

Instructor: Louis Mercer  
Office: University Hall 1219  
Email: Lmerce3@uic.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesday, 11-1 PM and by appointment

# **AAST/CLJ/SOC 271: African Americans and the Politics of Incarceration**

Fall 2017

MWF, 1:00-1:50 PM

Lecture Center A, Room A002

This course will focus on historical and contemporary experiences of African Americans in the carceral state. Over 2 million Americans are currently incarcerated in federal or state prisons, and over 4.5 million are on probation or parole. This is not only the highest number of prisoners of any other country on earth, but also the highest rate of incarceration in the world. People of color are disproportionately impacted by this system: Even though African Americans make up just over 13% of the US population, nearly 38% of federal prisoners are black, and even though 17% of the US population is Latinx, they make up 33% of federal prisoners.

How, in a country that defines itself by the ideals of liberty and justice for all, can a carceral system so disproportionately impact citizens of color? And why does a nation that claims to be the beacon of freedom in the world incarcerate a higher percentage of its citizens than any other country? In this class, we will learn how the carceral state rose in the United States, what impact that system has socially and politically, and how different groups experience and responded to mass incarceration, particularly those in Chicago.

## **Class Readings**

The following two books will be read in their entirety in this class, so you must either purchase them or plan on using the library reserve copy:

- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*
- Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Also recommended, but not required, for this class (particularly those unfamiliar with contemporary issues facing African Americans and the recent upswing in activism in the Movement for Black Lives):

- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*

Beyond these books, most weeks will include assigned readings that will be made available on Blackboard. I expect everyone to have read the week's assigned readings by Friday.

## **Reading Responses**

Each week, there are assigned readings you will need to read by Friday in order to participate in discussions. But you will also be required to write reading responses that reflect your thoughts and ideas about the topics. You are required to write two (2) reading responses before the midterm essay and two (2) reading responses after the midterm.

Format: 350-500 words. Submitted on Blackboard. In your own voice. Little to no direct quotations from the readings (just paraphrase!). Cite readings with author and page number, like this (Mercer, 82).

Response: Briefly, what were the articles' authors arguing? More substantially, what did you find interesting or illuminating? Do you have any criticism of or questions for the authors? Finally, how might these articles/chapters help us better understand the politics of incarceration?

### **Leading Discussion**

You will sign up for one week in which you and 2 or 3 other students will collaborate to write discussion questions based on that week's readings and lead a class discussion for 20-30 minutes. A guide on how to develop quality discussion questions will be distributed in class. You will be graded on collaboration with your team, the quality of discussion questions, and your ability to sustain the discussion in a fruitful manner.

Please note: You may NOT write a reading response for the week you lead discussion.

### **Midterm Essay: Due Monday, Oct. 9**

Historical Perspectives on African Americans and Incarceration. 750 words. Instructions will be handed out a few weeks prior to the essay's due date.

### **Final Project: Due Monday, Dec. 11**

Create a project focusing on a topic related to prisons, incarceration, or the criminal justice system in which you develop an original argument based on research and create a persuasive call to action. Must include citations from 3 outside sources (not assigned in class) approved by the instructor. 1250-1500 Words. Choices include:

- Write a "white paper" for a legislator advocating for some kind of reform or new law or policy
- Write a speech to educate and motivate a group or organization
- Write a long form op-ed advocating for a reform or policy shift
- Develop a plan for a public art or museum display

### **Attendance Policy**

You may miss up to 4 classes, no questions asked. However, you may harm your discussion participation grade (particularly on Fridays) and your ability to comprehend topics for the midterm and final project when you are absent. Each day missed after 4 classes will result in a 5% drop in your final grade.

### **Grading**

Participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion Participation</li><li>• Leading Discussion</li><li>• Response Papers</li></ul>	35%
Midterm Essay	25%
Final Project	40%

### **Class Policies**

- Bring your readings to class, either in hard copy form or on an electronic device capable of easily accessing the readings (I don't recommend using your phone, as it is hard to search for passages on a small screen, but if it is your only option, do what you have to do.)
- Speak your truth, but speak respectfully – Threats of violence, hate speech, or any other speech that threatens a person's identity will not be tolerated. The instructor will ensure to the best of his ability that all feel safe to be themselves.
- Be mindful of distractions to yourself and others – electronic devices should only be used for notes and accessing course readings during class, and any conversations should be focused on the topics of the class

### **Late Work Policy**

- Reading Responses – No late responses allowed...just do it the next week! But remember, you must get 2 responses done on or before October 6, and 2 after October 6.
- Midterm Essays – you may turn in your midterm essay after October 9 for no grade penalty, but with the following stipulations:
  - Essays will lose a full letter grade each day starting Oct. 16
  - If it is turned in after October 9, you lose the privilege of revising your essay if you feel your grade is unsatisfactory
- Final Projects – No late projects allowed
- Leading Discussion – If you cannot participate in leading your week's discussion because of illness or other unavoidable conflict, you will be assigned to another week. Otherwise, nonparticipation in leading discussion is not allowed.

