

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.

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Course Format and requirements

This course has two weekly lectures and small-group discussions on Fridays. This course is offered with support of a grant from the Center for Community Engagement and is intended to foster community-engagement opportunities for students that are interested.

Attendance: Attendance is required. You are free to miss three class sessions without explanation or apology. Beyond that please make a point of checking in with an instructor or with your small-group facilitator to let us know what's going on. Should you miss class you should review lecture materials and the “minutes” posted on blackboard. There is no substitute for being in class, but should you wish to “make up” the work, you should consider supplementary asynchronous engagement on that week’s discussion board thread.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments are substantive, 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 on the fly.

Class Participation: Attendance and active listening during lecture are important features of class participation, and in each lecture we will do our best to make time for questions. 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, we would say without hesitation that small-group discussion is.

Reading Response Posts: You will post a weekly reading response post on the discussion board on Blackboard. **Your post is due by class time on Wednesday. Your first post is due on Wednesday the 18th.** Late posts will not be penalized but please try not to not make a habit of this. You are strongly encouraged but not obligated both to read and to respond to your classmates' posts. Posts should be in the ballpark of 250 words and should probably take roughly 30 minutes to complete. (Optional response posts can take whatever form you like.) In early weeks, instructors will look to 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" we 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 the analytic helps to 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 productively relate to. 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 your small-group discussion.

Exams: The midterm will have two components, each of which are open-book and untimed: a) a *critical term glossary* to be completed in collaboration with your small group (33%); and b) two essays (750+ words each) to be completed independently (66%). All components will be due to your small-group facilitator by class time on March 3rd. Everyone will take the midterm exam.

For the final exam, you will be asked either: a) to present a blueprint for ending mass incarceration (or some goal comparable in scope); or b) to design an experiment to ameliorate some facet of carcerality in your community (2,000ish words). The final exam will be due to your small-group facilitator on May 3rd. 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 "Another World is Possible" 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, 25 or so hours over the course of the semester seems like a reasonable goal. Then, in lieu of the final, you will write up a short (500ish word) critical account of the activities you have undertaken. That is, we will want to hear about what you have done and what your takeaways are for future endeavors. Like the final, this reflection will be due to your facilitator by May 3rd.

Lecture materials: Lectures will not be recorded. However, handouts and/or lecture slides will be posted. As well, in each class, a volunteer will take “minutes,” which will also be posted on blackboard.

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%).

The spirit of this class: It is rarely obvious what abolition looks like in practice. What might “abolitionist education” look like? Is it possible to foster a space for abolitionist learning within the material and ideological conditions of a corporate university? These are difficult questions, but ones that we take very seriously. In the months ahead we will do our best to provide the centripetal force necessary for rigorous, disciplined, collaborative inquiry to take place. Simultaneously, we will do our best to be compassionate and adaptive. We are avid about the practices of inquiry, we aspire to cultivate solidarity, and we believe that abolition as a movement and stance has much to offer to human flourishing and human survival. Throughout, we will do our very best to resist the pedagogical crutches of terror and punishment.

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 associated with this course must be performed in accordance with University of Rochester’s code of [Academic Honesty](#). If you have questions about this, please ask.

*The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of disability, please contact the **Office of Disability Resources** at disability@rochester.edu;

* Special accommodations may be coordinated this through the [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#) (CETL)

* If and when needed, we encourage you to seek support from tutors in the [Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program](#)

* You needn’t struggle alone. If you’re struggling, please reach out to the [CARE network](#).

Books available for purchase and on to be placed on reserve

Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (New Press, 2022)
Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (Semiotext(e), 2018)

Itinerary

The itinerary that follows is subject to amendment. Changes to assignments will be prominently noted in class and announced on blackboard.

