

ECO 170 | Crime, Class, and Capitalism: the Economics of Justice

Fall 2022, Thursday afternoons

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I. Course description

This course examines the connections between capitalism and the criminal justice system in the United States. It investigates the relationships among economic injustice, poverty, wealth, anti-social behavior, crime and the criminal justice system. The course studies how the criminal justice system shapes the lives of individuals from a variety of socioeconomic classes.

In this course, we study the political economy of modern mass incarceration in the U.S. In other words, we examine how certain fundamental ways of organizing life in the U.S. – such as the production and distribution of the things that humans need to survive and flourish -- may help us to explain the U.S.'s world-historic prison buildup, and we examine how the new scale and character of incarceration may act back upon the society's economic foundation.

The course unfolds in four parts:

1. After determining our guiding questions, we consider capitalism's fundamental dynamics, the role of race within capitalism, and the theoretical foundations of Marxian criminology.
2. Second, we analyze the origins of mass incarceration in the U.S. with the economic theory and history established in the first part.
3. Then, we study three special topics within the political economy of mass incarceration: (1) prison labor, historically and in the modern era; (2) conceptions of mass incarceration as a "labor market institution" (i.e. an institution that structures the dynamics of labor markets, like labor unions or welfare states); and (3) "carceral Keynesianism," or, the notion of mass incarceration as a public jobs program for deindustrialized rural America. Each topic should help us address the question, "what are the economic causes and effects of mass incarceration?" with more specificity.
4. In the final section, we return once more to our guiding questions and conclude.

II. Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students should have a foundational understanding of:

- Social scientific inquiry and the architecture of a strong argument
- The capitalist mode of production and its relevance to recent U.S. history
- Crime as a historically contingent legal category and its relationship to economic processes
- Race categorization as a historically contingent process and its relationship to economic processes
- The state of the discourse on the economic causes of mass incarceration
- Several prominent theories of the economic functions of prisons
- Efforts to realize alternatives

III. Assignments

1. Reading analyses (25% of your grade)

This class is centered around a rich catalog of readings and our discussions of them! So, it is important that you not only complete the readings, but that you actively synthesize the information, think analytically about them, and consider what questions you have about them or what you would like to suggest in discussion. Towards these ends, there will be several small assignments that are meant to guide your attention while reading and ensure your comprehension so that you show up to class prepared to discuss them critically. They should also help you keep track of concepts and statistics that will be relevant to the midterm and final. A submission that demonstrates an earnest engagement with the readings is very likely to earn full credit. Due to life and its contingencies and my awareness thereof, your lowest reading analysis grade will be dropped.

2. Midterm essay (25%) and final essay (30%)

There will be a medium-length midterm essay assignment and a lengthier final essay assignment that will test your critical comprehension of the material. The details of these assignments will be circulated in class.

3. Class participation (20%)

The remaining 20% of your grade will pertain to your engaged participation in class.

IV. Class protocols

1. Participate! One of the richest ways to learn is to become an active member of a learning community, to take risks, ask genuine questions, and explore the thoughts that you are having in the moment. And, I, and your peers, need this from you in order for the course to succeed. Sharing a question or thought may be right on the edge of your comfort zone for some of you...I urge you to go for it. See how it goes. This kind of reasonable risk-taking is the only way, and something to ultimately view with great pride. If sharing a question or thought is totally off the table in a specific moment, I get it -- and you'll have the chance to demonstrate your thoughtful engagement with the material in the written assignments and other occasional correspondence with me. But, even for those of you for whom speaking in class may feel entirely daunting, I still urge you to do your best to experiment with speaking up occasionally, as it is a powerful avenue into certain forms of learning and an extremely useful skill, and one that is only developed through trying. And if you're talking too much, don't worry, I'll tell you.
2. Please, also, be relentlessly kind. This means both refraining from comments that are simply disparaging and rid of academic content, as well as affording others the benefit of the doubt when they might say something that seems wrongheaded in the experimental space that is the classroom. Alas, much of this terrain evades preemptive rulemaking, and is up to us to navigate collectively as we progress through often-controversial material. Do not hesitate to let me know if you have concerns about how class discussion is unfolding.
3. If engaging in argument, challenge yourself to first articulate the viewpoint you are rebutting so accurately that your opponent would heartily thank you for your careful characterization, and only *then*, offer your critique.
4. **An emphasis regarding preparation**: In order to prepare for class such that you are ready to participate meaningfully, you should (1) complete all of the readings while taking notes on them, and then (2) take a moment to review those notes, synthesize the material into some core insights and questions, and consider what you would like to ask or suggest in discussion. It is this process that will lead you to feel like you are really learning, and to a high-level discussion that we can all enjoy. This is a 3-credit course, which means that you can expect 6-8 hours of work each week outside of our class sessions.

