

## 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 engage 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 mass incarceration; and to efforts afoot to push back against mass incarceration, both nationally and locally, and to prefigure an abolitionist future.

### Instructors

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### Books available for purchase and on to be placed on reserve

Angela Davis, et al, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (Haymarket, 2022)  
Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (Haymarket, 2021)  
Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (Semiotext(e), 2018)

### Course Format

This course has two weekly lectures and small-group discussions on Fridays. So long as we are remote, Monday and Wednesday lectures will be recorded and posted on blackboard. Once we return to the classroom, lectures will *not* be recorded.

### Requirements

Attendance: So long as we are remote, you are *strongly encouraged* to virtually attend all lectures live if you are able to do so. Once we are back in person, an attendance policy will kick in, and an attendance sheet will be circulated. Thereafter Yyou are free to miss two class sessions without explanation. Barring explanation, subsequent unexcused absences may have a negative impact on your final grade.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments are substantive in depth and in heft, but we have done our best to limit assignments to 100 or so required pages per week. It is essential for you to try to do the

reading. All reading assignments on the syllabus are for Mondays and Wednesdays. Instructors reserve the right to post short additional reading assignments midweek in anticipation of Friday discussions.

Class Participation: Attendance and active listening during lecture are important features of class participation. While we are remote you are allowed to have your camera off, but if you have it in you to have your camera on—particularly on Fridays—we will love you for it. Most lectures should have at least a little time for Q&A, and while we are on zoom, please feel encouraged to post questions in the chat. The lion's share of class participation, however, will take place in your Friday small group. If forced to say which is more important, attendance at lecture or attendance at small group discussion, I would say without hesitation that small-group discussion is.

Reading Response Posts: Weekly reading response posts will be posted on Blackboard under "Discussion Board." Every week, you are expected to post one primary post and one response post to one of your small-group classmates. **Your primary post is due by the end of the day on Wednesday, and your response post is due before class on Friday. Your first post is due on Wednesday, January 19<sup>th</sup>.** An occasional late post is okay, but please, please try not to not make a habit of this.

Primary posts should be in the ballpark of 250 words and should probably take roughly 30 minutes to complete. Response posts can be as short as a few sentences. In early weeks, your small-group facilitators will model the sort of engagement that we are looking for. You are free to adopt whatever form you wish for your post, but here is a good default template: choose an *analytic* from one of the week's assigned readings. By "analytic" I mean a critical category that the author uses. Choose an analytic that seems important to the author's argument and/or to the historical and/or conceptual terrain that they are attempting to map. Quote a usage or two directly from the text. In your own words, explain what the category means, how it functions in the author's argument, and/or what it helps illuminate about some facet of incarceration in the United States. *Think* with the category. That is, identify other critical categories and/or other things that this analytic might help to illuminate. Think about the category's implications and/or limitations. Lastly and most importantly, pose a question provoked by your thinking about and with this category that you would like to tackle in small-group discussion.

Exams: The midterm will have two components, both open-book and untimed: a *critical term glossary* to be completed in collaboration with your small group (33%), and two essays (750-1000 words each) to be written by yourself (66%). All components will be due in small group on March 4<sup>th</sup>. Everyone will take the midterm exam. For the final exam, you will be asked either to present a blueprint for ending mass incarceration (or some goal comparable in scope) or to design an experiment to ameliorate some facet of carcerality in your community (2,000 words). However, those of you who opt to complete this class as a community-engaged class will *not* be required to complete the final exam.

Community engagement: This is a community-engaged course and is generously supported with a course operating grant from the good folks at the Center for Community Engagement. Pursuant to CCE's criteria, the course exposes students to issues of inequality or unmet needs in community, and course material is taught in collaboration with or adjacent to a set of community partners. You will encounter a good number of these community partner organizations at next week's "Building a world without Prisons" roundtable. To complete this course as a community-engaged course, you will be expected to soulfully participate in the work of one or more of these organizations. As an hour expectation, 20 or so hours over the course of the semester would seem a reasonable goal. Then, in lieu of the final, you will write up a short (750 word) critical account of the activities you have undertaken. That is, we will want to hear about what you have done and what you have taken away from what you have done.

Grades: Final grades will be determined according to the following formula: Class participation (30%); Weekly writing assignments (20%); Midterm (25%); Final or community-engagement (25%).

**On teaching and learning during a pandemic, amidst a culture-wide institutional legitimacy crisis, under the shadow of the climate crisis...**

What the hell are we doing here? I'd be lying if I said I knew for sure; like you, however, I'm doing my best to figure it out. I feel hope rather than despair when I pose the question like this: how can we use this special space we have been afforded to think together, to learn together, in ways that feel edifying, that *are* edifying; that might help us train ourselves to lead good lives, help us foster collectives, and might enable us to build power together so that we might effectively struggle together so that we might all survive?

