

ECO 170 | Crime, Class, and Capitalism: The Economics of Justice Fall 2022, Mondays & Wednesdays

Office hours: Mondays 9:30-10:30 am, Wednesdays 1:30-2:30 pm (email me or ask me after class about where to meet)

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York

Instructor: Michael David Lynch (miclynch@jjay.cuny.edu)

Peer Success Coach: TBA

This is the version of the syllabus dated 8/25; it is subject to change.

Please reference Blackboard for updated week-by-week information throughout the semester.

I. Course description

This First Year Seminar 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. -- as with 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 criminal justice buildup, and how the new scale and character of incarceration in the U.S. may in turn condition those fundamental forms of economic organization.

In this course we will ask why and how we should study mass incarceration, considering the moral and political motivations that often animate the undertaking, and establishing our rubric for what constitutes a rigorous argument in the social sciences. We will develop a quantitative view of the scale, inequality, and uniqueness of incarceration in the U.S.

We will lay our conceptual base for the course, studying (1) the capitalist mode of organizing economic activity and its neoliberal variant; (2) theories of crime, with a focus on Marxian and neoclassical criminology; and (3) racial categorization. We consider the relationships between the three. As our

particular interest is in the political economy approach, we focus our attention on Marxian theoretical traditions, though we regularly situate them within a broader context of countervailing approaches.

We ask what prisons do, in their capacity as major economic institutions in the U.S. We assess theories of mass incarceration as a prison-industrial complex, a neo-slavery, a punitive poverty-management alternative to welfare, a public jobs program for deindustrializing rural areas, and as a reordering of urban space to maximize profitmaking, among others. We will consider these frameworks' empirical solidity, theoretical coherence, and moral or political implication.

Finally, we ask how our analyses from the earlier sections of the course might aid us in envisioning alternatives to mass incarceration and developing approaches for their realization.

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 causes of mass incarceration
- Several prominent theories of the economic functions of prisons
- Efforts to realize alternatives to mass incarceration

III. Assignments (this class is out of 400 points in total)

1. **Reading response/discussion questions** (25% of your grade) This class is centered around a rich catalog of fascinating readings and our discussions of them! So, it is important that you not only complete the readings, but that you put in additional time to 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. The success of the course is entirely dependent upon this! To assist you (read: coax you into doing so), you are required to submit THREE questions per CHAPTER. That means for each class, you will come with THREE (or SIX, depending on the day) questions prepared (on paper, written out in pen or pencil) over the assigned readings, that's three questions per chapter for a total of six questions written out to turn in at the beginning of each class. These questions can be over topics that you did not understand or perhaps questions you would like to respectfully ask your classmates during discussion to get their point of view. Reading discussion questions are worth a total of 100 points.

2. **Midterm: Interview + analysis** (25% of your grade) For your midterm exam, you will be invited to interview someone of your choosing about their experience, direct or indirect, with incarceration or police violence -- perhaps, a New Yorker with an incarcerated friend or family member, someone who now works as a credible messenger, someone who used to be a prison warden, a friend or family member serving (or who served previously) in the NYPD, a corrections worker who coordinates prison labor programs, etc. After your interview, you will write a journalistic, analytical piece about your interviewee, relating the experiences that the interviewee shared with you, and examining those experiences with the economic frameworks that we will have studied. This process will include the ethical considerations related to asking someone about experiences of theirs that may, in the cases of some interviewees, be tales of suffering, and making those experiences an object of your academic analysis. The intentions for the presentation of the projects -- whether they would only reach you and me, or whether they would be shared with the class or in broader forums (eg. the FYS showcase), and whether pseudonyms would be used, etc. -- would need to be dealt with directly and responsibly with the interviewees. I will offer support with these considerations. You will also cite at least three sources, from within and beyond the syllabus, for the analytical portion. More specifics of this assignment will be circulated and discussed later on in the semester as the due-date approaches. The assignment must be at least 4 pages in length, typed, Times New Roman 12-point font, and double-spaced. This project is worth 100 points: 50 points for the written portion and 50 points for your presentation of the interview in class.

3. **Final Exam** (25% of your grade) Your final exam will be cumulative and cover all of the readings, documentaries and lectures from class. The exam will be on Blackboard, you will have a total of four hours to complete it. Hence why taking notes throughout the semester is important! (it's an open-book, exam). The exam is worth 100 points.

4. **Class participation and attendance** (25% of your grade) The remaining 25% of your grade (the last 100 points) will pertain to your engaged participation in class (arriving on time, being present, **NOT BEING ON YOUR PHONE**, etc).

