Prisons, Race, and the Social Order
STPEC 291F - 01, Spring 2010
Wednesday, 4:30 - 6:00, Herter 204
Don Lippincott, email me: undeniably@gmail.com
Advised by John Bracey

This student-led colloquium will explore the racial, economic, and disciplinary roles of imprisonment and the prison from its historical origins in the 17th and 18th-centuries into the present, with the American judicial/penal system since the late 1960s as our primary focus. Readings will include theoretical works, sociological studies, as well as narratives written by prisoners themselves. We will utilize three major frameworks in developing a critique of the prison: the prison-industrial complex, racialized incarceration as a modern "peculiar institution", and the disciplinary/surveillance society. The aim of the course will be to foster a critical perspective of the prison system and explore means of resistance to its domination.

Books:
Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish
Angela Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete?
(I have copies of both in PDF form which I'll be sending out, but I'd still recommend buying Discipline and Punish since we will be spending four weeks on it - it's easy to get copies from any library or used as well)

Week 1: Introduction to prison studies, mass incarceration, current prison statistics and numbers.

Week 2: Detaching crime from punishment; prison "reform"
Reading: Rusche, G., & Kirchheimer, O., Punishment and Social Structure, introduction; Davis, A., Are Prisons Obsolete? pp. 9 - 59 (first half of book)

Week 3: What is the "prison industry"? What is racialized punishment?
Reading: Davis, A., Are Prisons Obsolete?, pp. 60 - 115 (second half of book)

Week 4: Critique of "prison industry" — the fourth "peculiar institution"; punishment as racial discourse
Reading: Wacquant, L., Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh

Week 5: The move from torture and corporal punishment to the prison
Reading: Foucault, M., Discipline and Punish, pp. 1 - 103

Week 6: Docile bodies and the use of discipline
Reading: Foucault, M., Discipline and Punish, pp. 104 - 169

Week 7: Panopticon and normative function of prison
Reading: Foucault, M., Discipline and Punish, pp. 170 - 228

Week 8: Development of a carceral society; illegality and delinquency; understanding the place of prisons in pre-globalization world capitalism
Reading: Foucault, M., Discipline and Punish, pp. 229 - 308

Week 9: Critical perspectives and elaborations of Foucault
Reading: Davis, A., Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition; Butler, J., Gender Trouble (sections)

Week 10: The rise of "neoliberal penalty" — what changed the course of resistance?
Reading: Wacquant, L., Ordering Insecurity: Social Polarization and the Punitive Upsurge; [likely another article]
Week 11: Resistance to (and from within) the prison in late 60s early 70s
Reading: Selections from autobiographies/letters of Assata Shakur, Angela Davis, George Jackson (possibly others)

Week 12: Resistance movements in the present
Reading: Articles/statements by members of Critical Resistance, possibly other groups

Week 13: Wrap-up and discussion

Papers:

Everyone will be expected to hand in either three three-page response papers or one three-page response and one five-plus page response paper (typed, double spaced, size 12 font, etc.). Given the pass/fail grading policy of the course and its focus on reading and discussion, response papers will serve as a means for you to demonstrate that you've been keeping up with the readings as well as to demonstrate engagement with key questions and ideas of the course. These do not have to follow any formal sort of format, and I'll be looking for substance, critical thought, and effort over style. If a paper fails to meet these (fairly minimal) criteria, I'll ask for a rewrite due by the next week.

The first three-page response paper will be due by Wednesday, 2/17 and will cover Are Prisons Obsolete? and the article by Wacquant. This one will be required by everyone, whether you are choosing to do either two or three response papers. I will be sending out some questions for people to consider working on in their response papers after class this week.

The second three-page response will be due on 3/24 and deal with Discipline and Punish. This will be for people who choose the three smaller response papers.

The last paper (either the last three-page one or the five-plus page one) will be due on 4/14, our second-to-last class. I'm going to leave it fairly open-ended for now, but the five-page paper will be required to at least deal partially with Foucault and the critiques of him we will read.