

# Incarceration and Inequality in the United States

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Sociology 190.1

Tuesdays, 2–4pm, 54 Barrows Hall

Office hours: <http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty-office-hours>

Course website: <https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1467743>

Starting in the early 1970s, the incarceration rate in the United States increased dramatically. Today, the United States incarcerates its residents at a rate five times the rate at which it incarcerated them for the first three quarters of the twentieth century. No other nation incarcerates such a large proportion of its population.

Racial disparity in incarceration has been large since the end of the Civil War. The black to white ratio in imprisonment today is around six to one. One in four black men and one in eight Latino men will go to prison before their mid-thirties. Two in three black men who did not finish high school will be imprisoned in their lifetimes.

This course asks three questions: First, how did we get here? How did the United States become the world's leader in incarceration? How did racial and class inequality in incarceration become so stark? Second, what are the consequences of the high rate and dense social concentration of incarceration in the United States? Finally, what can we do about it?

## Requirements

Assignment	Value	Date
Seminar participation	25%	Every week
Reading responses	30%	Mondays by 4pm
Final paper topic	5%	February 27th
Final paper outline	5%	March 20th
Final paper	35%	May 8th

1. Attending all seminars is mandatory. Participation will count for 25% of your grade. This grade will be based on attendance and the extent to which you contribute to seminar discussions and ask questions.

2. Every week you will post a reading response on the week's readings to the Discussions part of the bcourses website by 4pm on Monday. Reading responses should not exceed 500 words. In your response, you should (a) summarize in your own words the main arguments of the readings for the week and (b) evaluate these arguments (Did you find

the arguments persuasive? Did you find the evidence sufficient?) and/or compare and contrast the readings with readings we did in other weeks. I will not grade individual responses, but you can expect me to call on you in seminar occasionally to speak about what you wrote. Late responses will not count. Completing the reading responses will count for 30% of your grade.

3. The remaining 45% of your grade will be based on a final research paper. These papers will be review essays. You will take on a single question, for example: What caused mass incarceration? How does incarceration affect families? What policies are effective at reducing incarceration? What would an alternative justice system look like? You will then write an essay on this question based on the existing literature. This essay should not only summarize the state of the literature, but also evaluate it and suggest directions for future research.

You will complete the final paper in stages. The first assignment, worth 5% of your grade, is to post to the bcourses website a paragraph describing your proposed paper topic and research question. This will be due on **February 27th**. The second assignment, worth another 5% of your grade will be to submit a 3–5 page outline of your paper. In this outline, you should lay out the problem or issue you are going to study, explain why it is important, and list the explanations for it that you plan to explore. You should also include a list of readings you intend to use to write your paper. This list should include relevant readings from the syllabus, but it should also include additional sources. Your sources can include government and policy reports, as well as newspaper coverage, but most of your sources should be scholarly articles and books. This outline will be due on **March 20th**. The final paper is due on **May 8th**. It will be worth 35% of your grade. You should revise the paper based on my comments on the previous two stages. The final paper should be 13–20 pages long.

## Ground rules

This class is a seminar, so it will be discussion-based. Some of you have taken lecture courses with me. In this class, I will do a lot less talking. In seminar, we will focus on the readings assigned for the class. If you feel that it is necessary to reference a text that is not assigned in the course, you should explain the argument for the benefit of your classmates rather than just referencing the author's name. Remember that we are here to help each other learn. We'll do our best to have a genuine conversation in which each person responds to the person who spoke last. Let's create an inclusive environment in which we treat each other as equals.

Please come to class with an open mind. This means being interested in what your classmates think and why. It means asking yourself why you think what you think. Sometimes our beliefs are based on intuition rather than a systematic review of the evidence. Over the course of the semester, our beliefs may shift or they may not. But if we focus on why we think what we think, and giving reasons for what we think, we'll have better discussions.

I will insist that you not use any devices—laptops, phones, ipads, etc.—during seminar.

Your cell phones should be turned off, not just set to vibrate. I promise that I am not doing this to be mean or punitive. Even if you are trying hard to pay attention, devices will distract you and your classmates. If I attend a lecture on campus that I really want to focus on, I won't bring a laptop because I know it will be hard to resist the temptation to use it to do something other than take notes. Recent research has shown that students learn less when they take notes on a laptop than when they take notes by hand. If you have special reasons for needing to take notes on a laptop, please discuss this with me in office hours. If, because of a true emergency, you need to keep your phone on during a particular class, let me know at the start of class.