### **Academic Integrity Notification**

Academic dishonesty as defined by the university includes, but is not limited to:

- Fabrication: Knowing or unauthorized falsification, reproduction, lack of attribution, or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
- Facilitating Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism: Intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise.
- Non-Original Works: Submission or attempt to submit any written work authored, in whole or part, by someone other than the student

Violation of any of these will result in a grade of zero for the assignment.

### **Disability Services Notification**

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## **Weekly Topics, Readings, and Assignments**

### **Week 1, Aug. 28-Sept. 1: Defining Mass Incarceration**

- Davis, Chapter 1, pages 9-21
- Blackboard: Ear Hustle Podcast

### **Week 2, Sept. 4-8: Prisons and Slavery in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century America**

NO CLASS SEPT. 4, LABOR DAY

- Davis, Chapters 2-3, pages 22-59
- Blackboard: Excerpts from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*

### **Week 3, Sept. 11-15: Jim Crow and the Criminalization of Blackness**

- Alexander, Introduction and Chapter 1, Pages 1-57
- Blackboard: Khalil Gibran Muhammad, "Where Did All the White Criminals Go?: Reconfiguring Race and Crime on the Road to Mass Incarceration" from *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*

### **Week 4, Sept. 18-22: Civil Rights and the Origins of Mass Incarceration**

- Blackboard: Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History" from *Journal of American History*
- Blackboard: Danielle McGuire, Prologue and "They'd Kill Me If I Told" from *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*

### **Week 5 Sept. 25-29: Prisoner Rights Movement**

- Blackboard: Excerpts from *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* and *Assata: An Autobiography*
- Blackboard: Ta-Nehisi Coates and Heather Ann Thompson, BookTV discussion of *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* & The Attica Liberation Faction Manifesto of Demands

### **Week 6, Oct. 2-6: The War on Crime and/or Drugs**

- Alexander, Chapter 2, pages 58-94
- Blackboard: Elizabeth Hinton "Introduction: Origins of Mass Incarceration" and "From the War on Crime to the War on Drugs," *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*

**Week 7, Oct. 9-13: The Prison Industrial Complex and Prison Labor**

DUE MONDAY, OCT. 9: MIDTERM ESSAY

- Davis Chapter 5, Pages 84-104
- Blackboard: Whitney Bennis, *The Atlantic*, "American Slavery, Reinvented"

**Week 8, Oct. 16-20: Policing**

DUE MONDAY, OCT. 16: TOPICS CHOSEN FOR FINAL PROJECT

- Blackboard: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "The Double Standard of Justice", *From #blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*
- Blackboard: US Dept. of Justice Civil Rights Division Investigation of the Chicago Police Department and various articles about CPD police misconduct in the cases of Homan Square, Jon Burge, and the fatal shootings of Rekia Boyd and Laquan McDonald

DUE FRIDAY, OCT. 20: MIDTERM ESSAY REVISIONS (OPTIONAL)

**Week 9, Oct. 23-27: Gender, Women, and Families of the Incarcerated**

- Davis, Chapter 4, Pages 60-83
- Blackboard: Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration"
- Blackboard: Beth Richie, "The Social Impact of Mass Incarceration on Women," in *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*

**Week 10, Oct. 30-Nov. 3: LGBTQ Prisoners**

- Blackboard: Sophie Drukman-Feldstein, "Meet the LGBTQ Prison Abolitionists Leading the Way to a Better World"
- Blackboard: Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, "Caging Deviance: Prisons as Queer Spaces" from *Queer (in)Justice*

**Week 11, Nov. 6-10: Immigration**

DUE MONDAY, NOV. 6: THREE SOURCES CHOSEN FOR FINAL PROJECT

- Blackboard: Patrisia Macías-Rojas, "Victims and Culprits: Deportation as a Pipeline to Prison," *From Deportation to Prison: The Politics of Immigration Enforcement in Post-Civil Rights America*
- Blackboard: Sarah Stillman, *The New Yorker*, "The Mothers Being Deported by Trump"

**Week 12, Nov. 13-17: School-to-Prison Pipeline**

- Blackboard: Nancy Heitzeg, "Criminalizing Education: Zero Tolerance Policies, Police in the Hallways, and the School to Prison Pipeline," *From Education to Incarceration: Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline*
- Blackboard: Monique Morris, "A Blues for Black Girls When the 'Attitude' is Enuf," from *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in School*

**Week 13, Nov. 20-24: Disability and Detention**

DUE MONDAY, NOV. 20: DRAFT OF A PARAGRAPH FROM FINAL PROJECT

- Blackboard: Michael Rembis, "The New Asylums: Madness and Mass Incarceration in the Neoliberal Era" from *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada*
- Blackboard: David M. Perry and Lawrence Carter-Long, "How Misunderstanding Disability Leads to Police Violence" from *The Atlantic*

NO CLASS FRIDAY, NOV. 24, THANKSGIVING

**Week 14, Nov. 27-Dec1: The New Jim Crow**

- Alexander, Chapters 3-5, pages 95-208

**Week 15, Dec. 4-8: Reform or Abolition?**

- Alexander, Chapter 6, 209-248
- Davis, Chapter 6, 105-115
- Blackboard: Dan Berger, Mariame Kaba, and David Stein, "What Abolitionists Do" in *Jacobin Magazine*

DUE MONDAY, DEC. 11: FINAL PROJECT



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