

Prisons and Punishment in American Society



Esteban del Valle and Groundswell mural in Brownsville, Brooklyn

Professor

Marisol LeBrón / lebronm@dickinson.edu

Time and Location

Tuesday and Thursday: 9:00am – 10:15am
Denny Hall 203

Office Hours

Tuesday 1:00pm – 3:00pm

Office Location

Denny Hall 10A

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

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, revised edition (New York: The New Press, 2011).

Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*, revised edition (London: Verso Books, 2008).

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 reading material for this course will be available through Moodle [marked *]. You are expected to print out these readings and bring them to class.

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.

Please note that there are many difficult readings in this course that will require independent thinking, processing, and work. You will have to seek out extra help if you are having difficulty understanding the concepts in the course. Therefore, if you do not have the time or are not committed to making the time to take on this amount of effort, this is most likely not the course for you.

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 being 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, your fellow classmates, and me; however, I expect that everyone 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. Consult the following rules on how to email your professors: <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/professors-guide/2010/09/30/18-etiquette-tips-for-e-mailing-your-professor>

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. Because this class only meets twice per week, ***students will be allowed one absence without penalty.*** All other absences will lower your participation grade for the course. ***Students with 5 or more absences will automatically fail 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. One-third of a letter grade will be deducted for every day that a paper is late (i.e., B+ to B). Late papers may also not receive written comments. If you do not hand in a paper at all, you will receive a ZERO for the assignment. 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 exam, précis, etc.)
The date you handed in the paper (not the due date)

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_Misconduct)

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 to 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/>

ACCESSIBILITY & ACCOMODATIONS

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.

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.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Class Participation: 20%

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.

In-class Presentation: 15%

Students will sign-up to give a 10-15-minute presentation on the day's reading. The presentation should address: 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 (if a scholarly text), the evidence or examples the author/authors use to support their claims and things you would have like the author to address/address further. Students should discuss what connections, if any, the day's text(s) have with other readings from the course. Lastly, students are responsible for coming up with 3-5 relevant questions for discussion. **On days where there are multiple assigned readings, even if you are not presenting on all of the readings (i.e. February 10 and 12), please make sure to discuss how your text connects to the other assigned for that day.

Lunch Session with Dan Berger: 5%

Students will attend a lunch session with scholar and activist Dan Berger on **MARCH 4TH**. Student are expected to attend this session ready to discuss Professor Berger's article and on campus lecture. Attendance at this outside event is mandatory.

Midterm Exam: 25%

This exam will consist of a selection of short essay questions. Students will choose **one** question and write a 4-5 page paper responding to the question. Papers must seriously engage the readings and address the questions posed, demonstrating an understanding of key concepts and arguments from the course. This is a take home exam. **DUE MARCH 19TH at the start of class.**

Final Exam: 35%

The final exam is similar in format to the midterm. For the final, however, students will select **two** questions and write 8-10 pages responding to the two questions selected. This is a take home exam. **DUE MAY 7TH.**

Week One: Theorizing Punishment and Prisons**Tuesday, January 20**

- Introduction to the course

Thursday, January 22

- Michel Foucault, "Generalized Punishment," and "The Carceral," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, [1975] 1995). *

Week Two: Colonialism and the Criminalization of Indigeneity**Tuesday, January 27**

- Luana Ross, "Worlds Collide: New World, New Indians," in *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998). *

Thursday, January 29

- Watch on your own before class: *Incident at Oglala* (1992), <http://vimeo.com/103529481>
- Leonard Peltier, “My Crime’s Being an Indian,” in *Prison Writings: My Life is a Sun Dance* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999). *
- Peter Matthiessen, “The Tragedy of Leonard Peltier vs. the US,” *The New York Review of Books* (November 19, 2009), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/nov/19/the-tragedy-of-leonard-peltier-vs-the-us/>
- Dan Battaglia and Preston Randolph, “Torture in the US Prison System: The Endless Punishment of Leonard Peltier” *Truthout* (August 13, 2011), <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/2591:torture-in-the-us-prison-system-the-endless-punishment-of-leonard-peltier>

Week Three: The Particular Institution: Slavery and Incarceration**Tuesday, February 3**

- Michelle Alexander, “The Rebirth of Caste,” in *The New Jim Crow*, p. 20-58.

Thursday, February 5

- Angela Y. Davis, “Slavery, Civil Rights and Abolitionist Perspectives Towards Prison,” in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Books, 2003). *
- Robert Gooding-Williams, “Fugitive Slave Mentality,” *New York Times Opinionator Blog* (March 27, 2012), <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/fugitive-slave-mentality/>

Week Four: Rolling Back Civil Rights and Managing Crisis**Tuesday, February 10**

- Christian Parenti, “Nixon’s Splendid Little War” and “From Crisis to Rollback” in *Lockdown America*, p. 3-44.

Thursday, February 12

- Christian Parenti “A War for All Seasons: The Return of Law and Order,” in *Lockdown America*, p. 45-66.
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Globalization and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism,” *Race & Class* 40 (2-3): 171-188. *

Week Five: Power Movements, Political Prisoners, and Mass Incarceration**Tuesday, February 17**

- In-class screening: *The Black Power Mixtape, 1967-1975* (2011)

Thursday, February 19

- Dan Berger, “Social Movements and Mass Incarceration: What is to Be Done?” in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society* 15(1-2): 3-18. *

Week Six: The War on Drugs and Disenfranchisement

Tuesday, February 24

- Michelle Alexander, “The Lockdown,” in *The New Jim Crow*, p. 59-96.