## **Required readings**

All readings are in the course reader available at Copy Central on Bancroft.

## **Email**

Before emailing me with a question about the course, please first make sure that your question is not already answered here in the syllabus. Almost everything you need to know about the course can be found here. If you have longer questions about the course material, sign up for office hours at the link on the first page of this syllabus. For questions not covered in the syllabus or that cannot be discussed in office hours, you may email me at [cmuller@berkeley.edu](mailto:cmuller@berkeley.edu).

## **Academic honesty**

You must in no way misrepresent your work or be party to another student's failure to maintain academic integrity. If you have questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, you should consult Berkeley's code of academic integrity: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/student-code-of-conduct>. It is much better to hand in a bad paper, or not to hand in a paper at all, than to hand in a paper that is plagiarized or that does not otherwise reflect your own work. Written assignments must include a bibliography and follow proper citation practices. The standard penalty for violations of academic integrity in this course will be a grade of 0% on the assignment and reporting to Student Judicial Affairs.

## **Accommodation**

If you have an accommodation letter from the Disabled Students Program (DSP), please contact me or sign up for office hours in the next two weeks so that we can make early arrangements for these accommodations.

## January 16

Course introduction

## January 23

Garland, David. 2001. "Introduction: The Meaning of Mass Imprisonment." Pp. 1–3 in *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences*, edited by David Garland. London: Sage.

Western, Bruce and Becky Pettit. 2010. "Incarceration & Social Inequality." *Daedalus* 139:8–19.

Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press. Pp. 1–19.

## January 30

Forman, James. 2012. "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow." *New York University Law Review* 87:101–146.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2017. "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration." Pp. 223–284 in *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World.

## February 6

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1901. "The Spawn of Slavery: The Convict-Lease System in the South." *Missionary Review of the World* 14:737–745.

Davis, Angela Y. 1998. "From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System." Pp. 74–95 in Joy James, ed. *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

## February 13

Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. 2010. *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. 1–14.

Hinton, Elizabeth. 2016. *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. 1–26.

## February 20

Travis, Jeremy, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn, eds. 2014. *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Pp. 70–129.

## February 27

Tonry, Michael and Matthew Melewski. 2008. “The Malign Effects of Drug and Crime Control Policies on Black Americans.” *Crime and Justice* 37:1–44.

## March 6

Western, Bruce. 2015. “Lifetimes of Violence in a Sample of Released Prisoners.” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 1:14–30.

Forman Jr., James. 2017. *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Pp. 217–239.

## March 13

Rios, Victor. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: New York University Press. Pp. 43–73.

Meares, Tracey L. and Dan M. Kahan. 1999. *Urgent Times: Policing and Rights in Inner-City Communities*. Boston: Beacon. Pp. 3–30.

Hinton, Elizabeth, Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, and Vesla M Weaver. 2016. “Did Blacks Really Endorse the 1994 Crime Bill?” *New York Times*. April 13.

## March 20

Richie, Beth. 2002. “The Social Impact of Mass Incarceration on Women.” Pp. 136–149 in Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, eds. *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*. New York: New Press.

Wakefield, Sara and Christopher Wildeman. 2014. *Children of the Prison Boom: Mass Incarceration and the Future of American Inequality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 1–25.

## April 3

Wacquant, Loïc. 2005. “Race as Civic Felony.” *International Social Science Journal* 57: 127–142.

Harris, Alexes, Heather Evans, and Katherine Beckett. 2010. "Drawing Blood from Stones: Legal Debt and Social Inequality in the Contemporary U.S." *American Journal of Sociology* 115:1755–1799.

## **April 10**

Gawande, Atul. 2009. "Hellhole." *New Yorker*. March 30.

Wildeman, Christopher and Emily Wang. 2017. "Mass Incarceration, Public Health, and Widening Inequality in the USA." *Lancet* 389:1464–74.

## **April 17**

Gottschalk, Marie. 2015. *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 258–282.

Western, Bruce. 2018. "Criminal Justice as Social Justice."

## **April 24**

Course overview