

HISTORY 227:
The Making of Black Lives Matter: A History of a Movement

Course Meetings:

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday: 11:00-11:50
L185 Education Building

Instructor:

Dr. Simon Balto (he/him)

Office: 4134 Mosse Humanities Building

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Office Hours:

Wednesday, 1:00-3:00, and by appointment

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Iesha Evans, a demonstrator protesting the shooting death of Alton Sterling, is detained by law enforcement near the headquarters of the Baton Rouge Police Department in Baton Rouge, La., on July 9, 2016. Jonathan Bachman, Reuters.



Black incarcerated children laboring in the U.S. South, ca. late 1800s. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection, LC-D428-850. From <https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-convict-leasing/>

The summer of 2023 will mark the ten-year anniversary of the birth of the movement now known around the world as Black Lives Matter. It appeared that summer first in a Facebook post by Alicia Garza, in what she called “a love letter to black people” in the wake of the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of a young Black boy named Trayvon Martin. It further exploded the following year with an uprising in Ferguson, Missouri after Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson killed a young Black man named Michael Brown, and still again the following summer when Baltimore police killed another young Black man, Freddie Gray. And then, of course, came the summer of 2020, when protests over police violence toward Black Americans exploded on a historically unprecedented scale after Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd – a murder that the whole world watched (or at least could watch, if they chose to look).

Many Americans, especially in 2020 and 2021 and particularly among those who had never had a bad encounter with law enforcement, struggled to understand what they were witnessing: Was police violence against Black people really that bad? More broadly, was the American criminal justice system really, as activists claimed, a system of *in*justice? If so, how had that happened? Surely it hadn’t always been like this?

Everything has a history, including the events of recent years surrounding protests for racial justice and in opposition to police and prisons in the United States. This class is an exploration of the history behind those headlines. It seems inevitable that we will talk about the events of our own present, but the larger purpose is to dive into the history behind it. We will examine the larger phenomenon of mass incarceration in the United States, and its racial contours and implications. We’ll explore nineteenth-century systems of surveillance and confinement that shaped some of the institutions and punitive logics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will read leading scholars on these subjects, watch documentaries and listen to podcasts about them, read primary sources that help us understand them, and have discussions about what we find. Regardless of any preconceived thoughts you may have about the Movement for Black Lives – whether sympathetic or oppositional – I hope that you’ll consider this history with care and an open mind.

This 3-credit course fulfills the Ethnic Studies Requirement.

Course Aims

This class explores several interrelated narrative and analytical threads. Perhaps most obviously, it is a history of regimes and instruments of surveillance and control (including but not confined to police) in U.S. history. It is also in many ways a history of the African-American experience since the era of emancipation. And finally, it is a meditation on the present and how the past shaped it. Given this, by the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Understand how Black Americans have experienced and talked about police and punishment at various stages of history.
- Understand how and why the carceral capacities of the U.S. have grown and changed over time
- Understand what mass incarceration in modern America is, and identify how the U.S. became the global leader in incarcerating its own citizens
- Identify various junctures in history at which people have critiqued the expansion of carceral power
- Discuss the connections between the past, the present, and perhaps the future.

Because this class fulfills the Ethnic Studies Requirement, we will also work toward the following learning goals satisfying the ESR:

- Students will articulate how the past has affected present day circumstances regarding race and racial inequalities in the U.S.
- Students will recognize and question cultural assumptions and knowledge claims as they relate to race and ethnicity.
- Students will demonstrate self-awareness and empathy toward the cultural perspectives and worldviews of others.
- Students will apply course concepts to their lives outside the classroom by respectfully participating in our multicultural society.

Course Credit Information

As a three-credit class, we meet as a group for about three hours per week. The class carries the expectation that you will spend two hours outside of class on course-learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc) for every hour of classroom time. In other words, you should allot roughly six hours of work for this course per week *outside of the classroom*, in addition to the time you spend inside the classroom. That figure is an average; there will be some weeks where you likely need to devote more time than that to this class, and others where you can devote a bit less.

Course Structure

This class is intended to be discussion-focused. While there will be the occasional lecture, that's not the driving feature. I limited the class capacity because I want us to have the opportunity to read, talk, think, and learn together: you from me, me from you, us from each other. We'll be reading work from leading scholars, reading a few primary sources, watching some lectures and documentaries, listening to a podcast or two, and ultimately coming back together to talk about what we've learned. I've selected a bunch of readings that I think help us make sense of a broad narrative when it comes to the intersections of race, policing, punishment, and safety in the United States across time. I've even assigned some of my own work, since I figured you may find it interesting and useful to talk with me about how I've gone about researching these subjects.

