AAST 291.50: Special Topics - Human Rights and Mass Incarceration

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Human Rights and Mass Incarceration
AAST 291-50
(Online Course)

University of Montana
African American Studies Program
Spring 2020

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Office Hours: By appointment

Learning Contract

This syllabus represents a contract between the professor and student. Your enrollment in the course symbolizes your acceptance of the terms set forth. As your professor I reserve the right to amend the syllabus throughout the semester. I will notify students of any significant changes to readings and/or lectures. Assignments and due dates will not be changed without notifying the class.

Course Description

Welcome to the Human Rights and Mass Incarceration online course offered by the African American Studies Program at the University of Montana. In this course we will examine the historical development of prisons and policing in the United States and how these two mechanisms have been used as a form of social control, specifically against people of African descent. The course will explore themes such as convict leasing, the war on drugs, the prison-industrial complex, political prisoners in the United States and the school-to-prison pipeline among other vital issues. The course will also examine some of the human rights violations related to mass incarceration raised by organizers, scholars, lawyers and the currently and formerly incarcerated. By the end of the semester, students will become familiar with important concepts and terms and will have a fundamental understanding of the history of prisons and police in the United States.

Required Book List


All other required readings will be available on Moodle.

Student Expectations

Response Papers (5)- Beginning in week four students will be required to submit five 1-2 page response papers over the course of the semester. The response papers will summarize and analyze the readings, lectures and topics from the previous two weeks. Each response paper will be worth two points. All response papers will be due on Monday during weeks 4, 6, 8, 12 and 14.

Discussion Board Responses (5)- To help facilitate discussion among students, there will be five discussion boards posted throughout the semester. The prompt for the discussion board will either be a question or a brief video or article related to a current event. Students are expected to respond in a thoughtful manner, and responses should be between 3-5 sentences in length. Students are also required to respond to two other students for full credit. Each discussion board response will be worth two points. Discussion boards will be posted and active from Monday to Saturday during weeks 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11.

Quizzes (2)- There will be two quizzes given throughout the semester in class. The quizzes will be worth ten points each and no make-up quizzes will be given. Each quiz will consist of multiple choice, short answer, fill in the blank and true/false questions from the readings, lectures, films and discussions. All quizzes will be posted on Thursdays at 8 am and will be available until Saturday at 11:59 pm. Once you begin the quiz, you will have 20 minutes to complete it.

Exams (2)- The two exams will consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, short answer and short essay questions which will be pulled from the readings, lectures, films and discussions. Each exam will be worth twenty points. All exams will be posted on Thursdays at 8 am and will be available until Saturday at 11:59 pm. Once you begin the exam, you will have 60 minutes to complete it.

Final Project- Students will be required to write a 5-7 page persuasive paper OR create a 15 minute video on a specific policy, law or initiative related to ending mass incarceration. The purpose of the paper/video will be to inform the audience about the issue and to explain how it will ultimately help the United States shift towards decarceration. Please see the final project document for specific details. The final project will be worth twenty points.
Grades

Response Papers (5)- 10%
Discussion Board Responses (5)- 10%
Quizzes (2)- 20%
Exams (2)- 40%
Final Project- 20%

Total- 100%

Grade Scale

93-100=A
90-92 = A-
87-89 = B+
83-86= B
80-82= B-
77-79= C+
73-76= C
70-72= C-
67-69= D+
63-66= D
60-62= D-
59 or Less= F

Academic Misconduct and Student Conduct Code

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanctions by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The code is available online at Disability Services for Students

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or 406.243.2243.
Email

I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours from Monday-Friday. During the weekend I will respond within 48 hours. Please feel free to contact me by email with your questions or concerns.

Late Assignments and Makeup Exams/Quizzes

Late work will not be accepted in this class. A missed exam or quiz can only be taken at a later date with a written excuse from a doctor, coach, dean, etc. If given, the makeup exam/quiz will be significantly different from the original exam presented in class.

Extra Credit

Students can receive 5 points of extra credit over the course of the semester. I will post an extra credit opportunity during weeks 5, 10 and 15 which will require students to write a 1-2 page response paper about an article or short video.

Course Outline

Week 1- (Jan. 13-17)-Course Overview and Introduction to Mass Incarceration

Read for Week 1: Kilgore Introduction- (1-8) and Chapter 1- A Snapshot of the System (11-23), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights The United States Bill of Rights, The Black Radical Congress’s Freedom Agenda. *See Moodle

Lecture: Introduce Course and Review Syllabus
Discussion: What is mass incarceration? How did it develop? Why are you interested in this issue?

