

Imagine...

A system in which punishment is not allowed to be the source of corporate profit

A society in which race & class are not primary determinants of punishment

A society in which punishment is no longer the central concern in making justice



@LIZAR_TISTRY

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ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?

This course centers around the iconic text and ultimate question: *are prisons obsolete?* The class will focus on the history, growth and current functioning of the American system of incarceration with the critical goal of questioning the future of such carceral structures. The course begins with the book *Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Davis and foundational sociological examinations, but the texts for the course intersect with several fields, including Gender Studies, Geography, History and Disability Studies. Students will be exposed to arguments against retributive sanctioning and explore alternative justice systems, especially *transformative justice*.

ob·so·lete

Dictionary result for obsolete

/ˌɒbsəˈliːt/

adjective

adjective: **obsolete**

1. no longer useful; out of date.

"the disposal of old and obsolete machinery"

synonyms: **out of date, outdated, outmoded, old-fashioned; More**

antonyms: **contemporary, current, modern, new, up to date**

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students are expected to

- 1) Articulate the development of discipline, corrections and justice in the United States.
- 2) List the basic theoretical arguments for and against retributive sentencing.
- 3) Interrogate other criminal justice objectives, as well as alternative justice systems
- 4) Critically engage the idea of the criminal.
- 5) Evaluate mass incarceration, its timeline and effects on American society.

Reading List

Required Books:

Are Prisons Obsolete?

Angela Davis, 2003, AK Press, ISBN-13: 9781583225813

Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

2007, UC Press, ISBN: 9780520242012 (Available via the Hofstra Library)

Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition

Liat Ben-Moshe

2020, UMN Press, ISBN 978-1-5179-0443-2

(You will be required to pick one of these books to read):

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

2018, Arsenal Pulp Press, ISBN-13 : 978-1551527383

Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement

Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

2020, AK Press, ISBN-13 : 978-1849353625

We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice

adrienne marie brown

2020, AK Press, ISBN-13 : 978-1849354226

Required Articles

- Laura Appleman, Deviancy, Dependency and Disability: The Forgotten History of Eugenics and Mass Incarceration ([436-460](#))
- Deirdre Caputo-Levine, The yard face: The contributions of inmate interpersonal violence to the carceral habitus
- Generation 5, Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Child Sexual Abuse and other forms of Intimate and Community Violence (pgs. 5-31)
- Noah Gimbel and Craig Muhammad, Are Police Obsolete?
 - Sections: Working Together? Imagining Symbiosis Between Grassroots and Government and Abolition Democracy: Rooting Resistance in the Black Radical Tradition
- Mechthild Nagel, "The case for penal abolition and Ludic Ubuntu in arrow of god." (2015).
- Lena Palacios, [With Immediate Cause](#)
- Julia C. Oparah, Feminism and the (Trans)gender entrapment of gender nonconforming prisoners
- Stephen Young & Bryan Pitman, [Land of Extraction: How the Carceral Institution Settled in Central Appalachia](#)

Required Films/Viewing Materials

- [Gladiator School](#)
- Interview: [I Use My Love to Guide Me](#)
- Short Film: [Shadow Boxing: A Chicana's Journey from Vigilante Violence to Transformative Justice \(c/w: childhood sexual assault\)](#)
- [The Prison in Twelve Landscapes](#)
- [Rikers: An American Jail](#) (Must log in through Hofstra Library)
- Let the Doors be Made of Iron: [Eastern State Penitentiary](#) (Must log in through Hofstra Library)
- [#CloseRikers](#) Panel Discussion

Optional Enlightenment ;)

Anticarceral Feminism

- Book: Emily Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (2019) **E-Book ISBN:** 978-0-252-05117-3
- Elizabeth Whalley and Colleen Hackett, 2017, *Carceral feminisms: the abolitionist project and undoing dominant feminisms*
- Judith Levine and Erica Meiners, interviewed by Laura Tanenbaum, 2020, “Our System Is Not Doing the Thing It Says It Intends to Do: Deliver Justice.” (On the Failure of Carceral Solutions to Sexual Violence)

U.S. Abolitionist History

- Audio Documentary: [Prisons on Fire: George Jackson, Attica and Black Liberation](#)
- Frederick Douglass, [The Convict Lease System](#), Library of Congress, pgs. 1-13
- Gary Dorrien, 2015, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. DuBois and the Black Social Gospel*

Alternative Justice

- Gray and Lauderdale, *The Great Circle of Justice: North American Indigenous Justice and Contemporary Restoration Programs*, 2007
- CR10 Publications Collective, *Abolition Now: Ten Years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex* (pgs. 137-156).

Notices:

>You are responsible for checking Blackboard and your Hofstra email address at least every week day for any announcements.