It perhaps goes without saying that if you don't want to read, this class is not for you. In any event, it's worth being candid about that fact. There are no exams in this course. Instead, you'll be asked to write five book reviews over the course of the semester, and numerous other shorter responses to other readings and videos. You'll also be assessed on your participation (which means both showing up every day and actively engaging with the material and with one another). And finally, you'll develop a culminating project of some format that captures your thinking about the history we're studying this semester. That final assignment is what's known as an "un-essay." Full details of the un-essay are included as a separate handout, but the gist is this: engaging with texts from our class in addition to a few additional texts of your own choosing (readings, songs, poems, manifestos), you will develop a final product that a) demonstrates knowledge of some aspect of the history at hand this semester, and b) makes an argument (explicit or implicit) about said history. The reason it's called an "un-essay" is that what that final product looks like can take a variety of forms: it *can be* a traditional essay if you'd like, but you could also write poems or original songs or a play, make visual art, construct a virtual exhibit, etc. The point is to allow you to ruminate on all that we've learned

and discussed and give you the creative space to do so in a way that doesn't limit your options to formal academic writing. Again, see the separate handout for more.

Here's a more mechanical breakdown of assessment:

Canvas response posts: 10*x2 points each = 20 / 100 points

Book reviews: 5x5 points each = 25 / 100 points

Participation = 20 / 100 points

Final un-essay = 25 / 100 points

Rough draft of un-essay = 10 / 100 points

*There are 14 2-point Canvas response post options spread across the syllabus. You may skip any 4 of them, excepting the first one (1/30) and the last one (5/3). You are welcome to turn in more than 10, but only your best 10 will be used for final grade assessment purposes. Please note that skipping the Canvas submission does not relieve you from the expectation that you will read/watch the assigned material for that class session and be actively engaged in discussion of it.

Grading Scale

A: 93-100

AB: 88-92

B: 83-87

BC: 78-82

C: 70-77

D: 60-69

Book Reviews: As noted above, you will write five book reviews over the course of the semester. When I say "review" in this particular context, I'm not asking you to say whether you liked it or not, what you liked and didn't like about it, etc. What I want you to do is to do your best to capture what the author's central arguments are and how the work enhances our understanding of issues of policing, race, and/or social movements. By the end of the semester, you may even be putting books from April into conversation with one from February!

Canvas Posts: These briefer response posts are ways for me to gauge your engagement with the reading and, more importantly, to try to get a sense of what people are interested in so that I can steer our discussions in productive directions. This is why these are due at 8 AM the morning of our class meetings. On some occasions, I will offer a specific prompt for you to respond to. On others, I'll leave things more open-ended and give you space to take things in your own direction, provided you're tying things back to the themes of the class.

Course Texts

Over the course of the semester, we will be engaging with a wide range of texts. I have made every effort to identify texts that can be accessed free-of-charge. There are, unfortunately, four items that are unavailable for free. I have placed a request for them to be held on Course Reserve at College Library, but I recommend purchasing them if you're able:

1. Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (Liveright, 2021). Currently listed on Amazon for \$15.21
2. Andrea Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (Beacon, 2017). Currently listed on Amazon for \$12.99
3. Alicia Garza, *The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart* (One World, 2020). Currently listed on Amazon for \$15.99.
4. *Riotville, USA*. Available to rent on Amazon for \$4.99, \$0.99 if you have Amazon Prime.

All told, purchasing materials for this class should come out to approximately \$50. Please feel free to be open with me if financial hardship prevents you from being able to access these books.

All other course materials will be available on Canvas or via web links.

Two Notes on Email

- 1) I do my best to respond to emails in a timely fashion, and usually do so. Understand, however, that responses to emails that you send in the evening or over the weekend may not be returned until the next business day. (For example, if you email me on Friday evening, please don't expect a response until Monday morning. If you'd consider the matter to be an emergency, please type URGENT in the subject line of the email.)
- 2) You should craft your own emails in a way that models professional courtesy. It's a good practice to be in. These are not text messages, and should include a salutation (i.e. "Dear Professor Balto") and a closing (i.e. "Sincerely, [your name]"). Very soon, you will be using email to communicate with potential employers, colleagues, etc. Start honing the skill now.

Academic Conduct

Students are expected to adhere to the University of Wisconsin's policies concerning academic integrity. Cheating can lead to all manner of unpleasantness, up to and including expulsion from the university. Any student found to be cheating or plagiarizing will be held accountable according to UW's standards. If you have *any question whatsoever* as to something you're doing may constitute plagiarism, *please ask*. I will not hold it against you if you're worried that you might be plagiarizing and want to check before turning something in. Once you turn it in, however, I'm contractually obligated to follow university procedures. Let's opt for safe over sorry.

