

HISTORY 952: Seminar in Comparative History: Policing, Prisons, and Punishment

Professor Simon Balto
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fall 2024

Tuesdays, 1:20-3:15
5257 Humanities

Office: 4134 Mosse Humanities
Email: sebalto@wisc.edu
Office hours: 1:00-3:00 Thursdays, or by appointment

This is a graduate readings seminar that explores a sampling of both the history and historiography of carceral regimes and logics in a comparative perspective. Readings located in the United States will be heavily represented, for two related reasons. For one, carceral regimes in the United States are the most heavily studied and represented within the carceral studies literature. Secondly, that historiographical truth owes in large part to the fact that, as the Prison Policy Initiative notes, currently “the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate of any independent democracy on earth” while “every single state [in the nation] incarcerates more people per capita than most nations.”¹ The United States is, in other words, the incarcerator *par excellence* when it comes to punishing its own citizens, as well as noncitizens within and trying to enter its borders. At the same time, the U.S. doesn’t stand alone in relying on carceral apparatuses and logics to organize its society and discipline certain subjects within it. Indeed, on this matter there are useful and important points of comparison in contexts around the world. Our readings will take us to England and France, the Caribbean, the Indian subcontinent, the Philippines, and South Africa, among others, and in some cases will explore transnational networks of carceral thought and disciplinary technology between them.

Our principal concerns with these readings are as follows: 1) to familiarize ourselves with some classic texts about the impulses and logics undergirding carceral governance; 2) to think about the mechanics of how those impulses and logics are implemented and operationalized via surveillance, police, and the prison; and 3) to think about carceral systems’ relationships to one another and to the larger social, cultural, racial, economic, and political contexts in which they exist and help to structure. Centrally at issue here are questions of how various people and governments turned toward police and prisons, *why* they did so, and what the consequences were and what they remain.

Course Requirements:

1. General:

It’s expected that you will faithfully attend and offer lively, significant contributions to discussions, every single week. In the same vein, it’s expected that you’ll be courteous and kind within those discussions. Mathematically, the most significant

¹ Prison Policy Initiative, “States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2024,” June 2024, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2024.html> [Last accessed: September 6, 2024]

portion of your grade is earned by being a well-prepared and actively contributing member of our discussions every single week.

2. Weekly responses:

Beginning with our class session for September 17, each student will submit a reaction essay of 500-750 words (2-3 pages) that assesses that week's main text. "Assesses" in this case means briefly summarizing the book, discussing its methods, interventions, and arguments, gauging its effectiveness, and raising questions about it that can help steer our collective conversations. (Please conclude your response with at least two to three questions that you think would make good discussion fodder.) **These are due via Canvas by 5:00 PM the Monday before our Tuesday class meetings.** (For example, papers on *Discipline and Punish* are due by 5 PM on Monday, September 16th.) Knowing that week-to-week workload for graduate students can vary wildly depending upon what's happening in your lives and other courses, each student may skip three of the thirteen weeks for which essays are due. **In other words, although we are reading thirteen books, you will only need to submit ten response papers.** How you choose to distribute your workload across those weeks is up to you.

I highly recommend consulting some book reviews in the *American Historical Review* and/or *Journal of American History* to get a sense of what critically reading historical monographs can look like.

3. Final Paper (only for those students enrolled for three credits):

For a final paper, you will write a historiographical paper, the primary goal of which is for you to consider course readings in conversation with one another and in dialogue with outside readings. You will interrogate how those readings help us better understand and reinterpret key themes and aspects of the long history of punishment and discipline as mapped across the semester's reading. Perhaps you will note divergences, perhaps convergences. That is up to your read, analysis, and interpretation.

For the paper, **which should be roughly 15 pages in length and is due by 11:59 PM on Sunday, December 15**, the expectation is that you will choose one or two intellectual subsets of the readings we have covered (for instance, the relationship between colonialism and carcerality, or the relationship between carceral regimes and racial inequalities) and read further works related to them beyond those required as common readings. If you decide to focus on two such subsets, it's incumbent upon you to make sure that they intersect and are conversant with one another in some way.

The paper should engage with 4-5 additional scholarly works (monographs or significant scholarly journal articles) besides the course's required readings. It should reflect upon those additional works and put them into conversation with some of the common readings.

Please feel free to consult with me when deciding on a topic. Indeed, I encourage you to do so. Ideally, we will land on a topic that in some way can help you think more deeply about your own research interests as well as the specifics of what we've discussed in class.

