

## **Incarceration Nation**

How does a country with five percent of the world's population, a country that nominally values freedom above all else, come to encage nearly a quarter of the world's incarcerated people? In this survey course we investigate the history of imprisonment in the United States—as theorized and as practiced—from the founding of the republic to the present day. Special attention is paid to the politics, economics, race politics, and religious logics of contemporary mass incarceration, and to the efforts afoot to push back against mass incarceration, both nationally and locally.

This course is supported by supplementary funding from a University Research Award, a community-engagement grant from the Rochester Center for Community Leadership, the Humanities Project, and it belongs to the Rochester Decarceration Research Initiative's year-long project, "How is Rochester a Prison Town?" Founded in 2018, RDRI is committed to three things: to researching how incarceration and carceral logics shape life nationally and locally, to decarcerating our campus, and to turning the University of Rochester into a force for decarcerating our community.

### **Instructors**

Professor: Joshua Dubler  
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Teaching Assistant: Wade Keye  
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Hours: Wednesday 12:30-1:30 and by appointment

### **Books available for purchase and on reserve**

Susan Burton and Cari Lynn, *Becoming Ms. Burton* (New Press, 2017)  
James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own* (FSG, 2017)  
John Pfaff, *Locked In* (Basic Books, 2017)  
Maya Schenwar, *Locked In, Locked Out* (Berrett-Koehler, 2014)  
Alex Vitale, *The End of Policing* (Verso, 2017)  
Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (Semiotext(e), 2018)

### **Requirements**

The course requires persistent attendance, engaged class participation, weekly reading and blackboard posts, and two exams—a midterm exam and a final. Final grades will be determined according to the following formula: attendance, class participation and blackboard posts: 33%; Midterm: 33%; Final: 33%

#### Attendance

You are entitled to miss two class sessions without explanation and without penalty. Barring the documentation of unusual circumstances, a third absence would drop your grade a third of a letter. Missing a fourth would have the same result. Miss class five times and you will not pass the class. A sign-in sheet will be circulated each class session, and it is your obligation to ensure

that your name is on it. Class will begin on time, and you are expected to be in the room when the course starts.

Reading Assignments Due to a renewed interest on my part in asking students read whole books, reading assignments in this class are often sizable. Nonetheless, in general, I have done my best to limit reading assignments to 150 required pages per week. You are expected to do the required reading. Recommended reading is truly optional. Recommended reading that is *not* explicitly addressed in class discussion or on a hand-out will *not* appear on a test.

Class Participation In a group of this size, participating in class can be somewhat challenging. I intend to do what I can to solicit your involvement. The issues we will be discussing are complex and can be upsetting. People will at times misspeak; I will misspeak. Please try to be generous with one another.

Reading Response Posts You will find your reading response assignments on Blackboard under “Assignments.” Reading responses are to be posted once per week *either* by noon Tuesday *or* by noon Thursday. You are free to use whatever form you wish, but a viable default form is that of the Quote/Note/Question. A quote is a passage from the assigned reading. A quote may be as long as a paragraph or as short as a single word. The quote you select should strike you as significant. You may feel like you “get” it, or you may feel utterly flummoxed by it. (The latter tend to be especially productive.) A note is an observation or extended meditation about your selected quote. Notes may comment on argument, style, language, or bias, A note may contextualize, explicate, criticize, or it may merely try to make sense of a difficult passage. Your notes need not be “right,” but they ought to be thoughtful and probing. A question is a question that you’d ideally like to discuss in class. By question I specially mean a textual question. That is, it is not the sort of biographical or historical question that might be adjudicated through a Wikipedia search. It is rather a question about what something in the text *means* or what it does for the author’s argument. A thoughtful response post will probably run 250 words or thereabouts, and should take 30 minutes or so to complete. You will receive brief feedback on your posts, and efforts will be made to incorporate your posts into class discussion. Posts will receive grades of  $\checkmark$  or  $\checkmark+$ .