For more information, the resources at the following page from the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards may be helpful: <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-misconduct/>

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/>

The History Lab

The History Department at UW offers resources to students through the History Lab that are intended to help you write like a historian. It's staffed by experienced graduate students who can help you form thesis statements and arguments, adopt correct citational practices, and so on. This would be a very, very good resource to tap into when you're working on your paper later in the term.

Writing Center

You are also encouraged to utilize the services available to you via UW's Writing Center, which offers wonderful resources and coaching for writers, regardless of self-perceived skill level. The Center (housed in Helen C. White, but with online options also available and satellite locations across campus) offers one-on-one consultation to students to help improve their abilities as writers. Consider consulting with them when planning and writing your papers. Services are free, and

constitute a truly invaluable resource for everyone on campus. Visit the Center here for more information: <https://writing.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.

Statement on Recording Lectures and other Classroom Content

Material I present to you via lecture, etc., is protected intellectual property, per the policy of the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents. What does this mean? For one, it means that you are not authorized to record my lectures or other classroom content, whether by video or audio. The exception is if you are a student with a qualifying disability that requires accommodation as determined by the McBurney Center. It also means that you are not allowed to sell notes that you take in class; those are for your personal use only (or for collaborative study purposes with your peers who are also enrolled in this class). It means that you are not allowed to record classroom lectures or discussions and distribute them, whether by posting them online or selling them to any organization. Failure to comply with these guidelines constitutes copyright infringement and is susceptible to discipline under university policy.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, depending upon our collective needs and the flow of the semester.

Week 1: Introductions

Wed, 1/25: Why we're here: Introductions

Fri., 1/27: Why we're here: Confronting Hard History

Week 2: Eruption

Mon., 1/30: Discussion of Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*

READING (to be completed before class on 1/30):

Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*, Intro. and Chapter 4 (Canvas)

CANVAS POST (due by 8:00 AM on 1/30):

300-word reflection on Taylor's chapters. Prompt on Canvas (2%)

Wed., 2/1: *Ferguson: A Report from Occupied Territory* (in-class viewing)

Fri., 2/3: Discussion of *Ferguson: A Report from Occupied Territory*

CANVAS POST (due by 8:00 AM on 2/3):

300-word reflection on *Ferguson: A Report from Occupied Territory*. Prompt on Canvas (2%)

Week 3: Mass Incarceration

Mon., 2/6: Discussion: What is “race?”

VIEWING (to be completed before class on 2/6)

Race: The Power of an Illusion – Episode 3 (The House We Live In)

<https://vimeo.com/601481660>

CANVAS POST (due by 8:00 AM on 2/6):

300-word reflection on *Race: The Power of an Illusion*. (2%)

Wed., 2/8: Discussion: What is “mass incarceration,” and why does it matter?

READING (to be completed before class on 2/8):

Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” *The Journal of American History* 97:3 (December 2010): 703-734

CANVAS POST (due by 8:00 AM on 2/8):

300-word reflection on Thompson’s article. (2%)

Fri., 2/10: Discussion: What is “mass incarceration,” pt. 2.

In-class video: Bryan Stevenson, “We Need to Talk about Injustice”

Week 4: From Present to Past

Mon., 2/13: Discussion of Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter*, part 1

READING (to be completed before class on 2/13):

Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter*, ix-80

Wed., 2/15: Discussion of Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter*, part 1

READING (to be completed before class on 2/15):

Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter*, 81-end

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 2/13):

500- to 700-word review of Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter* (5%)

Fri., 2/17: The Big Picture: Discussion of Balto & Felker-Kantor, “Police and Crime in the American City, 1800-2020

READING (to be completed before class on 2/17):

Simon Balto and Max Felker-Kantor, “Police and Crime in the American City, 1800-2020,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, May 18, 2022. On Canvas.

NOTE: you only need to read pp. 1-29, though you’re welcome to explore the rest if you want.

Week 5: Early Technologies of Surveillance and Confinement

Mon., 2/20: Slavery and Containment

READING (to be completed before class on 2/20):

Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, chapter 1. On Canvas.

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8 AM on 2/20):

300-word response to Camp (2%)

Wed., 2/22: Slave Patrols: Sally Hadden lecture

Fri., 2/24: Violence and Emancipation

READING (to be completed before class on 2/20):

Kidada Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, Intro and Chapter 1. On Canvas.

