

S/20 – Incarcerating Blackness

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Books: James Foreman, *Locking Up Our Own* (FSG); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New Press); Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice* (NYU). All books are available at Amherst Books in downtown Amherst. Please purchase your copies there and help support local independent business.

Readings outside these books are available as PDFs via email or Moodle.

Aim of the course | This course explores the complex relationship between race, racism, and mass incarceration. Readings from the African-American intellectual tradition, contemporary critics of the prison industrial complex, and memoirs from political prisoners will help us understand the depth and structure of the historical and cultural meaning of racialized imprisonment. In particular, we will look at how incarceration has been both a metaphor for the Black experience in the United States and a constant presence in that experience as a form of social, cultural, and political control. We will also examine how gendered and economic factors intersect with race and racism in the expansion of the prison system in the United States. Lastly, we will examine key cultural objects that reflect on racialized incarceration, reading them in light of contemporary historical and critical race analysis in order to discern the effects and affects of imprisonment on African-American life.

Method of evaluation | You are required to attend class every day. Any absences past three will result in a 1/3 final grade penalty upon each absence. You are also expected to contribute to class discussion, whether that is critical intervention, asking about clarity, exploring ideas, and so on. This is a crucial part of your classroom experience and therefore comprises **15%** of your final grade.

Each student will contribute to a shared blog. I expect a minimum of eight original posts and eight comments on other posts. The shared blog is your opportunity to discuss the materials from the course outside the classroom, to share thoughts and alternative sources, and explore ideas in a student-to-student setting. (Details in a separate document.) This will comprise **20%** of your grade.

We will have three short writing exercises – called “exams,” “quizzes,” “focused writing,” or whatever makes you happiest – on Moodle. These exercises will require you to write briefly and concisely about key ideas in the course. Details when appropriate. Each exercise will be timed and total 1500-2000 words. Each exercise comprises 15% of your grade for a total of **45%**.

The final assignment will be a two-part group project: a presentation in class and curation of the presentation in a blog space. Details when appropriate. This comprises **20%** of your grade.

I am happy to accommodate any student learning needs. Please have the appropriate person get in touch with me about those needs as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary arrangements. I am committed to your success in this course, no matter what particular accommodations you need, and will cheerfully make adjustments or modifications to ensure your best effort. We are here to learn together. You have a right to that learning on your best terms.

Schedule of Readings

Please keep up with the course readings. I expect you to come to class having read the material with critical questions or clarification inquiries prepared ahead of time. Though this is a decent sized class, I expect you to read and discuss in our class sessions. Reading length is generally workable and modest. But always look ahead in the syllabus and plan accordingly. Developing critical reading skills is part of the aim of this course.

I have listed a few content warnings for the material below. None of it is explicit or gratuitous, but nevertheless is part of the material and I want to make sure you all feel fully informed. As with classroom accommodations, please let me know if you have any concerns and we'll figure out how to keep you looped into the course in all possible ways.

28 January | Intro to course

30 January | Patterson, selection on "social death"

04 February | Patterson, cont.; Mbembe, "Necropolitics"

06 February | Mbembe, "Necropolitics"

11 February | Du Bois, on double-consciousness

13 February | Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground"

18 February | Davis, Chs. 1 and 3

20 February | Davis, Chs. 5 and 6

25 February | Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 1-96

27 February | Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 97-177

03 March | no class

05 March | Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 178-260

10 March | Discussion of *13th*

12 March | critical discussion of Alexander & *13th*

17 March | spring

19 March | break

24 March | Gilmore, selection one

26 March | Gilmore, selection two

31 March | Richie, *Arrested Justice*, 1-98 (cw: discussion of sexual and gendered violence)

02 April | Richie, *Arrested Justice*, 99-166 (cw: discussion of sexual and gendered violence)

07 April | critical discussion of Richie & Gilmore

09 April | Forman, *Locking Up Our Own*, Intro and Ch 1-2

14 April | Forman, *Locking Up Our Own*, Ch 3-4

16 April | Forman, *Locking Up Our Own*, Ch 5-6

21 April | Forman, *Locking Up Our Own*, Epilogue

23 April | Presentation set one

28 April | Presentation set two

30 April | Presentation set three