**PRISON HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**SOCIOLOGY 334 “W”**

DePauw University

Spring 2011

TR 8:20-9:50 a.m.

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This seminar will focus on sociological analyses of prison in the United States from their inception to present day. We will consider how conceptualizations of prison, theories of punishment, and institutional practices have changed over time and how, despite historical variation, prisons have remained a unique and powerful form of social control. Because prisons control the lives of particular populations more than others (i.e., young, inner-city African-American men) we will use the intersection between racism, discrimination against the poor and masculinity as a central analytic frame.

We will ask ourselves the following questions and turn to a diverse set of voices (e.g., prisoners, correctional administrators, prison activists, criminologists, prison guards) to find answers: How does prison exacerbate existing race and class inequalities? Why are certain accounts of the historical development of prisons in this country accepted more than others? Why are prisons considered big business and who benefits from them? Is it accurate to say that prison actually creates crime? What is driving prison overcrowding? In addition, we will explore prison life and variation in the cultures of private prisons, women’s prisons and death row. We end with an exploration of avenues for social change, looking specifically at the role of

(anti-) prison activists.

The course is part of DePauw's competency program in writing ("W" course). Even if you have already fulfilled this university requirement, I am assuming that part of the reason you have enrolled in this class is to improve your writing skills regardless of how advanced they may be. All of the assignments are writing-based or have a writing component and we will be writing in and outside of class on a weekly basis.

Reminder: This is a 300-level course. In addition to being writing intensive, it is reading and discussion intensive. Although I will be doing mini-lectures from time to time, the bulk of our time will be writing about and discussing assigned readings. Please keep the workload in mind as you read through the syllabus to determine whether you want to remain in the class.

**COURSE GOALS**

The goals for this course are as follows: 1) Learn how to analyze prisons (as a major social institution) from a sociological perspective and understand the value of doing so; 2) Understand how racism, classism and masculinity are central to the formation, history and persistence of prisons; 3) Learn what prison life is like from the perspectives of those who live and work there; 4) Recognize the complexity of social behavior, groups, organizations and institutions, and how that influences our assessment of prison; 5) Be able to conceptualize alternatives to prison and viable strategies for social change; 6) Acquire and/or fine-tune your critical reading, writing and discussion skills.  
  
To determine W certification, I will ask the following questions:   
1. Have you acquired and refined your technical skills as a writer?

2. Can you develop a clear argument and back it up with convincing evidence?

3. Are you able to demonstrate in writing the meaning of a theory or theoretical concept and apply it to data in the real world?

4. Have you demonstrated the ability to take critical comments about your writing and revise your work effectively?

5. Can you offer constructive criticism to others about their writing?

6. Can you read your own written work critically and identify ways to improve it on your own?

If I can answer "yes," on a satisfactory level (C- or better) for each of the above questions, you will become W certified. W certification and passing the course are not one in the same. It is possible to pass the course, but not receive W certification. Conversely, it is possible to become W certified without passing the course. Your letter grade will be based on completing the course requirements listed below.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

**A. Books.**

Abu-Jamal, Mumia. 1996. *Live from Death Row* NY: Avon.

Carceral, K.C. 2006. *Prison, Inc.: A Convict Exposes Life Inside a Private Prison*. NY: NYU Press.

Davis, Angela. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete*? NY: Seven Stories.

George, Erin. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Gordon, Robert Ellis and Inmates of the Washington Correctional Systems. 2000. *The Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison.* Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press.

Oshinsky, David. M. 1997. *Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim  
 Crow Justice.* NY: Free Press.

**B. Articles.** There are a number of articles that we will be reading that are available on Moodle.

Read Appendix A for suggestions on how to read for this course.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**A. Exams.** There will be a mid-term and final exam, each worth 100 points.

**B. Papers.** You will be writing 4 papers over the course of the semester.

Paper 1. (Due Tuesday, February 8, 2011). Write a 2 page (double-spaced) essay that answers the following questions: What is your current perspective on prisons in the United States? How did you arrive at this perspective? Although this paper will not be graded, I will use it to get a sense of your writing skills and your ideas on the subject matter of the course. Your paper should have a clear thesis and an interesting title that captures your thesis. Please proofread your essay before turning it in. (Required, but not graded.)