We have tried to be deliberate about this, but the challenge is hard, and almost certainly we have, and will continue, to miss the mark somewhat. If there's something you need, please don't hesitate to ask and we will do our best to be understanding and accommodating. Simultaneously, for this to work, there must be structure, and expectations, and a willingness to try to push you to give more of yourself than you might sometimes feel capable of giving. With compassion, we will do our best to balance these competing imperatives. Come what may, we know that *you are doing the best you can under the circumstances*.

Additional Notes

\*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/>

**Itinerary**

The itinerary that follows is subject to amendment. Changes to assignments will be prominently noted in class and announced on blackboard. Guests and supplementary events are supported by grants from the Central New York Humanities Corridor and the Center for Community Engagement.

January 12                      Introductions

Unit I                              The Carceral Modern

January 14                      Frank Schmallegger, *Criminal Justice*, 250-254\*  
Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 9-21\*  
Recommended: Timothy Crimmins, "Incarceration as Incapacitation: An Intellectual History"\*

**January 17                      Toward a World without Prisons Roundtable**

**3:00-4:30 pm**

- January 19 Norman Johnson, *Forms of Constraint*, 67-87, 174-177\*  
Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," from *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228\*  
Recommended: Caleb Smith, *The Prison in the American Imagination*, 1-23\*
- January 21 Small group
- January 24 Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction*, 73-101\*  
Rebecca McClellan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 53-86\*
- January 26 Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 17-57\*
- January 28 Small group
- January 31 Nicole Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 93-132\*  
Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 35-87\*
- February 2 Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 1-15\*  
Recommended: Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders*, 1-25\*
- February 4 Small group
- Unit II Mass Incarceration and/or the Prison Industrial Complex
- February 7 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 20-57\*  
Recommended: James Forman, Jr., "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow"\*
- February 9 James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own*, 3-46\*
- February 11 Small group
- February 14 Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 1-26\*  
Mona Lynch, "Mass Incarceration, Legal Change, and Locale"\*  
Recommended: Marie Gottschalk, *Caught*, 1-22\*
- February 16 Christophe Ringer, *Necropolitics*, 1-16\*  
Recommended: Dubler and Lloyd, "The Political Theology of Mass Incarceration"\*
- February 18 Small group
- February 21 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 5-17, 88-127\*
- February 23 Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*, 41-75\*
- February 25 Small group
- February 28 Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism*, 11-150

March 2	Wang, <i>Carceral Capitalism</i> , 151-227 Recommended: Wang, 260-359
March 4	<b>Midterm due in small group</b>
<u>Unit III</u>	<u>Toward the abolitionist horizon</u>
March 14	Derecka Purnell, <i>Becoming Abolitionists</i> , 1-45* Mariame Kaba, <i>We do this 'til we free us</i> , 2-17, 26-28
March 16	Alex Vitale, <i>The End of Policing</i> , 1-54*
March 18	Small group
March 21	Maya Schenwar and Victoria Law, <i>Prison by any other name</i> , 1-49* Kaba, <i>We do this 'til we free us</i> , 70-87
March 23	Nancy Herzog and Kay Whitlock, <i>Carceral Con</i> , 24-50*
March 25	Small group
March 28	Nils Christie, "Conflicts as Property"* Danielle Sered, <i>Until We Reckon</i> , 1-15*
<b>March 28, 5:00 pm</b> Hawkins-Carlson	Justin Murphy, "Your Children are very greatly in Danger: School Segregation in Rochester"
March 30	Danielle Sered, <i>Until We Reckon</i> , 17-49* Kaba, <i>We do this 'til we free us</i> , 54-67
April 1	Small group
April 4	<b>Guest: Rosalyn Smith, V-Day</b> Nicole Fleetwood, <i>Marking Time</i> , "150-189"
April 6	Angela Davis et al, <i>Abolition. Feminism. Now.</i> , ix-76
April 8	Small group
April 11	<b>Guest: Serena Ligouri, New Hour Children</b> Davis et al, <i>Abolition. Feminism. Now</i> , 77-173
<b>April 11, 5:00 pm</b>	Laura Hill, "Strike the Hammer: The Black Freedom Struggle in Rochester"
April 13	Mariame Kaba, <i>We Do This 'Til We Free Us</i> , 132-156
April 15	Small group
April 18	<b>Guest: Samra Brouk</b>

Readings TBD

- April 20 Bettina Love, *We Need to do more than just Survive*, 88-123\*  
Miles Horton, *The Long Haul* [selections]\*
- April 22 Small group
- April 25 **Guest: Mohamadou Slahi**  
Slahi, *Guantanamo Diary* [selections]\*
- April 27 Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us*, 164-197
- May 6 **Final exam or community engagement reflection due by 5:00 pm**

\* Available on blackboard under Course Materials