IV. Class protocols

1. Email me anytime! And come to office hours. And grab me for questions or comments after class. More than an invitation, this is an imperative. Email/OH/approach me when you are confused about an assignment, excited about an epiphany, outraged by the nonsense you're reading in my class, annoyed by a tweet, etc. Try to ask your questions early -- there is exponentially more learning to be had from inviting me into your process than from sheepishly delivering the accumulated wreckage of your prior hesitations once the time is forced upon us. **Please use my professor email address (miclynch@jjay.cuny.edu)**. During the week, I will do my best to respond to you within 24 hours. If I'm unable to do this at any point, I ask for your patience, and confidence that I will respond as soon as I am able.

2. Engage with **TBA**, your fantastic Peer Success Coach (PSC). Your PSC is a John Jay student who is dedicated to supporting your success this semester and beyond. **TBA** will keep you informed about upcoming events and opportunities, college policies and deadlines, and the various services available at the college. I strongly encourage you to make the most of their support. She will assist you in executing a plan to reach your academic and postgraduate goals by recommending strategies, helping you remove obstacles, and directing you to useful resources. Because of how valuable their support is, I've decided to require a coaching session with her as an element of the course; details will be circulated.

3. Please check Blackboard announcements and your email regularly, as I will frequently communicate with you via these mediums.

4. *You are required to have an old school pen-to-paper notebook in class. This policy has two reasons: first, taking notes by hand is, for many, a far more effective way of digesting material than those afforded by laptops or cellphones, as well as a useful skill to have more broadly. I'll be actively supporting your development of this skill during class.

5. *Laptops and cellphones will not be allowed in class. While laptops may offer a helpful escape from one's own handwriting, and may even eventually become a note-taking device of

choice, they present very many avenues for distraction for the laptop users and the students in their vicinity, impeding the development of a cohesive discussion group, which is this course's main aspiration. For those same reasons, I ask that you put your phone on airplane mode and away during class. I have put a lot of work into creating a rich educational experience for our course, and hindrances of this sort will make me, as I've once before remarked, very, very unhappy. Let me know if this policy raises concerns. These are my default policy, but if we find that laptops offer an important convenience of accessing the readings digitally, and we can take the additional measures to make laptops into entirely undistracting objects, then we may consider changing these policies for our group. We'll discuss.

6. Participate in class! 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 actually 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. Reasonable risk-taking is the only way, and something to ultimately view with great pride. And, since others probably have that same question, or are very likely to be interested in what their peers are thinking, the risk is likely to be very small. If sharing a question or thought is totally off the table because of your comfort in a specific moment, or your general disposition, I get it, this will happen sometimes -- and you'll have the chance to demonstrate your thoughtful engagement with the material in the written assignments, office hours, and the other opportunities for correspondence with me.

Please be 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 wrongheaded in this moment of experimentation that is one's first year in college. We are going to cover sensitive and controversial topics in this class, so always be respectful of those who disagree with you. Learn from other opinions, don't shut them down!

**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 the success of the course is dependent upon the critical participation that this will

enable! This is a 3-credit course, which means that you can expect 6-8 hours of work each week outside of our class sessions. I recommend you set that time aside intentionally.

7. No audio or video recording in class. We will keep each class session as a fleeting moment in time for the sake of your, and my, freest participation. I will post my slides or other teaching materials for you to access them. I may occasionally take pictures of the whiteboard after we fill it with our thoughts, but this will only be for my or our reference within the privacy of our class. Let me know if you have concerns with this policy.

8. Come to every class. But not if you're sick. Contact me with any concerns. If you must miss a session for an entirely immutable reason, get in touch, and I'll see what I can do to get you caught up, or potentially zoom you in if you are available during the session but only from afar.

V. Readings

Required texts:

[Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*](#)

[Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: police and prisons in the age of crisis*](#)

[Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*](#)

Articles will be printed out for you by me on a weekly basis for in-class group readings and discussions. Hold on to these articles since the final exam is cumulative! If you miss class, remember to ask me for any printed articles you may not have.

It helps if you can physically hold your readings, so I've listed the three books above as required. Now, if you don't want to purchase these books for any reason, I understand – try a public or university library, they're free. *Important:* students in the past have had difficulty getting these books on time through the John Jay bookstore, so, I recommend that you proceed with caution and perhaps purchase or rent them elsewhere. The site hyperlinked above lists several options. **We do not begin using the books until week 4**, so you should have plenty of time to acquire them.

Part I: Introduction to mass incarceration in the U.S.

Week 1: Introduction

Monday 8/29- ice-breaker, no readings

Wednesday 8/31- read the entire syllabus and come prepared with questions over the course, homework, exams, etc. Order books for future readings!