>For this course, you are given the opportunity to learn largely at your own pace and hopefully in a space that feels safe and private (your home). This is a luxury that online courses afford students who have traumatic histories (with sexual/carceral/gun violence or war) and who may suffer various anxiety-related disorders as a result. I believe that **content warnings** are a very important way to minimize re-traumatization and provide an equitable learning experience to those of us who do battle post-traumatic stress. Therefore, for any live session, I will practice delivering content warnings and ask that each student who participates in the session does as well. Regarding posted materials, however, I will make the note here that given the topic of the course – prisons and incarceration – **violence will be a regular subject. Sexual assault and non-sexual physical violence will be spoken or written about each week.** Every student is encouraged to do what is needed to take care of your emotional state while reading and viewing. This may look like taking breaks, being alone or* asking a close friend whose presence is comforting to stay nearby. It also may look like drinking water, meditating, or interspersing your session with cat videos. Please know that I understand if something is hard to get through and do not hesitate to tell me if that is so. However, with that being said, difficulty of the subject material will not excuse any student from participating with the course. I have designed it so that you can still achieve 30 points even if you have to disengage with one reading or film, but you cannot opt out of the learning experience in any significant way.

Work Requirement:

- Complete daily reading, listening, and viewing
- Upload weekly responses to Blackboard Discussion site
- Synchronous video conference online once a week, lead two peer seminars
- Learn terms, dates, people, and other elements that arise in readings and lectures.
- Write one complete essay, responding to the question of the class, using course materials, original research and outside, data-driven sources

Assignments:

Material Digest (Attendance and Participation):

Students will submit to the discussion board before class, once a week, the answers to the following questions:

1. What was the thesis of the text? If a film or otherwise artistic material, what was the main topic?
2. What are the data used to provide evidence for the claims?
3. What did I find most memorable?
4. What did I find most confusing or challenging?
5. How does this connect to a previous material?
6. If we have a guest speaker: Prepare a short statement about what you appreciate about their writing, activism, or art. Submit two questions ahead of time.

Students will earn 1 full point for uploading the MD and attending class. You will earn half for uploading the material digest on time and missing class, or vice versa. Points for attendance and material digest will end when you reach 12.

Reflection Vlog, Podcast or In-Person Share

Twice over the course of the semester will you have to podcast or vlog a “share” that shows how a creative work or article assigned relates to a timely occurrence. For example, you’ve seen an incident in the news or on social media that would be well explained by an article or book read in class. These should last for roughly 15 minutes each and be engaging, concise and analytical.

Seminar Lead/Support

Two students will be responsible for leading the discussion on days marked “SL”. In order to prepare for these discussions, students will need to read, listen or watch all assigned materials and bring to class relevant questions or activities to foster group discussion and facilitate peer learning. The seminar leaders will be evaluated on their preparedness, ability to direct conversation in a helpful and generative way, ability to answer reasonable questions, and usefulness of any outside materials offered.

Research Paper

You and up to one teammate will take a topic of interest and meet five deadlines in order to build a coherent, evidence-based exposition or argument related to the structural violence of incarceration, or to transformative justice and abolition. The research question must be informed by course materials. The first deadline will be to submit a refined thesis statement. The second, an outline which includes the type of data you will collect and your annotated bibliography, which is a document that includes brief overviews of the key sources that support your paper. On your third deadline, you will be expected to submit a methods report, explaining how you’ve collected data for your analysis. On the fourth deadline, you will submit a draft of your paper, which will be peer reviewed before your final deadline, which is when you will turn in your final, revised, paper. For solo authors, this paper is 10-12 pages; for a team, 18-20 pages.

NOTE:

Late responses will be accepted, but will earn up to .5, rather than a full point.

There is also no rounding up final grades; one must reach the target in order to receive the grade.

Grading:

Grading in this class will neither be punitive, nor subjective. Your aim is not to please me or preempt how I would like you to respond; it is merely to engage comprehensively and as an informed, critical and honest student. Therefore, grading in this class is based off of complete, on-time participation of the following (explained below in further detail):

- **Weekly meetings; attendance and weekly material digests** are worth 1 point. (12 points)
- Book podcast/vlog = 3 points.
- 2 Seminar Leads = 4 points.
- One final paper, with several deadlines. Altogether worth 11 points.
 - The first two tasks (thesis statement, bibliography) are each worth one point. The methods report is worth 2 points. Progress (incomplete) draft is worth 1 point. Full draft is worth 3 points. Peer review = 1 point. Final, polished paper = 2 points.

In total, these assignments amount to 30 points. You are permitted to do extra work for extra credit, provided that you have attempted all of the standard assignments. Up to three “additional contributions” are allowed for 1 point/each: additional peer service, co-lead a discussion to

support the seminar leader, or a review an event on a related topic (transformative justice, anticarceral feminism, disability justice, abolition of prisons, jails, detention centers, etc.).

Final Grades

A = 28+

A- = 27

B+ = 26

B- = 24-25

C+ = 23

C = 22

C- = 21

D+ = 20

D = 19

F = <1

All additional course policies can be found via the link below. Please note that there are new and important policies relating to pregnancy, illness and classroom conduct. You are required to read this information at the beginning of the semester:

<https://www.hofstra.edu/provost/course-syllabi-information.html>