Paper 2. (Due Tuesday, February 22, 2011). The second paper is tied to a small group assignment described below. (40 points)

Paper 3. (Due Tuesday, April 19, 2011). Using any of the readings assigned from Week 3 forward, write a 5-6 page analytic paper. By analytic, I mean that the paper should not be a mere summary of the readings (although you might have to do some summarizing in order to develop your argument) and it should offer your original insight. You may write a critique, present an argument, compare and contrast the readings, or apply the reading to a previous reading. I will be looking for a specific, original thesis that is well developed and draws on the readings for evidence. (50 points)

Paper 4. (Due either Tuesday, May 11 or Thursday, May 13). The fourth paper is tied to a small group assignment described below. (20 points)

**C. Small group assignments**.  
  
1. Prison film analysis. (Due Tuesday, February 22). You will be assigned randomly to a small group of 4-5 people. As a group you will select a prison film off a list I will provide to the class, watch and discuss it. Individually, you will write a 5-page (double-spaced) analysis of the film using the conceptual material assigned on February 8-10. For example, how do the conceptual lenses of racism, classism and masculinity help us understand prisons as represented in the film? Does the film support or challenge the importance of these concepts? Or, how applicable is Goffman's conception of a total institution to the prison in this film? What does he overlook? (40 points paper; 10 points participation/peer evaluation)

2. Supermax Control Unit exercise. (Due Tuesday, May 10 or 12). You will be assigned to a small group of 4-5 people. You will be given a specific exercise to complete, which will require group planning and discussion, a 2-3 page paper written collaboratively and a 15 minute class presentation. Presentations will be held on May 10 and May 12 (20 points for paper; 20 points for presentation; 10 points for participation/peer evaluation).

**D. Class participation.** (Due every class session) Everyone is expected to come to class having completed, thought about and prepared to discuss and/or write about the assigned readings. Class participation will be assessed in terms of the quality and regularity of your contribution. I will ask for a self-assessment prior to deciding on a grade. If you do not feel comfortable speaking up in a seminar, I strongly advise you to drop this course. See Appendix B for more details. (25 points for 1st half of semester; 25 points for 2nd half of semester)

**F. Prison Tour.**  Depending on class interest, I will schedule a tour of one of the prisons in the area. Because the tour will take place outside of class, participation is voluntary.

**COURSE POLICIES**

**A. How grades are calculated.** Grades will be determined using the following point and percentage systems. In order to pass the course, students must complete all of the assignments.

Midterm exam 100 points

Final exam 100 points

Paper 1 Read but not graded

Paper 2 40 points

Paper 3 50 points

Paper 4 20 points (group paper)

Small Group assignment 1 10 points (participation)

Small Group assignment 2 30 points (10 participation; 20 presentation)

Class participation 50 points (25 each half)

Total 400 points

Final grade: 90% and above = A-, A  
 80%-89% = B-, B, B+  
 70%-79% = C-, C, C+  
 60%-69% = D  
 59% and below = F

**B. What the Grades Mean.**

A = Work that goes beyond the requirements of assignments by adding new insight, creativity and/or particularly thoughtful analysis. Demonstrates a comprehensive command of the course material, an exceptional ability to apply concepts to the real world, and a superior ability to organize and express ideas.

B = Work that adequately meets the requirements of the assignments. Demonstrates a solid command of the course material, an ability to apply concepts to the real world with only minor problems, and good organization and expression of ideas.

C = Work that partially meets the requirements of the assignments. Demonstrates acceptable command of the course material, a basic ability to apply concepts to the real world with some gaps and problems, and moderate skill in the organization and expression of ideas.

D = Work that marginally meets the requirements of the assignments. Demonstrates little command of the course material, minimal attempt to apply concepts to the real world, and limited ability to organize and express ideas.