Grade Distribution (3-credit option):

Class Participation	40%
Canvas Responses	30% (10 x 3 points each)
Final essay	30%

Grade Distribution (3-credit option):

Class Participation	50%
Canvas Responses	50% (10 x 5 points each)

Course Credit Information:

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), reading, writing, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus. For those taking the course for 2 credits, the credit standard is met by a total of 90 hours of student engagement.

Readings:

Each week, beginning on September 17, we will read and discuss one particularly significant historical monograph.

The following are the common, required books for this course. They are available through the book retailer of your choice.

1. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (originally published in French in 1975; many translated editions since, any of which are fine for purposes here)
2. Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law & Order* (Red Globe Press, Second Edition, 2013 [1978])
3. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007)
4. Jen Manion, *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015)
5. Robin Bernstein, *Freeman's Challenge: The Murder that Shook America's Original Prison for Profit* (University of Chicago Press, 2024)
6. Radha Kumar, *Police Matters: The Everyday State and Caste Politics in South India, 1900-1975* (Cornell University Press, 2021)
7. Amit Prakash, *Empire on the Seine: The Policing of North Africans in Paris, 1925-1975* (Oxford University Press, 2022)

8. Julian Go, *Policing Empires: Militarization, Race, and the Imperial Boomerang in Britain and the U.S.* (Oxford University Press, 2023)
9. Kelly Lytle Hernández – *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (University of California Press, 2010)
10. Jessica Ordaz, *The Shadow of El Centro: A History of Migrant Incarceration and Solidarity* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021)
11. Jacob Dlamini, *The Terrorist Album: Apartheid's Insurgents, Collaborators, and the Security Police* (Harvard University Press, 2020)
12. Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press, 2017)
13. Marisol LeBrón, *Policing Life and Death: Race, Violence, and Resistance in Puerto Rico* (University of California Press, 2019)

Disability Services

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of disability or ongoing illness, please contact me as soon as possible. UW's McBurney Center office coordinates services for students with disabilities; I will work collaboratively with the Center and students in need of accommodation to provide necessary accommodations. The McBurney Center's website, including their contact information, is here: <https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>

UW-Madison's Institutional Statement on Diversity

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW–Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background — people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Course Schedule

(Subject to change if instructor deems necessary or prudent)

Sep. 10: Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” *Journal of American History* 97:3 (December 2010): 703-724; Simon Balto and Max Felker-Kantor, ““Police and Crime in the American City,” *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, May 18, 2022: 1-43.

Sep. 17: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (originally published in French in 1975; many translated editions since, any of which are fine for purposes here)

Sep. 24: Stuart Hall, Chas Chritcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law & Order* (Red Globe Press, Second Edition, 2013 [1978])

Oct. 1: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007)

Oct. 8: Jen Manion, *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015)

Oct. 15: Robin Bernstein, *Freeman's Challenge: The Murder that Shook America's Original Prison for Profit* (University of Chicago Press, 2024)

Oct. 22: Radha Kumar, *Police Matters: The Everyday State and Caste Politics in South India, 1900-1975* (Cornell University Press, 2021)

Oct. 29: Amit Prakash, *Empire on the Seine: The Policing of North Africans in Paris, 1925-1975* (Oxford University Press, 2022)

Nov. 5: Julian Go, *Policing Empires: Militarization, Race, and the Imperial Boomerang in Britain and the U.S.* (Oxford University Press, 2023)

Nov. 12: Kelly Lytle Hernández – *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (University of California Press, 2010)

1. NOTE #1: We will not have a class meeting on 11/12, but will discuss Hernández's *Migra!* on 11/19 alongside Ordaz's *The Shadow of El Centro*.
2. NOTE #2: You may write one of your response papers on *Migra!*, but if you do, please still turn it in by 5 PM on Nov. 11. DO NOT MERGE MIGRA! AND THE SHADOW OF EL CENTRO INTO ONE SINGLE WEEKLY RESPONSE FOR BOTH BOOKS.

Nov. 19: Jessica Ordaz, *The Shadow of El Centro: A History of Migrant Incarceration and Solidarity* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021)

Nov. 26: Jacob Dlamini, *The Terrorist Album: Apartheid's Insurgents, Collaborators, and the Security Police* (Harvard University Press, 2020)

Dec. 3: Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press, 2017)

Dec. 10: Marisol LeBrón, *Policing Life and Death: Race, Violence, and Resistance in Puerto Rico* (University of California Press, 2019)