

WGSS 393: Critical Prison Studies
University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Spring 2015
DATE & TIME: Tuesday & Thursday 10-11:15
ROOM: Bartlett 203

Instructor: Adina Giannelli, JD
Office Hours: Wednesdays 10-12 &
by appointment

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-COURSE DESCRIPTION-

Drawing on key feminist literature, poetry, political theory, theater, sociological texts, film, personal narratives, and fiction, this course will offer an introduction to the prison and its critiques, feminist and otherwise, in the U.S. and beyond. In the context of this course, we will critically examine the history of the prison; what it means to be “in prison”; the role of “justice” in the juvenile system; and review some of the major issues faced by those who are subject this system.

Working together as a class, we will explore questions including: *What is the prison, why does it exist, and what is its role in the propagation of social inequality? What are its historical and contemporary critiques, and how are these critiques operationalized? How do carceral systems within and beyond the United States reflect processes of globalization, complex systems of oppression, and the project of neoliberalism? What is the relationship between the development of the prison historically, other institutions of oppression, and the prison industrial complex as we know it? What does feminist theory and praxis bring to the study of the prison and its dismantling? What are the politics of prison abolition, and how have activist projects and social movements worked toward this project?*

- GUIDELINES -

[I] **GENERAL EXPECTATIONS**

1. Students are expected to come to class on time, having carefully read the material assigned, and ready to engage in serious discussion. **Students are expected to silence and put away their cell phones and computers for the duration of class.** Participation is required, and critical to your success in this class. In addition, everyone is asked to do the following:

- (i) **Respect your classmates’ rights to speak**, and listen attentively to what is being said, even if you disagree with what you hear. **You don’t have to agree with everything that is said in class, but you are expected to use discretion and sensitivity when speaking, and be respectful of everyone present.**
- (ii) **Be willing to consider new ideas.** Over the course of the semester, we will explore themes, concepts, and material that may be new, challenging, and unfamiliar. **This is the art of a good education. Keep an open mind.**
- (iii) **Participate actively.** We all learn best when we are present and engaged in the course material. **Don’t be afraid to ask questions (of me, and of one another).** This is why we are here.

- (iv) If you have a question, an issue, a problem, or concern that cannot be addressed in class or in our online forum, please send me an email at your earliest convenience, so that we can resolve it promptly.

[II] COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade in this course will be based on the following components:

Component	Percent of Final Grade	Due Date(s)
Class Participation	20%	ONGOING
Online Discussion Forums	20%	Ongoing/assigned by class session, you complete 10 (of 25).
Midterm/ Angela Davis Reflection	10%	Week Ten
Final Project	30% (20% project; 10% presentation)	PRESENTATIONS: Weeks 12-13
		PROJECT: Last Day of Class
Book Review	20%	Due electronically by Midnight Thursday, May 7 (last day of final exams).

REQUIRED READINGS

While all relevant texts available for purchase or via interlibrary loan, all course readings will be available online. We will be reading essays, criticism, journalism, theory, excerpts from academic texts, as well as a collection of essays (Angela Davis' *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, two short novels (James Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*), and a play (Athol Fugard's *The Island*).

Note: Because the course reflects an urgent contemporary problem, as the semester goes on, I will also assign short news articles related to our course discussion. I also reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus, to account for workload and the inclusion of additional relevant media.

WEEKLY READINGS/Course Schedule	
<p><u>Week One:</u></p> <p>INTRODUCTIONS</p> <p>Tuesday 1/20 & Thursday 1/22</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schlosser, Eric. 'The Prison Industrial Complex,' available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/12/the-prison-industrial-complex/304669/?single_page=true Goldstein, Dana. 'Blame Liberals', available at: https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/01/15/blame-liberals Law, Victoria. 'Against Carceral Feminism,' available at: https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/10/against-

	carceral-feminism/
<p><u>Week Two:</u></p> <p>PRISONS AND US HISTORY Tuesday 1/27 & Thursday 1/29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davis, Angela. "From the Convict Lease System to the Super-Max Prison" (2000) • Diaz-Cotto, Juanita. "Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Studies of Incarceration" (2000) • Hallett, Michael. "For-Profit Imprisonment in American History" (2006) • Roberts, Dorothy. <i>Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty</i> (1995) (excerpts)
<p><u>Week Three:</u></p> <p>POLITICAL INCARCERATION & THE PROJECT OF PRISON THEATER Tuesday 2/3 & Thursday 2/5</p>	<p><u>2/3:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fugard, Athol. <i>The Island</i> (1973) • Mandela, Nelson. "Clear the Obstacles and Confront the Enemy" (1976) <p><u>2/5:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lopez, Jose. "Political Incarceration." (2000) • Willmott, Donna. "It's Time to Bring Our Political Prisoners Home." (2000) • "Free Angela and All Political Prisoners" (documentary, in class)
<p><u>Week Four:</u></p> <p>POLITICAL PRISONERS Tuesday 2/10 & Thursday 2/12</p>	<p><u>2/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alian, Ittaf. "Female Prisoners and the Struggle: A Personal Testimony" (2011) • Barham, Osama. "My Arrests, My Interrogation" (2011) • http://www.latinorebels.com/2013/12/07/in-post-mandela-post-about-political-prisoners-huffpost-includes-pussy-riot-but-not-oscar-lopez-rivera/ • "What does new U.S.-Cuba Pact Mean for Exiled Black Panther Wanted in New Jersey?" (2015). Available at: http://www.democracynow.org/2014/12/19/assata_shakur_what_does_new_us <p><u>2/12:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lopez, Jose. "Political Incarceration." (2000) • Willmott, Donna. "It's Time to Bring Our Political Prisoners Home." (2000) • "Leonard Peltier speaks out from prison" (2012). http://www.democracynow.org/2012/12/19/exclusi