F = Work that does not meet the requirements of the assignments. Demonstrates no command of the course material, unable to appropriately or consistently apply concepts to the real world, and insufficiently organizes and expresses ideas.

**C. Late Work/Make-up Work.** All papers are due in class on the dates indicated on the syllabus, unless I receive in advance an official notification that you will be off campus on university business (e.g., athletic event) or if you are gravely ill and contact me before class to make other arrangements. Unexcused late papers will be penalized 5 points for every 24 hour period in which they are late. Out of fairness to the entire class, no exceptions will be made (this includes missing class for job interviews, weddings, cheaper airfare, senioritis, etc.).

**D. Security Measures.** Please keep copies of all of the work you hand in. All assignments should be handed in to me directly. Do not put assignments in my mailbox or under my office door. If you are turning in something late, it is your responsibility to contact me and make arrangements to drop off the material.

**E. Extra Credit.** None. No exceptions.  
  
**F. Honor Code.** As with all courses at DePauw University, you are bound by the policy on academic integrity. See me immediately if you do not understand your obligations as a student. While I encourage you to work together in small groups and discuss the course material among yourselves outside of class, papers 1-3 should be written without collaboration and should reflect your independent ideas.

**G.** **Special Accommodations.** In compliance with the American Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibit discrimination based on disability, DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and university-administered activities and reasonable modifications to students with disabilities. Questions regarding the University’s policy for students with disabilities, documentation of the disability and requests for modifications should be directed to the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Services, 765-658-6267, Harrison Hall 302.

**H. Laptops.** Because this is a discussion based class, I would prefer that you not use your laptops in class. This means that you will need to make hardcopies of the readings posted on Moodle and/or bring in notes from the reading.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

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| **WEEK 1**  Feb 1, 3 | **INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAME**  **I. A Glimpse of Prison**  **T:**  Read Robert Gorden, et. al. 2000. *The Funhouse Mirror*. Pullman, WA:  WSU Press, pp. xi-43. [book]  **TR:** Read Robert Gorden, et. al. 2000. *The Funhouse Mirror*. Pullman, WA:  WSU Press, pp. 44-108. [book] |
| **WEEK 2**  Feb 8, 10 | **II. Conceptual Framework: Race, Social Class and Masculinity**  **T:** Read Erving Goffman. 1961. *Asylums*. NY: Doubleday, pp. 3-74.  [Moodle] **Paper 1 due in class.**  **TR:** Read Marc Mauer. 1999. *The Race to Incarcerate*. NY: New Press, pp.  118-170. [Moodle]; Don Sabo et al. (2001) *Prison Masculinities*.  Philadelphia: Temple, pp. 3-18; 61-77. [Moodle]  **Small group assignment 1.** |
| **WEEK 3**  Feb 15, 17 | **HISTORY OF U.S. PRISONS**  **III. Early History of Prisons and Convict Leasing**  **T:** Read David J. Rothman. 1995. “Perfecting the Prison: United States,  1789-1865,” pp. 100-116. [Moodle]; Edgardo Rotman. 1995. “The Failure  of Reform: United States, 1865-1965,” pp. 151-177. [Moodle]  **TR:** Read David M. Oshinsky. 1997. *Worse than Slavery*. NY: Free Press,  pp. 1-106. [book] |
| **WEEK 4**  Feb 22, 24 | **T:** Read David M. Oshinsky. 1997. *Worse than Slavery*. NY: Free Press, pp.  109-155. [book] **Paper 2 due in class.**    **TR:** Read David M. Oshinsky. 1997. *Worse than Slavery*. NY: Free Press,  pp. 157-255. [book] |
| **WEEK 5**  March 1, 3 | **IV. Contemporary U. S. Prisons (1960s-present)**  **T:** Read Sullivan, “Violence and Revolt: The 1970s” and “Reaction and Repression: 1980s,” pp. 95-154 [Moodle]  **TR:** Read Bosworth, “A Culture of Control” and “Challenging the Culture of Control?” pp. 148-198 [Moodle] |
| **WEEK 6**  March 8, 10 | **V. The Prison Industrial Complex**  **T:** Read Angela Davis. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* NY: Seven Stories  Press, pp. 9-21; 84-104. [book]; Tracy Huling. 2002. “Building a Prison  Economy in Rural America,” pp. 197-213. [Moodle]  **TR:**  **Midterm exam** |
| **WEEK 7**  March 15, 17 | **PRISON LIFE**  **VI. Private Prisons**  **T:** Read K.C. Carceral. 2006. *Prison, Inc.* NY: NYU Press, pp. ix-60. [book]  **TR:** Read K.C. Carceral. 2006. *Prison, Inc.* NY: NYU Press, pp. 61-132.  [book]  **March 18: Last day to drop course** |
| **WEEK 8**  March 22, 24 | **Spring break!** |
| **WEEK 9**  March 29, 31 | **T:** Read K.C. Carceral. 2006. *Prison, Inc.* NY: NYU Press, pp. 135-170.  [book]  **TR:** Read K.C. Carceral. 2006. *Prison, Inc.* NY: NYU Press, pp. 173-235.  [book] |