Lecture: An Overview of Mass Incarceration and Some Key Concepts
Discussion: How does the concept of human rights apply to people of African descent? How have settler colonialism, racism and capitalism impacted the development of prisons and policing in the United States?

Read for Week 2: Angela Davis Chapter 2- Slavery, Civil Rights, and Abolitionist Perspectives Towards Prison (22-39)
Week 2- (Jan. 20-24)-Settler Colonialism, Chattel Slavery and Mechanisms of Control

**Lecture:** Settler Colonialism, Slavery and the Development of Racism in the U.S.
**Discussion:** What does Ortiz say about the true purpose of the second amendment? What role does the second amendment play in the expansion of settler-colonialism?

**Lecture:** Slave Codes and Slave Patrols
**Discussion:** In what ways did slave codes attempt to dehumanize people of African descent? Why was this dehumanization process important to the settler colonial project and how did Africans resist?

**Documentary:** *Empire Files: Why America? Mass Shootings and White Nationalism Share Roots*

**Read for Week 3:** Davis Chapter 3- Imprisonment and Reform (40-59) and Gary Potter, “The History of Policing in the United States.” Potter available on Moodle.

Week 3- (Jan. 27-31)-The Development of Prisons and Policing in the North

**Discussion Board #1 Open**

**Lecture:** The First Police in the North
**Discussion:** What role did police play in the Northern United States and how did this differ from the slave patrols of the South?

**Lecture:** The Quaker and Auburn Systems of Penitentiaries
**Discussion:** Why was the penitentiary system viewed as a progressive reform? How were the Quaker and Auburn systems different?

**Final Project Topic Due**

**Read for Week 4:** Taylor- Introduction- Black Awakening in Obama’s America
Week 4- (Feb. 3-7)-Convict Leasing and the Jim Crow South

Response Paper #1 Due

Lecture: The 13th Amendment, Convict Leasing and the Jim Crow South
Discussion: How did white supremacy attempt to re-establish itself after the end of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era?

Film: Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II

Read for Week 5: Ward Churchill, “The Pinkerton Detective Agency: Prefiguring the FBI.” See Moodle

Quiz # 2

Week 5- (Feb. 10-14)-Labor Organizing and Prohibition

Discussion Board #2 Opens

Lecture: Labor Organizing and Repression
Discussion: In what ways was labor organizing criminalized in the late 19th and early 20th century? What role did the Pinkerton Agency play in repressing labor organizing?

Lecture: The Prohibition of Alcohol and the Racialization of Early Drug Prohibition
Discussion: Was the prohibition of alcohol successful? What role did race play in the early efforts to criminalize drugs in the United States?

Read for Week 6: Taylor Chapter 1- A Culture of Racism, Kilgore Chapter 2- Building Popular Support for Growing the Prison System (25-37)

Week 6- (Feb. 17-21)-America’s Second Reconstruction and the “Law and Order” Response

Response Paper #2 Due

Lecture: America’s Second Reconstruction
Discussion: What fundamental changes took place during the 1960s? What were some of the social movements that lead the way for these changes in society?
Lecture: The “Law and Order” Response

Discussion: Why was a “law and order” response necessary for the maintenance of the status quo? Was it necessary for the preservation of the U.S. as a nation or could there have been alternative responses to social movements?

Read for Week 7: Taylor Chapter 2- “From Civil Rights to Colorblind” and Branko Marcetic, “The FBI’s Secret War.” *See Moodle

Week 7- (Feb. 24-28)-COINTELPRO and Political Prisoners

Discussion Board #3 Opens

Lecture: The COINTELPRO and Political Prisoners in the U.S.

Discussion: What was the COINTELPRO and do political prisoners exist in the United States today?

Film: Cointelpro 101

Read for Week 8: Kilgore Chapter 3- “Lock ‘Em Up and Throw Away the Key”: The Rise of Mass Incarceration (39-55) and Chapter 4- The War on Drugs (59-71) and Taylor Chapter 3- “Black Faces in High Places.”

Week 8- (Mar. 2-6)-From the War on Poverty to the War on Drugs

Response Paper #3 Due

Lecture: The War on Poverty and the Social Climate of the 1960s

Discussion: Can poverty be eradicated in a capitalist society? How has poverty in the United States been racialized?

Lecture: From the War on Crime to the War on Drugs

Discussion: Why was there a shift to focusing on drugs instead of poverty? Were the reasons political? Why or why not?

