Incarceration and Inequality in the United States
Christopher Muller

Sociology 190.1
Mondays, 12–2pm
Office hours: http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty-office-hours
Course website: https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1501638

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 inequality in incarceration has been large since the end of the Civil War. The Black to White ratio in imprisonment today is around five to one. One in four Black men and one in eight Hispanic 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Every week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading responses</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Fridays by midnight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper topic</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>March 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper outline</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>March 29th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>May 10th</td>
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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 ask questions and contribute to seminar discussions.

2. Every week you will post a reading response on the week’s readings to the Discussions part of the bcourses website by midnight each Friday before class. Reading responses should not exceed 500 words. In your response, you should (a) summarize very briefly in
your own words the main arguments of the readings for the week, (b) evaluate these arguments (Did you find the arguments persuasive? Did you find the evidence compelling?) and/or compare and contrast the readings with readings we did in other weeks, and (c) pose three questions that you would like to discuss in class. 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? What are the sources of racial inequality in incarceration? How can we end hyperincarceration? What would an alternative form or system of justice 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 March 1st. 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 29th. The final paper is due on May 10th. 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. 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.
Required readings

All readings are posted to the Course website.

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 or assignments, 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.

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 so that we can make early arrangements for these accommodations.

Resources

Berkeley has recently created a website with helpful resources for undergraduate students: https://recalibrate.berkeley.edu/one-click-mode/one-click-resources-undergraduate-students

January 25: Introduction

February 1: Definitions

February 8: Origins I


February 22: Origins II


March 1: Origins III


March 8: Drugs


March 15: Violence I


**March 29: Violence II**


**April 5: Consequences**


**April 12: Democracy**


**April 19: Abolition**


April 26: Restoration