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| **WEEK 10**  April 5, 7 | **VII. Women’s Prisons**  **T:** Read Erin George. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 1-60.  [book]  **TR:** Read Erin George. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 61-  114. [book] |
| **WEEK 11**  April 12, 14 | **T:** Read Erin George. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 115-153.  [book]  **TR:** Read Erin George. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 154-  185. [book] |
| **WEEK 12**  April 19, 21 | **VIII. Death Row**  **T:** Read Mumia Abu-Jamal. 1996. *Live from Death Row*. NY: Avon, pp. 169-  188. [book] **Paper 3 due in class.**  **TR:** Read Mumia Abu-Jamal. 1996. *Live from Death Row*. NY: Avon, pp.  xv-70. [book] |
| **WEEK 13**  April 26, 28 | **T:** Read Mumia Abu-Jamal. 1996. *Live from Death Row*. NY: Avon, pp. 73-  111. [book]  **TR:** TBA  **Small group assignment 2** |

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| **WEEK 14**  May 3, 5 | **PRISON ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE**  **T:** Read Angela Davis. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* NY: Seven Stories, pp. 105-115. [book]; Liz Samuels and David Stein, “Perspectives on Critical Resistance,” pp.1-14. [Moodle]; William Wimsatt. 2001. *No More Prisons*. NY: Soft Skull Press, pp. 144-156. [Moodle]  **TR:** Read Jon Newman. 1998. “Not All Prisoner Lawsuits are Frivolous,” pp. 55-57. [Moodle]; Paul Wright and Dan Pens. 1998. “*Prison Legal News’* Top Ten Non-Frivolous Prisoner Lawsuits,” pp. 58-61. [Moodle]; Daniel Burton-Rose. 1998. “Solidarity in Stillwater,” pp.127-131. [Moodle]; Attica Liberation Faction. 1971. “Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform,” pp. 303-309. [Moodle] |
| **WEEK 15**  May 10, 12 | **T:** Group Presentations (Group 1-3) **Paper 4 due in class (Groups 1-3)**  **TR:** Group Presentations (Group 4-5) **Paper 4 due in class (Groups 4-5)**  Semester Wrap-up |
| **Final Exam** | Thursday, May 19, 1:00-4:00 p.m. |

**APPENDIX A**

Advice on Reading for this Course

Please bring your books or articles to class for discussion on the days they are assigned. Although not the eco-friendliest suggestion, I highly recommend that you print off the Moodle articles. This will allow you to mark up the articles, make notes and have them available during discussion.

You are responsible for all of the assigned readings, even those that we do not specifically discuss in class. Reading and understanding ideas on your own is part of the college experience. This does not mean you cannot ask for help when you need it. Please take advantage of my office hours (or make alternative arrangements if my hours do not work for you)!

When to Read. You should read each assignment and come to class prepared to discuss it on the day in which it appears on the course schedule. For example, the readings listed for Tuesday should be read before coming to class on Tuesday; the readings listed for Thursday should be done by class time on Thursday.