Exams You will have two exams: a midterm and a final. Each exam will have an in-class component and a take-home component. Take-home components will be due in class at the time of the in-class exam. The midterm exam will be due/take place on March 7th, and the final exam will be due/take place during finals week. In structure, the two exams will be roughly the same. Parts I and II—to be taken in class—will consist of multiple-choice passage identifications and short-answer term identifications. (A week in advance of each exam you will be given a list of candidate terms that have been drawn from the readings and from lectures.) Part III will consist of essays. For the midterm, you will be given three essay questions and be asked to answer two (500-750 words each). For the final exam, you will be asked to design a project—or, in dialogue with Turning Points, to solve a particular problem—to ameliorate one facet of mass incarceration in your community (1,000-1,500 words).

Class outside the Classroom On a number of occasions throughout the semester, events will take place outside of class time. We understand that demands on your time are fierce and that conflicts inevitably arise, but we expect you to make every effort to attend these events.

#### Additional Notes

\*To help foster an environment of collective engagement, I do not permit the use of phones, tablets, or laptops in the classroom.

\*As per university guidelines, the credit hour policy of the College tabulates a four-credit course as including 150 instructional minutes, 50 minutes of equivalent activities, and 480 minutes of supplementary student work per week.

\* All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with University of Rochester's code of Academic Honesty. In short, your work must be your own. For more information look online: <http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/>

\* If and when needed, we encourage you to use the tutors at the College Writing Program:

<http://writing.rochester.edu/index.html>

\* Should you require special accommodations, please coordinate this through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to ensure you have equal access to course content and requirements.

<http://www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/undergraduate/>

The itinerary that follows is subject to amendment. Changes to assignments will be prominently noted in class, and announced on blackboard. Supplementary activities for this course have been generally funded by a University Research Award, the Humanities Project, the Central New York Humanities Corridor, and the Rochester Center for Community Leadership.

January 17                      Introductions

**Unit 0                              Guns, Gun Violence, Gun Control**

January 22                      Dan M. Kahan and Donald Braman, "More Statistics, Less Persuasion: A Cultural Theory of Gun-Risk Perceptions, 1291-1325" \*  
Jennifer Carlson, "States, Subjects and Sovereign power: Lessons from Global Gun Cultures" 335-353 \*

Jan 22, 7:30 pm                      Patrick Blanchfield, "*Everybody gets shot down there: Gun Control, Gun Violence, Police Power*"  
Hawkins-Carlson

**Unit I                              The Carceral Modern: Reform, Labor, Knowledge**

January 24                      Frank Schmalleger, *Criminal Justice*, 250-286\*  
Timothy Crimmins, "Incarceration as Incapacitation: An Intellectual History"\*  
Recommended: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228\*

January 29                      Norman Johnson, *Forms of Constraint*, 42-66, 170-174\*  
Jennifer Janofsky in Tarter and Bell (eds.), *Buried Lives*, 106-123\*  
Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction*, 73-101, 197-201\*  
Recommended: Caleb Smith, *The Prison in the American Imagination*, 1-23\*

January 31                      Rebecca McClennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 53-86\*  
Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 17-57, 263-269\*

February 5                      Nicole Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 35-54\*  
Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 35-87\*  
Recommended: Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive"\*

February 7                      Ava DuVernay (dir.) *13<sup>th</sup>* [On Netflix]



- April 9                    Alex Vitale, *The End of Policing*, 1-75  
Recommended: Vitale, 76-128
- April 11                    End of Policing, 129-155, 176-228  
Recommended: Vitale, 156-175
- Unit IV                    How is Rochester a Prison Town?**
- April 16                    Guest(s) and assigned reading TBD\*
- April 18                    Guest(s) and assigned reading TBD\*
- April 23                    Guest(s) and assigned reading TBD\*
- April 25                    Guest(s) and assigned reading TBD\*
- April 26, 1-5 pm        “How is Rochester a Prison Town? A Symposium”  
Visual Studies Workshop
- April 30                    Assigned reading TBD\*

\* To be made available on blackboard