Week 2:

Monday 9/5- [Selections from Adam Smith's, *Wealth of Nations*](#) (3 questions)

Wednesday 9/7- [The Communist Manifesto, Marx & Engels](#) (3 questions)

Week 3:

Monday 9/12- Martin Luther King Jr.'s ["There's Something Wrong with Capitalism"](#) speech and Frederick Douglass's ["What, to a slave, is the Fourth of July."](#) (6 questions, 3 on each article)

Wednesday 9/14- Waleed Ahmad's ["Prisoners demand the right to vote"](#) article and Asha Ramachandran's ["COVID behind bars"](#) article. (6 questions, 3 on each article)

Week 4:

Monday 9/19- Michelle Alexander's *New Jim Crow*, Preface/Introduction & Chapter 1 (6 questions, 3 questions over each)

Wednesday 9/21- *New Jim Crow* Chapter 2 (3 questions)

Week 5:

Monday 9/26- campus closed, no readings, but begin thinking about who you want to interview for the midterm!

Wednesday 9/28- *New Jim Crow* Chapter 3 (3 questions)

Week 6:

Monday 10/3- *New Jim Crow* Chapter 4 (3 questions)

Wednesday- 10/5 campus closed, read articles and work on interview for your midterm!

Week 7:

Monday 10/10- campus closed, read articles and work on interview for your midterm!

Wednesday 10/14- *New Jim Crow* Chapter 5 (3 questions)

Week 8:

Monday 10/17- *New Jim Crow* Chapter 6 (3 questions)

Wednesday 10/19- Midterm due, must be printed and turned-in at the beginning of class for full credit (expect printer problems so plan ahead). In-class presentations!

Week 9:

Monday 10/24- Christian Parenti's *Lockdown America* Chapter 1 (3 questions)

Wednesday 10/27- *Lockdown America* Chapter 2 (3 questions)

Week 10:

Monday 10/31- *Lockdown America* Chapter 3 (3 questions)

Wednesday 11/2- *Lockdown America* Chapter 4 (3 questions)

Week 11:

Monday 11/7- *Lockdown America* Chapter 5 (3 questions)

Wednesday 11/9- *Lockdown America* Chapter 6 (3 questions)

Week 12:

Monday 11/14- *Lockdown America* Chapter 7 (3 questions)

Wednesday 11/16- *Lockdown America* Chapter 8 (3 questions)

Week 13:

Monday 11/21- *Lockdown America* Chapter 9 (3 questions)

Wednesday 11/23- *Lockdown America* Chapter 10 (3 questions)

Week 14:

Monday 11/28- *Lockdown America* Chapter 11 (3 questions)

Wednesday 11/30- Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Chapters 1 & 2 (6 questions)

Week 15:

Monday 12/5- *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Chapters 3 & 4 (6 questions)

Wednesday 12/7- *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Chapters 5 & 6 (6 questions)

Week 16: Conclusion & Review

Monday 12/12- Review Day (review all material covered in class and bring as many questions as you want about the final exam)

Wednesday 12/15- Exam Week begins, FINAL EXAM DUE SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18TH AT 11:59 PM ON BLACKBOARD. No exceptions.

COLLEGE-WIDE POLICIES

Grading Scale

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

Academic Integrity (from the 2020-2021 Undergraduate Bulletin)^[1]_{SEP} *The following information is excerpted from the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity. The complete text of the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity can be accessed at*

http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Academic_Integrity_Policy.pdf.

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.

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 %

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 [L] [SEP] 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 **Attendance** (copied from the 2020-2021 Undergraduate Bulletin). Students are expected to attend all class meetings as scheduled. Excessive absence may result in a failing grade for the course and may result in the loss of financial aid. The number of absences that constitute excessive absence is determined by the individual instructor, who announces attendance guidelines at the beginning of the semester in the course syllabus. Students who register during the Change of Program period after classes have begun are responsible for the individual course attendance policy, effective from the first day of the semester. **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. Carrie Dehls is the

Human Resources Benefits Coordinator. Employees may reach her at cdehls@jjay.cuny.edu or at 212.237.8504. Malaine Clarke is the Director of Accessibility Services. Students may reach her at maclarke@jjay.cuny.edu or at 212.237.8185. Silvia Montalban is the College's 504/ADA Compliance Coordinator. She can be reached at smontalban@jjay.cuny.edu or at 646.557.4409.

Additional information about this CUNY policy can be accessed at:

<http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/accessibility-services-appeal-process> ***Fantastic college resources*:**

Writing Center, 2450N | Wellness Center, 212-237-8111, New Bldg L68 ^[11]_[SEP]