How to Read. Develop a system of reading and note-taking that will allow you to answer the following questions after each article:

1. What is the author’s main point or argument?

2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this argument? (e.g., Does the author present sufficient evidence to back up his/her argument? Can you think of counter-evidence that the author ignores? Is the logic consistent? Does the author have a particular bias?)

3. How does this article relate to this week’s topic and other readings?

4. What are the implications of this reading for your own life?

In the margins of the books/articles note places where you have questions, where the text is confusing, and where the author makes a statement that you think is especially worthy of our attention. If I don’t see marginal notations, I will assume you did not complete the reading for the day. [Note: if you want to resell your books and minimize marking them up use Post-It notes or some other system to engage with the reading.]

**APPENDIX B**

Class Participation

An important component of this class is discussion. There are different kinds of contributions you can make to discussion, all of which you are expected to work on over the course of the semester. None of these are possible without coming to class each session having read the assigned readings:

1. Attentively listening to your colleagues, in order to build on what has already been said;

2. Asking colleagues to clarify unclear contributions;

3. Summarizing key ideas that have emerged during the discussion;

4. Articulating an answer to a posed question;

5. Raising questions that help advance discussion;

6. Offering an original idea related to the topic of discussion;

7. Drawing on evidence (social scientific data, personal experience, popular culture) to either support or challenge ideas;

8. Constructively critiquing an idea offered in the readings or by a class member (including me);

9. Pointing out how various comments complement each other or are at odds;

10. Playing “devil’s advocate.”

I want to stress that we will be working on these skills. You are not expected to have these perfected by the first day of class or even by the end. All I am asking is that you make a good faith effort to practice them. My job is to provide a safe and non-threatening atmosphere that, hopefully, will facilitate discussion.

Ground Rules

1. Come to class on time, so discussion is not interrupted.

2. Come to class having read all the readings.

3. Address each other when speaking, rather than directing comments to me (unless, of course,

you are referring to something I said or want to direct a comment or question to me specifically).

4. Understand that contributing more does not necessarily mean better. The best contributors are usually those who are the best listeners. I ask that people contribute regularly and meaningfully. Dominating discussion and or not being sensitive to the direction of the discussion are just as problematic as not saying anything at all.

5. Take to heart, especially those who have difficulty speaking up in groups, that there is no such thing as a stupid question or comment.

6. Respect silences. Some people become anxious when there is a lull in the conversation and feel compelled to say something just to fill the silence. Periodic silences are appropriate. For example, they give more reserved people the opportunity to jump in. Or, they can give the group a chance to think about what has been said and how various comments relate to each other. On occasion I will actually call for reflective periods of silence.

7. Personal information that people share in class should not be discussed outside of class.

Grading

At mid-term you will have the opportunity to evaluate yourself in terms of the quality and quantity of your participation. I will then respond to that self-evaluation and give you advice on how you can improve. I will give you a grade so that you have an idea of where you stand. We will repeat this process at the end of the semester. Each assessment is worth 25 points. You should be aware that participation in small group work is equally important. However, it is assessed separately from overall class participation. The basic expectations and guidelines are the same.

“A” grades are reserved for students who are always in class; show evidence of having read and thought about the reading with some depth; listen well to other students; help focus our discussions with thoughtful comments and questions about the broader implications and comparative possibilities of the readings; take a leadership role in discussion; and generally offer creative, imaginative ways of engaging the texts and the themes of the course.

“B” grades are for students who are always in class and take a thoughtful part in our discussion; participate actively and well, engaging in texts and themes of the course with some depth; and occasionally take leadership for the direction of the discussion.

“C” grades are for students who come to class regularly but rarely speak, or if you are active in discussion but irregular in attendance, or if you participate in discussion in a way that shows little evidence of having done or thought much about the readings.

“D” grades are for students who come irregularly and rarely show signs of having done or thought much about the readings.

“F” grades are for students who miss lots of classes, rarely speak when present and show no evidence of having done the reading.