V. Readings

Book: *Lockdown America* by Christian Parenti (1999)

Part I: Economic foundations

Week 1 (9/1): Establishing our questions

- Read this syllabus

Week 2 (9/8): Capitalism

- J.W. Mason, "Notes on Capital and Capitalism", 1-8
- Samuel Bowles, Frank Roosevelt, Richard Edwards & Mehrene Larudee, *Understanding Capitalism: Competition, Command and Change*, 4th Ed.
 - Ch.5 "Capitalism as an Economic System," 89-111
 - Ch.13 "Technology, Control, and Conflict in the Workplace," 299-323

Week 3 (9/15): Capitalism - critiques and recent history

- Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, "Chapter 3. What's so Bad about Capitalism?", 22-57
- Samuel Bowles, Frank Roosevelt, Richard Edwards & Mehrene Larudee, *Understanding Capitalism: Competition, Command and Change*, 4th Ed.
 - Ch.7 "U.S. Capitalism: Accumulation and Change", 132-167
- Optional:
 - David Kotz, "A Great Fall: The origins and crisis of neoliberalism" (4pp.)
 - Karl Marx, excerpts from *Capital*, Ch.25 "The general law of capitalist accumulation", 784-788, 790-792, 793-798

Week 4 (9/22): Capitalism and race

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Chs.1-3, pp.3-54
- Geert Dhondt, "Incarceration and Social Structures of Accumulation", Sections B&E (8pp.)

Week 5 (9/29): Marxian criminology

- Karl Marx, "Marx on the History of his Opinions", 3-6
- Erik Olin Wright, *The Politics of Punishment*, Chs.1&2, pp.3-41
- James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime*, xxi-xxviii (neoclassical criminology)
- Georg Rusche, "Labor Market and Penal Sanction: Thoughts on the Sociology of Criminal Justice", 2-8
- Optional:
 - David Greenberg, *Crime and Capitalism*, "Introduction" (27pp.)
 - Marx and Engels on Crime and Punishment (opening by D. Greenberg, 1, 2, 3) (13pp.)

Part II: The political economy of mass incarceration

Week 6 (10/6): What is mass incarceration?

- Bruce Western, *Punishment and Inequality in America*
 - Ch.1 "Mass Imprisonment", pp.11-33
 - Ch.3 "The Politics and Economics of Punitive Criminal Justice" excerpt, pp.52-66
- Prison Policy Initiative: "The Whole Pie 2022" (15pp.)
- Prison Policy Initiative: "Incremental declines can't erase mass incarceration" (5pp.)
- Prison Policy Initiative: "States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2021" (5pp.)
- Optional:
 - Prison Policy Initiative, "New York profile" (5pp.)

Week 7 (10/13): What caused mass incarceration? (1/3)

- Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America* (74pp.)
 - Preface, xi-xiii
 - Chs.1-3, pp.3-66
 - Ch.8, pp.163-169
 - Ch.11 excerpt, pp.238-242
- Optional:
 - John Sutton, "The Transformation of Prison Regimes in Late Capitalist Societies", 715-746

Week 8 (10/20): What caused mass incarceration? (2/3)

- John Clegg & Adaner Usmani, "The Economic Origins of Mass Incarceration" in *Catalyst* (30pp.)
- John Pfaff, *Locked In*, Ch.1 "The War on Drugs", pp.21-50

Week 9 (10/27): What caused mass incarceration? (3/3)

- Norton & Stein, "Materializing Race" in *Spectre* (response to Clegg & Usmani) (15pp.)
- Clegg & Usmani, "Reifying Racism" in *Spectre* (response to the response) (15pp.)

Week 10 (11/3): Race and the question of continuity

- Loic Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration", 41-60
- James Forman, Jr., "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond The New Jim Crow", 21-69

Part III: Special topics

Week 11 (11/10): Prison labor - history

- Rosalind P. Petchesky, "At Hard Labor: Penal Confinement and Production in Nineteenth-Century America" (13pp.)
- Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor*, Ch.2, pp.17-36
- Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America*, pp.230-238

Week 12 (11/17): Prison labor - modern

- Asatar Bair, *Prison Labor in the United States, an Economic Analysis*, Chs.1&2, pp.9-47
- Slides: Geert Dhondt and Eric Seligman, "Prison Labor in U.S. State Prisons, 1974-2016"

