implemented. The Director of Disability Services is available by appointment to answer questions and discuss any implementation issues you may have.

Disability Services proctoring is managed by Susan Frommer, she can be reached at (717)-254-8107 or proctoring@dickinson.edu. Address general inquiries to Stephanie Anderberg at (717)-245-1734 or e-mail disabilityservices@dickinson.edu.

NAMES & PRONOUNS

If you prefer to be called by a different name or referred to by a different gender pronoun than the one under which you are officially enrolled, please inform me. Students are expected to respectfully refer to each other by preferred names and pronouns during class discussions.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Class Participation: 15%

On-time completion of the reading assignments, active listening during lectures and in-class discussion, and adding to discussions by making comments and asking questions are all required of you in this course.

Book Review: 30%

The fields of Critical Prison Studies and Carceral Studies have experienced an explosion of interesting and compelling books over the past decade. This assignment is an opportunity for you to read a book related to the course material on a topic of your choosing and write a **750 word** book review. Detailed guidelines will be distributed in class. All book reviews will be due at the beginning of class on **Monday, March 19, 2018**. Please select one book from the following list:

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007).
- Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Vikki Law, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women* (PM Press, 2009).
- Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Harvard University Press, 2010).
- Robert Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire* (Metropolitan Books, 2010).
- Naomi Murakawa, *First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
- Judah Schept, *Progressive Punishment: Job Loss, Jail Growth, and the Neoliberal Logic of Carceral Expansion* (NYU Press, 2015).
- Talitha LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
- Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
- Jordan Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (University of California Press, 2016).
- Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood is in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy* (Pantheon, 2016).
- Elizabeth Hinton *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press, 2017).
- Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (UNC Press, 2017).

Presentation and Discussion Facilitation: 20%

In groups, students will be responsible for facilitating one class discussion over the course of the semester. I will, of course, assist, direct, and add to the conversation as necessary, but for our first half hour together, you will be responsible for the structure and progression of class discussion. Although the format is flexible, and you are encouraged to be creative, you must be sure to address the following:

- the central argument/thesis of the text(s)
- how the author(s) develops their argument (i.e. the organization of the text)
- the author's/authors' methodology
- the evidence or examples the author/authors use to support their claims
- things you would have like the author to address/address
- what connections, if any, the day's text(s) have with other readings from the course

Although you will be going over central claims and examples, please note that this is NOT simply a presentation summarizing the text. Rather, you are being asked to pose questions to your classmates and facilitate an engaging discussion of the text. As a group, you should plan ahead and work together to get creative with this assignment. For instance, you might consider incorporating debate, small group discussions, primary source analysis, multimedia, and/or other materials and exercises. Additionally, feel free to discuss how readings about particular historical moments might connect to contemporary issues. Again, please DO NOT just plan to summarize the readings and lecture the class for 30 minutes – that will be highly unpleasant for everyone. **You should prepare a PowerPoint presentation to accompany your discussion.** You will be graded based on the thoughtfulness of your presentation/discussion plan, the clarity of your analysis, your grip on the text and the relevant context, and your effectiveness in engaging your classmates.

Final Essays: 35%

For your final, you will be given a series of essay prompts. Students will select two questions and write 4-5 pages for each prompt selected (8-10 pages in total). Papers must seriously engage the readings and address the questions posed, demonstrating an understanding of key concepts and arguments from the course. Questions will be handed out on Tuesday, April 18th at the start of class. This is a take home exam, which will be **DUE FRIDAY, MAY 11 at 12PM**. No late essays will be accepted – finals handed in after the deadline will receive an automatic ZERO on the assignment.

Week One:

Monday, January 22

- Introduction to the course

Thursday, January 25

- Michel Foucault, "Generalized Punishment," and "The Carceral" *

Week Two: Colonialism and the Criminalization of Indigeneity

Monday, January 29

- No class – Professor LeBrón will be delivering a lecture at the Claremont Colleges.

Thursday, February 1

- Luana Ross, "Worlds Collide: New World, New Indians" *
- James Kilgore, "Mass Incarceration Since 1492: Native American Encounters With Criminal Injustice," <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/34725-mass-incarceration-since-1492-native-american-encounters-with-criminal-injustice>

Week Three: Slavery and the Logics of Incarceration

Monday, February 5

- Angela Y. Davis, “Slavery, Civil Rights and Abolitionist Perspectives Towards Prison” *
- Michelle Alexander, “The Rebirth of Caste” *

Thursday, February 8

- Dylan Rodriguez, “Forced Passages: The Routes and Precedents of (Prison) Slavery” *

Week Four: Rolling Back Civil Rights and Managing Crisis

Monday, February 12

- Christian Parenti, “Nixon’s Splendid Little War” and “From Crisis to Rollback” *
- **Recommended:** James Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration*, Chapter 2

Thursday, February 15

- Christian Parenti “A War for All Seasons: The Return of Law and Order” *
- James Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration*, Chapter 4

Week Five: Broken Windows and Zero Tolerance Policing

Monday, February 19

- Christian Parenti, “Discipline in Playland, Part I and II” *

Thursday, February 22

- George Lipsitz, “Policing Place and Taxing Time on Skid Row” *
- Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, “Asset Stripping and Broken Windows Policing on LA’s Skid Row: An Interview with Becky Dennison and Pete White” *

Week Six: The Prison Beyond The Prison

Monday, February 26

- Marie Gottschalk, “The Prison Beyond the Prison: The Carceral State and Growing Political and Economic Inequalities in the United States” *
- James Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration*, Chapters 9 and 12

Thursday, March 1

- In class screening: *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes* (Dir. Brett Story)

Week Seven: Black Women in the Prison Nation

Monday, March 5

- Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice*, Chapters 1 and 2

Thursday, March 8

- Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice*, Chapter 3

Week Eight: SPRING BREAK

Monday, March 12

- No class – enjoy!!

Thursday, March 15

- No class – enjoy!!

Week Nine: Against Carceral Feminism

Monday, March 19

- Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice*, Chapter 4

Thursday, March 22

- Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice*, Chapter 5 and Conclusion

Week Ten: The Limitations of Rights-based Legal Frameworks

Monday, March 26

- Dean Spade, *Normal Life*, Preface, Introduction and Chapter 1

Thursday, March 29

- Dean Spade, *Normal Life*, Chapter 2

Week Eleven: Building Transformative Resistance

Monday, April 2

- Dean Spade, *Normal Life*, Chapters 3 and 4

Thursday, April 5

- Dean Spade, *Normal Life*, Chapter 5, Conclusion, and Afterword

Week Twelve: NO CLASS

Monday, April 9

- No Class – Professor LeBrón at the Death by Policing conference at UIUC

Thursday, April 12

- No Class – Professor LeBrón at the Death by Policing conference at UIUC

Week Thirteen: Prisoners' Rights Are Human Rights

Monday, April 16

- Berger and Losier, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement*, Introduction and Chapter 1

Thursday, April 19

- Berger and Losier, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement*, Chapter 2

Week Fourteen: From Revolution to Mass Incarceration

Monday, April 23

- Berger and Losier, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement*, Chapters 3 and 4

Thursday, April 26

- Berger and Losier, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement*, Chapter 5 and Conclusion

Week Fifteen: Abolition Futures

Monday, April 30

- James Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration*, Chapters 13 and 14
- Dan Berger, Mariame Kaba, and David Stein, "What Abolitionists Do," <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/08/prison-abolition-reform-mass-incarceration>

Thursday, May 3

- Wrapping up

**FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, MAY 11 at NOON.
NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED – NO EXCEPTIONS!**