	<p>ve leonard peltier speaks out from</p>
<p><u>Week Five:</u></p> <p>LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS Thursday 2/19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> James Baldwin, <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i> (1974)
<p><u>Week Six:</u></p> <p>LIVED NARRATIVES & POLICING</p>	<p>Tuesday 2/24: Lived Narratives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carter, Ruben. <i>Eye of the Hurricane</i> (2011) (excerpts) Johnson, Paula C. <i>Inner Lives: Voices of African American Women in Prison</i> (2003) (excerpts) Mandela, Nelson. "Reflections on Working for Peace." Shakur, Assata. <i>In Her Own Words</i> (excerpts) http://aclu-co.org/blog/claudias-story-domestic-violence-victims-call-help-resulted-three-days-jail-deportation-proceedings/ <p>Thursday 2/26: Policing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coates, Ta-Nehisis. "Blue Lives Matter" (2014). Available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/12/blue-lives-matter-nypd-shooting/383977/ Goldberg, David Theo. "Surplus Value: The Political Economy of Prisons and Policing" (2000)
<p><u>Week Seven:</u></p> <p>MASS INCARCERATION & ITS EFFECTS Tuesday 3/3 & Thursday 3/5</p>	<p><u>3/3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rodriguez, Dylan. "Domestic War Zones and the Extremities of Power" (2006) Pager, Devah. <i>Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration</i> (2007) (excerpts) <p><u>3/5</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bernstein, Nell. <i>All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated</i> (2005) (excerpts) Fleury-Steiner, Benjamin. <i>Dying Inside</i> (2008) (excerpts)
<p><u>Week Eight:</u></p> <p>TRANSNATIONAL PRISON LITERATURES Tuesday, 3/10 & Thursday, 3/12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saadawi, Nawal El. <i>Woman at Point Zero</i> (1975)

NOTE: During weeks 9 & 10 (March 23-April 3), all students must complete an individual meeting with the instructor to discuss final course projects. These will be scheduled in anticipation of the break.

SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS 3/17 or 3/19

HAVE FUN BE SAFE

Weeks Nine & Ten:

ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE? Theorizing the Prison

Tuesday 3/24,
Thursday 3/26,
Tuesday 3/31,
Thursday 4/2

3/24

- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish* (excerpts).
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks* (excerpts)

3/26

- Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (excerpts).

3/31

- ANGELA DAVIS TALK IN LIEU OF CLASS (Details TBA)

4/2:

- Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (excerpts, continued). **Angela Davis Response Due**

Week Eleven:

ACTIVISM & RESISTANCE

Tuesday 4/7 &
Thursday 4/9

Guest Speakers/Readings TBA

Week Twelve:

PRESENTATIONS

Tuesday 4/14 &
Thursday 4/16

Students present final projects to class.

Week Thirteen:

PRESENTATIONS

Tuesday 4/21 &
Thursday 4/23

Students present final projects to class.

<u>Week Fourteen:</u>	
WRAP-UP Tuesday, 4/28	Last day of class; final projects due; wrap-up discussion and evaluations.

FINAL PROJECTS

Your final project represents the culmination of a semester's worth of hard work and engagement with critical concepts, issues, and debates about prisons. The course is designed such that the last third of the semester is devoted to work on these projects. Additional information about these projects, which are student-designed in collaboration with the instructor, will be provided later in the semester.

Final Project DEADLINES:

Component	Due Date	% of Grade
Meeting w/Adina	Friday 4/3	ungraded but mandatory
Project Proposal	Tuesday 4/7	ungraded but mandatory
Project Presentations	4/14; 4/16; 4/21; 4/23	10% of final course grade
Final Project	Tuesday 4/28	20% of final course grade

BOOK REVIEW

In lieu of a final exam, you will read and write a critical review of one of the following texts:

- Bernstein, Nina. 2002. *The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care.*
- Conover, Ted. 2001. *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing.*
- Davis, Angela. 1974. *Autobiography.*
- Lancaster, Roger. 2011. *Sex, Panic, and the Punitive State.*
- Oshinsky, David. *Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (1997)
- Solzhenitzyn, Aleksandr. 1959. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.*
- X, Malcolm & Alex Haley. 1965. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.*

Additional information about this assignment will be provided later in the semester.