**PRISON HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**SOCIOLOGY 334**

DePauw University

Spring 2012

TR 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Professor Rebecca Bordt

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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 men’s prisons, women’s prisons and on death row. We end with an exploration of avenues for social change, looking specifically at the role of

(anti-)prison activists.

Note: This is a 300-level course with an extensive reading load (approximately 100 pages a week) and an emphasis on discussion. Only continue if you’re willing to do the work.

**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.  
  
 **REQUIRED READINGS**

**A. Books.**

Abu-Jamal, Mumia. 2001. *All Things Censored.* NY: Seven Stories.

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.

Hassine, Victor. 2011. *Life without Parole: Living and Dying in Prison Today*. NY: Oxford.

Perkinson, Robert. 2010. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire.* NY: Picador.

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

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

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

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

Paper 1. (Due Thursday, February 2, 2012). 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 Thursday, February 23, 2012). The second paper is tied to a small group assignment described below. (40 points)

Paper 3. (Due Tuesday, April 17, 2012). Using any of the readings assigned from February 16 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 8 or Thursday, May 10). The fourth paper is tied to a small group assignment described below. (20 points)

**C. Small group assignments**.  
  
1. Prison film analysis. (Due Thursday, February 23). On Tuesday, February 14, 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 4-page (double-spaced) analysis of the film using the conceptual material assigned on February 9 and/or 14. 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 May 11 or 13). On Thursday, April 26, during class you will be assigned to a small group of 3 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 11 and May 13 (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. (25 points for 1st half of semester; 25 points for 2nd half of semester)

**F. Prison Tour.**  At the beginning of the semester I will poll the class on your interest in going on a prison tour (or two). Because the tour will take place outside of class, participation is voluntary. I cannot excuse you from other classes or obligations.

**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)

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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 and make alternate 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 (hardcopies and on your computer) 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. I highly encourage you to reread the policy if you have not reread it this semester: <http://www.depauw.edu/handbooks/student/acadlife/app/aip/dishonesty/>

Academic dishonesty includes the following: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, plagiarism, multiple submissions, abuse of academic material, deception and misrepresentation, electronic dishonesty, and carelessness. Each of these violations is described in detail in the Student Handbook. See me if you have any questions about your obligation to uphold this policy. 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, 302 Harrison Hall.

**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**  Jan 31, Feb 2 | **INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAME**  **I. A Glimpse of Prison**  **T:**  Gorden, Robert et. al. 2000. *The Funhouse Mirror*. Pullman, WA:  WSU Press, pp. xi-43. [book]  **TR:** Gorden, Robert et. al. 2000. *The Funhouse Mirror*. Pullman, WA:  WSU Press, pp. 44-108. [book]  P**aper 1 due in class.** |
| **WEEK 2**  Feb 7, 9 | **II. Sociological Theories of Punishment**  **Macro Theories:**  **T:** Garland, David. 1990. *Punishment and Modern Society*. Chicago:  University of Chicago Press, pp. 3-22; 277-292 [Moodle]    **Micro Theories:**  **TR:** Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums*. NY: Doubleday, pp. 3-74.  [Moodle] |
| **WEEK 3**  Feb 14, 16 | **Conceptual Lenses: Race, Social Class and Masculinity:**  **T:** Tonry, Michael. 2011. *Punishing Race*. NY: Oxford, pp. 26-52. [Moodle]  Sabo, Don et al. 2001. *Prison Masculinities*. Philadelphia: Temple, pp. 3-  18; 61-77. [Moodle]  **Get small group assignment 1.**  **HISTORY OF U.S. PRISONS**  **III. History of Prisons (1830s-1930s)**  **TR:** Perkinson, Robert. 2010. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire.* NY: Picador, pp. 1-46. [book] |

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| **WEEK 4**  Feb 21, 23 | **T:** Perkinson, Robert. 2010. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire.* NY: Picador, pp. 47-82. [book]    **TR:** Perkinson, Robert. 2010. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire.* NY: Picador, pp. 83-131. [book]  **Paper 2 due in class.** |
| **WEEK 5**  Feb 28, March 1 | **T:** Perkinson, Robert. 2010. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire.* NY: Picador, pp. 132-214. [book]  **IV. Contemporary U. S. Prisons (1940s-present)**  **TR:** Perkinson, Robert. 2010. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire.* NY: Picador, pp. 215-285. [book] |
| **WEEK 6**  March 6, 8 | **T:** Perkinson, Robert. 2010. *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire.* NY: Picador, pp. 286-374. [book]  **TR:**  **Midterm exam** |
| **WEEK 7**  March 13, 15 | **V. The Prison Industrial Complex**  **T:** Davis, Angela. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* NY: Seven Stories  Press, pp. 9-21; 84-104. [book]; Huling, Tracy. 2002. “Building a Prison  Economy in Rural America,” pp. 197-213. [Moodle]  **PRISON LIFE**  **VI. Men’s Prisons**  **TR:**  Hassine, Victor. 2011. *Life Without Parole: Living and Dying in*  *Prison Today*, 5th edition. NY: Oxford, pp. xi-24. [book] |
| **WEEK 8**  March 20, 22 | **T:** Hassine, Victor. 2011. *Life Without Parole: Living and Dying in*  *Prison Today*, 5th edition. NY: Oxford, pp. 25-76. [book]  **TR:**  Hassine, Victor. 2011. *Life Without Parole: Living and Dying in*  *Prison Today*, 5th edition. NY: Oxford, pp. 97-131; 149-167. [book]    March 23—last day to drop class. |

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| **WEEK 9**  March 27, 29 | **Spring break!** |
| **WEEK 10**  April 3, 5 | **VII. Women’s Prisons**  **T:** George, Erin. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 1-60.  [book]  **TR:** George, Erin. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 61-  114. [book] |
| **WEEK 11**  April 10, 12 | **T:** George, Erin. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 115-153. [book]  **TR:**  George, Erin. 2010. *A Woman Doing Life*. NY: Oxford, pp. 154-  185. [book] |
| **WEEK 12**  April 17, 19 | **VIII. Death Row**  **T:** Abu-Jamal, Mumia. 2000. *All Things Censored*. NY: Seven Stories,  pp. 288-298; 15-30. [book] **Paper 3 due in class.**  **TR:** Abu-Jamal, Mumia. 2000. *All Things Censored*. NY: Seven Stories,  pp. 34-93. [book] |
| **WEEK 13**  April 24, 26 | **T:** Abu-Jamal, Mumia. 2000. *All Things Censored*. NY: Seven Stories,  pp. 96-127. [book]  **TR:** TBA  **Get small group assignment 2** |

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| **WEEK 14**  May 1, 3 | **PRISON ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE**  **T:** Davis, Angela. 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* NY: Seven Stories, pp. 105-115. [book]; Samuels, Liz and David Stein, “Perspectives on Critical Resistance,” pp.1-14. [Moodle]; Wimsatt, William. 2001. *No More Prisons*. NY: Soft Skull Press, pp. 144-156. [Moodle]  **TR:** Read Newman, John. 1998. “Not All Prisoner Lawsuits are Frivolous,” pp. 55-57. [Moodle]; Wright, Paul and Dan Pens. 1998. “*Prison Legal News’* Top Ten Non-Frivolous Prisoner Lawsuits,” pp. 58-61. [Moodle]; Burton-Rose, Daniel. 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 8,10 | **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 17, 1:00-4:00 p.m. |

Please email me ([rbordt@depauw.edu](mailto:rbordt@depauw.edu)) before class on Thursday, February 2, 2012 to verify that you have read this syllabus closely. Doing so will give you one “free” unexcused absence from class.