

Incarceration and Inequality in the United States

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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

Assignment	Value	Date
Seminar participation	25%	Every week
Reading responses	30%	Fridays by midnight
Final paper topic	5%	March 1
Final paper outline	5%	March 29th
Final paper	35%	May 10th

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

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.

February 8: Origins I

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 22: Origins II

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.

March 1: Origins III

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.

March 8: Drugs

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

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

March 15: Violence I

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 29: Violence II

Gawande, Atul. 2009. “Hellhole.” *New Yorker*. March 30.

Walker, Michael. 2016. “Race Making in a Penal Institution.” *American Journal of Sociology* 121:1051–78.

April 5: Consequences

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

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 12: Democracy

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.

April 19: Abolition

Davis, Angela Y. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?*. New York: Seven Stories Press. Pp. 9–21.

Kushner, Rachel. 2019. “Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind” *New York Times*. April 17.

Petitjean, Clément. 2018. “Prisons and Class Warfare: An Interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore” *Verso Blog*. August 2.

April 26: Restoration

“The Transformative Power of Restorative Justice.” sujatha baliga interviewed by Ezra Klein: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-transformative-power-of-restorative-justice/id1081584611?i=1000478414868>

Sered, Danielle. 2019. *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*. New York: New Press.

Betts, Reginald Dwayne. 2020. “Kamala Harris, Mass Incarceration and Me.” *New York Times*. October 20.