Lecture: The War on Drugs Part II
**Discussion:** Has “War on Drugs” legislation been beneficial and effective over the past forty years? What are some of the racist stereotypes that helped fuel the war on drugs?

**Exam #1**

**Read for Week 9:** Davis Chapter 5- The Prison Industrial Complex (84-104) and Kilgore Chapter 11- Private Prisons (167- 181), Kilgore Chapter 7- Jail- The Local Face of Mass Incarceration (105-117), Kilgore Chapter 12- Incarceration Inc. (183-196)

**Week 9- (Mar. 9-13)-The Prison Industrial Complex and Mass Incarceration**

**Discussion Board #4 Opens**

**Lecture:** The Development of Mass Incarceration as a Mode of Social Control  
**Discussion:** What factors led to the development of mass incarceration? Why did it develop at this time?

**Lecture:** The Profit Motive and the Expansion of Prisons  
**Discussion:** Why is the prison-industrial complex? Should it be legal for people and corporations to make a profit off of prisons/prisoners? Why or why not?

**Read for Week 11:** Kilgore Chapter 8- The School-to-Prison Pipeline (119-133)  
Taylor Chapter 4 “The Double Standard of Justice” and Heather Ann Thompson “Criminalizing Kids: The Overlooked Reason for Failing Schools” *See Moodle

**Week 10- (Mar. 16-20)-Spring Break No Class!!!**

**Week 11- (Mar. 23-27)-The School-to-Prison Pipeline**

**Discussion Board #5 Opens**

**Lecture:** Zero Tolerance Policies and the School-to-Prison Pipeline  
**Discussion:** How does race and class affect the school-to-prison pipeline?

Week 12- (Mar. 30-Apr. 3)-Racial Profiling and Extrajudicial Killings

Response Paper #4 Due

Lecture: Racial Profiling and Extrajudicial Killings
Discussion: Does racial profiling violate people's human rights? What are extrajudicial killings?

Lecture: Stop-and-Frisk and Broken Windows Policies
Discussion: Should law enforcement officers target specific groups?

Read for Week 13: Davis Chapter 4- How Gender Structures the Prison System (60- 83), Kilgore Chapter 10- Women’s Prisons (153-164), Kilgore Chapter 9- The Folks Left Behind (137-151)

Quiz #2

Week 13- (Apr. 6-10)-Human Rights, Gender and Conditions in Prison

Lecture: Human Rights and Prisoners
Discussion: Do prisoners deserve the same human rights as everyone else? In what ways are their human rights violated? Are prisoners treated like enslaved Africans?

Lecture: How Gender Shapes U.S. Prisons
Discussion: What are some of the specific ways that women and trans people suffer under the current prison system?

Lecture: The Impact of the War on Drugs on the Black Community.
Discussion: What have been some of the long term implications of drugs and the war on drugs in the Black community?

Read for Week 14: Kilgore Chapter 5- The War on Immigrants (73-89), Kilgore Chapter 6- The Death of Rehabilitation (91-103)
Week 14- (Apr. 13-17)-Immigration Detention Centers and the PIC Part II

Lecture: From Private Prisons to Immigrant Detention Centers  
Discussion: Are both profit and white supremacy pushing the growth of the prison industry?

Lecture: Is the Concept of Rehabilitation Dead?  
Discussion: Should prisons focus on rehabilitation? Should rehabilitation take place outside of prisons?

Documentary: Inside America’s For-Profit Bail System


Week 15- (Apr. 20-24)-The Global War on Drugs

Response Paper #5 Due

Lecture: The Global War on Drugs from the 1950s-Today  
Discussion: Where has the global war on drugs had the largest impact?

Read for Week 16: Taylor Chapter 7- From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation  
Davis Chapter 1- Introduction- Prison Reform or Prison Abolition (9-21) and Chapter 6- Abolitionist Alternatives (105-115)  
Kilgore Chapter 13- Changing the Mindset (199-217) and Chapter 14- Organizing to End Mass Incarceration (219-234)

Week 16- (Apr. 27-May 1)-Alternatives to Mass Incarceration

Lecture: Prison Abolition and Alternatives to Prisons  
Discussion: Should we abolish prisons in the U.S.? How would we go about abolishing prisons? What would we do with a person who commits a crime?

Lecture: Organizations Working to End Mass Incarceration
Discussion: What are some of the most effective ways to end mass incarceration?

Exam #2

Week 17- (May 4-8) Finals Week
***The final paper/video will be due on the day of the final***