Thursday, February 26

- Michelle Alexander, “The Color of Justice,” in *The New Jim Crow*, p. 97-139.

EVENT: Thursday, February 26 @ 7PM
RUTH WILSON GILMORE CLARKE FORUM LECTURE (ATS)

Week Seven: The New Jim Crow

Tuesday, March 3

- Michelle Alexander, “The Cruel Hand,” in *The New Jim Crow*, p. 140-177.

EVENT: Tuesday, March 3 @ 7PM
DAN BERGER CLARKE FORUM LECTURE (STERN GREAT ROOM)

EVENT: Wednesday, March 4 @ NOON
DAN BEGER LUNCH SESSION (DENNY)
**Attendance is mandatory. Lunch will be provided.*

Thursday, March 5

- Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow,” in *The New Jim Crow*, p. 178-220.

Week Eight: NO CLASS, Spring Break

ENJOY!

Week Nine: Zero Tolerance and Quality of Life Policing

Tuesday, March 17

- Christian Parenti, “Discipline in Playland, Part I – Zero Tolerance and the Science of Kicking Ass,” In *Lockdown America*, p. 69-89.

Thursday, March 19

- Christian Parenti, “Discipline in Playland, Part II – Policing the Themepark City,” In *Lockdown America*, p. 90-110.

MIDTERM DUE AT THE START OF CLASS

Week Ten: Racial Profiling and the School-to-Prison Pipeline**Tuesday, March 24**

- Victor M. Rios, “The Hyper-Criminalization of Black and Latino Male Youth in the Era of Mass Incarceration,” in *Souls* 8(2): 40-54. *
- Markus Gerke, “Want to Help Marginalized Students in Schools? Stop ‘Stop and Frisk’ and Other Punitive Practices, Too,” *Masculinities* 101 (November 4, 2013) <http://masculinities101.com/2013/11/04/want-to-help-marginalized-students-improve-in-schools-stop-stop-and-frisk-and-other-punitive-practices-too/>

Thursday, March 26

- Molly Knefel, “The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Nationwide Problem for Equal Rights,” *Rolling Stone* (November 7, 2013) <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-school-to-prison-pipeline-a-nationwide-problem-for-equal-rights-20131107>
- Caroline Cooper, “Black students and the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’” *Al Jazeera America Tonight Blog* (January 22, 2014) <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/america-tonight-blog/2014/1/22/black-students-andtheschooltoprisonpipeline.html>
- Julianne Hing, “Race, Disability and the School-to-Prison Pipeline” *Colorlines* (May 13, 2014) http://colorlines.com/archives/2014/05/race_disability_and_the_school_to_prison_pipeline.html

Week Eleven: Punishing Disability**Tuesday, March 31**

- Liat Ben-Moshe, “Disabling Incarceration: Connecting Disability to Divergent Confinements in the USA,” *Critical Sociology* 39(3): 385-403.

Thursday, April 2

- Tux Turkel, “When police pull the trigger in crisis, the mentally ill often are the ones being shot,” *Portland Press Herald* (December 8, 2012) <http://www.pressherald.com/2012/12/08/shoot-maine-misfiring-on-deadly-force/>
- Fernanda Santos and Erica Goode, “Police Confront Rising Number of Mentally Ill Suspects” *New York Times* (April 1, 2014) <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/us/police-shootings-of-mentally-ill-suspects-are-on-the-upswing.html>
- David M. Perry and Lawrence Carter-Long, “How Misunderstanding Disability Leads to Police Violence,” *The Atlantic* (May 6 2014) <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/05/misunderstanding-disability-leads-to-police-violence/361786/>
- Harold Braswell, “Why do police keep seeing a person’s disability as a provocation?” *The Washington Post* (August 25, 2014) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/08/25/people-with-mental-disabilities-get-the-worst-and-least-recognized-treatment-from-police/>

Week Twelve: Gendered Violence and the Criminalization of Vulnerability**Tuesday, April 7**

- Beth Richie, “Introduction” and “The Problem of Male Violence against Black Women” in *Arrested Justice*, p. 1-63

Thursday, April 9

- Beth Richie, “Black Women, Male Violence, and the Buildup of a Prison Nation” and “Conclusion” in *Arrested Justice*, p. 99-124, 157-166

Week Thirteen: Policing Gender in the Neoliberal Era**Tuesday, April 14**

- Dean Spade, “Preface” and “Introduction: Rights, Movements, and Critical Trans Politics,” in *Normal Life*, p 7-47.

Thursday, April 16

- Dean Spade, “Trans Law and Politics on a Neoliberal Landscape” in *Normal Life*, p. 49-78.

Week Fourteen: The Limitations of a Rights-based Legal Framework**Tuesday, April 21**

- Dean Spade, “What’s Wrong with Rights” in *Normal Life*, p. 79-99.

Thursday, April 23

- Dean Spade, “Trans Law and Politics on a Neoliberal Landscape” in *Normal Life*, p. 101-136.

Week Fifteen: Is a World Without Prisons Possible?**Tuesday, April 28**

- Dean Spade, “Law Reform and Movement Building” and “Conclusion” in *Normal Life*, p. 171-228.

Thursday, April 30 [final day of class]

- In-class screening: *Visions of Abolition: From Critical Resistance To A New Way of Life* (2011)

**FINAL EXAM DUE MAY 7th @ NOON
NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED – NO EXCEPTIONS!**