No class on 11/24 – Thanksgiving

Week 13 (12/1): Mass incarceration as a labor market institution

- Adam Reich and Seth Prins, "The Disciplining Effect of Mass Incarceration on Labor Organization", excerpts: 1303-1314, 1336-1341
- Noah Zatz, "The Carceral Labor Continuum", 133-168
- Optional:
 - Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore, "Carceral Chicago", 251-281
 - Bruce Western and Katherine Beckett, "How unregulated is the U.S. labor market? The penal system as a labor market institution", 1030-60

Week 14 (12/8): Carceral Keynesianism

- NY: Tracy Huling, "Building a Prison Economy in Rural America", 1-8
- KY: Brett Story, *Prison Land*, ch.3 "Rural Extractions: Work and Wages in the Appalachian Coalfields," 79-104
- CA: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 148-166 & 174-180

Part IV: Conclusion

Week 15 (12/15): Conclusion

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, Ch.6 "What is to be done?", 241-248
- Erik Olin Wright, *The Politics of Punishment*, Ch.15, 313-346
- Judah Schept & Sylvia Ryerson, *Coal, Cages, Crisis*, Ch.7, 199-225

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Grading Scale

The grading scale will be the following (grades rounded to the nearest whole number):

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

Academic Integrity (from the 2020-2021 Undergraduate Bulletin)

The following information is excerpted from the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity.

Academic dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York. Penalties for academic dishonesty include academic sanctions, such as failing or otherwise reduced grades, and/or disciplinary sanctions, including suspension or expulsion.

Definitions and Examples of Academic Dishonesty

Cheating is the unauthorized use or attempted use of material, information, notes, study aids, devices or communication during an academic exercise. The following are some examples of cheating, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- Copying from another student during an examination or allowing another to copy your work
- Unauthorized collaboration on a take-home assignment or examination
- Using notes during a closed-book examination
- Taking an examination for another student, or asking or allowing another student to take an examination for you
- Changing a graded exam and returning it for more credit
- Submitting substantial portions of the same paper to more than one course without consulting with each instructor
- Preparing answers or writing notes in a blue book (exam booklet) before an examination
- Allowing others to research and write assigned papers or do assigned projects, including use of commercial term paper services
- Giving assistance to acts of academic misconduct/dishonesty
- Fabricating data (all or in part)
- Submitting someone else's work as your own
- Unauthorized use during an examination of any electronic devices such as cell phones, palm pilots, smart phones, tablet devices, computers or other technologies to retrieve or send information.

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writings as your own. The following are some examples of plagiarism, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- Copying another person's actual words without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source
- Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source
- Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the sources
- Failing to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments

- Internet plagiarism includes submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the Internet without citing the source, and “cutting and pasting” from various sources without proper attribution.

Obtaining unfair advantage is any activity that intentionally or unintentionally gives a student an unfair advantage in the student’s academic work over another student. The following are some examples of obtaining an unfair advantage, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- Stealing, reproducing, circulating or otherwise gaining advance access to examination materials
- Depriving other students of access to library materials by stealing, destroying, defacing, or concealing them
- Retaining, using or circulating examination materials, which clearly indicate that they should be returned at the end of the exam
- Intentionally obstructing or interfering with another student’s work

Falsification of records and official documents. The following are some examples of falsification, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- Forging signatures of authorization
- Falsifying information on an official academic record
- Falsifying information on an official document such as a grade report, letter of permission, drop/add form, I.D. card or other college document

Extra Work During the Semester (copied from the 2020-2021 Undergraduate Bulletin)

Instructors are not obligated to offer extra-credit work in any course. Any extra-credit coursework opportunities offered during the semester for a student to improve his or her grade must be made available to all students at the same time. The term "extra credit work" refers to optional work that may be assigned by the instructor to all students in addition to the required work for the course that all students must complete. It is distinguished from substitute assignments or substitute work that may be assigned by the instructor to individual students, such as make-up assignments to accommodate emergencies or to accommodate the special circumstances of individual students.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (copied from the 2020-2021 Undergraduate Bulletin)

A student should make an initial request for accommodation to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities, and provide appropriate supporting documentation. The Student Disabilities Services Coordinator may consult with appropriate college officials such as the instructor or Provost to determine the appropriateness of the requested accommodation consistent with the program requirements. Such consultation shall be confidential, and limited to those officials whose input is necessary to the decision. Students may consult with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities or the 504/ADA Compliance Coordinator at any time to discuss and understand their rights under the Rehabilitation Act, the ADA, and state and local legislation, and they are encouraged to do so.