January 11 Introductions

Unit I The Carceral Modern

January 13 Frank Schmalleger, *Criminal Justice*, 250-254*
Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* 9-21*
Recommended: Timothy Crimmins, "Incarceration as Incapacitation: An Intellectual History"*

January 18 Norman Johnson, *Forms of Constraint*, 67-87, 174-177*
Caleb Smith, *The Prison in the American Imagination*, 1-23*
Recommended: Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," from *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228*

January 19 ***Another World is Possible: Decarceral Organizers' Roundtable***
5:00-6:30 pm

January 20 Small group

January 23 Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction*, 73-101*
Rebecca McClennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 53-86*

January 25 Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 17-57*

January 27 Small group

January 30 Nicole Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals*, 93-132*
Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 35-87*

February 1 Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates*, 1-15*
Recommended: Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders*, 1-25*

February 3 Small group

Unit II Mass Incarceration and/or the Prison Industrial Complex

February 6 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 20-57*
Recommended: James Forman, Jr., "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow"*

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| February 8 | James Forman, Jr., <i>Locking Up Our Own</i> , 3-46* |
| February 10 | Small group |
| February 13 | Elizabeth Hinton, <i>From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime</i> , 1-26* Mona Lynch, “Mass Incarceration, Legal Change, and Locale”* Recommended: Marie Gottschalk, <i>Caught</i> , 1-22* |
| February 15 | Christophe Ringer, <i>Necropolitics</i> , 1-16* Recommended: Dubler and Lloyd, “The Political Theology of Mass Incarceration”* |
| February 17 | Small group |
| February 20 | Ruth Wilson Gilmore, <i>Golden Gulag</i> , 5-17, 88-127* |
| February 22 | Loic Wacquant, <i>Punishing the Poor</i> , 41-75* Julie Livingston and Andrew Ross, <i>Cars and Jails</i> , 5-21* |
| February 24 | Small group |
| February 27 | Jackie Wang, <i>Carceral Capitalism</i> , 11-150 |
| March 1 | Wang, <i>Carceral Capitalism</i> , 151-227 Recommended: Wang, 228-322 |
| March 3 | Midterm due in small group |
| March 6, 8, 10 | Spring Break |
| <u>Unit III</u> | <u>The carceral present</u> |
| March 13 | Brennan et al, “Women’s Pathways to Serious and Habitual Crime”* Harner and Riley, “The Impact of Incarceration on Women’s Mental Health: Responses from Women in a Maximum-Security Prison”* |
| March 15 | Doughty, Bedell, and N’Gambwa, “ <i>I really wanna put eyes on these guys: Caregiving in prisons, pandemic, and protest</i> ”* |
| March 17 | Small group |
| March 20 | Salem et al, “Transitioning into the Community: Perceptions of Barriers and Facilitators Experienced by Formerly Incarcerated, Homeless Women During Reentry—A Qualitative Study”* Scroggins and Malley, “Reentry and the (Unmet) Needs of Women”* |

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| March 22 | Heidemann, Cederbaum and Martinez, "Beyond Recidivism: How Formerly Incarcerated Women Define Success"* Recommended: Bedell et al, " <i>Our commonality is our past: a qualitative analysis of re-entry community health workers' meaningful experiences</i> "* |
| March 24 | Small group |
| March 27 | Nancy Herzog and Kay Whitlock, <i>Carceral Con</i> , 24-50, 102-124* |
| March 29 | Schenwar and Law, <i>Prison by any other name</i> , 1-49* |
| March 31 | Small group |
| <u>Unit IV</u> | <u>Toward the abolitionist horizon</u> |
| April 3 | Mariame Kaba and Beth Ritchie, <i>No More Police</i> , xi-70 Recommended: Derecka Purnell, <i>Becoming Abolitionists</i> , 1-45* |
| April 5 | Kaba and Ritchie, <i>No More Police</i> , 71-139 |
| April 7 | Small group |
| April 10 | Kaba and Ritchie, 140-201 Recommended: Mariame Kaba, <i>We do this 'til we free us</i> , 2-28* |
| April 12 | Kaba and Ritchie, 202-289 |
| April 14 | Small group |
| April 17 | Nils Christie, "Conflicts as Property"* Danielle Sered, <i>Until We Reckon</i> , 1-15* |
| April 19 | Danielle Sered, <i>Until We Reckon</i> , 17-49* |
| April 21 | Small group |
| April 24 | Shira Hassan, <i>Saving our own Lives</i> , 114-157, 261-286* |
| April 26 | Ashon Crawley, "Meditation on Abolition"* |

* Available on blackboard under Course Materials