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8 AM on 2/24):

300-word response to Williams (2%)

Week 6: Violence

Mon., 2/27: Convict Leasing: Discussion of *Slavery By Another Name* documentary

VIEWING (to be completed before class on 2/27):

Slavery By Another Name

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 2/27):

300-word response to *Slavery By Another Name* (2%). Prompt on Canvas.

Wed., 3/1: Gender and Jim Crow Justice

READING (to be completed before class on 3/1):

Sarah Haley, “‘Like I Was a Man’: Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia,” *Signs* 39:1 (Autumn 2013): 53-77 On Canvas.

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 3/1):

300-word reflection on Haley’s article. Prompt on Canvas. (2%)

Fri., 3/3: *Tulsa, 1921: An American Tragedy*

VIEWING (to be completed by 3/3)

Tulsa, 1921: An American Tragedy

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 11:59 PM on 3/5):

300-word reflection on *Tulsa, 1921*. Prompt on Canvas. (2%)

Week 7: Lynchings Legal and Not

Mon., 3/6: Lynching and the Justice System

Wed., 3/8: *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy*

VIEWING (to be completed by 3/8)

Scottsboro: An American Tragedy

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8 AM on 3/8):

300-word reflection on *Scottsboro*. Prompt on Canvas. (2%)

Fri., 3/10: One-on-one meetings to discuss final projects.

Week 8: SPRING BREAK: Take *Occupied Territory* with you!

Week 9: Policing Cities

Mon., 3/20: Discussion: Balto, *Occupied Territory*, pp. 1-90

Wed., 3/22: Discussion: Balto, *Occupied Territory*, pp. 91-189

Fri., 3/24: Discussion: Balto, *Occupied Territory*, pp. 190-262

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 3/24):

500- to 700-word review of *Occupied Territory* (5%)

Week 10: Or Does it Explode?

Mon., 3/27: The Urban Crisis

Wed., 3/29: In-class discussion of Hinton, *America on Fire*, pp. 1-143

Fri., 3/31: *Riotsville, USA* documentary

CANVAS POST (to be completed by end of day on 3/31):

300-word response to *Riotsville, USA* (2%).

Week 11: Killing Resistance

Mon., 4/3: *Eyes on the Prize: A Nation of Law?*

CANVAS POST (to be completed by end of day on 4/3):

300-word response to *Eyes on the Prize: A Nation of Law?* (2%)

Wed., 4/5: Discussion of *Eyes on the Prize*. In-class analysis of the Black Planter Party's 10-Point Platform and of documents related to community control of police

Fri., 4/7: Hinton *America on Fire*, pp. 144-end

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 4/7):

500- to 700-word review of *America on Fire* (5%)

Week 12: Intersectionality and the Policing of Women

Mon., 4/10: Defining Intersectionality; Discussion of Ritchie, *Invisible No More*, Foreword-126

Wed., 4/12: Discussion of Ritchie, *Invisible No More*, 127-End

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 4/12):

500- to 700-word review of *Invisible No More* (5%)

Fri., 4/14: Wellness/Work Day

Week 13: “The Soft Side”

Mon., 4/17: Punishing Poverty

READING (to be completed before class on 4/17):

Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, “Guns and Butter: The Welfare State, the Carceral State, and the Politics of Exclusion in the United States,” *Journal of American History* 102:1 (June 2015): 87-9. On Canvas.

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8 AM on 4/17):

300-word response to Kohler-Hausmann (2%)

Wed., 4/19: Policing Schools

READING (to be completed before class on 4/19):

Max Felker-Kantor, “Arresting the Demand for Drugs: DARE and the School-Police Nexus in Los Angeles,” *Journal of Urban History* OnlineFirst, 2022. On Canvas.

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8 AM on 4/17):

300-word response to Felker-Kantor (2%)

Fri., 4/23: **ROUGH DRAFT OF FINAL PROJECT DUE**

Week 14: The New Jim Crow

Mon., 4/24: In-class, peer workshop of final projects

Wed., 4/26: Discussion of Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow”

VIEWING (to be completed before class on 4/26):

Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow”; 2013 lecture at University of Chicago
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gln1JwDUI64>

Fri., 4/28: Discussion of Garza, *The Purpose of Power*, xv-138

Week 15: Closing Arguments

Mon., 5/1: Discussion of Garza, *The Purpose of Power*, 139-end

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 5/1):

500- to 700-word review of *The Purpose of Power* (5%)

Wed., 5/3: “Walking” tour of downtown Madison, summer 2020

CANVAS POST (to be completed by 8:00 AM on 5/3):

300-word reflection on the State Street Mural Project. Prompt on Canvas. (2%)

Fri., 5/5: Coda

READING (to be completed before class on 5/5):

The Movement for Black Lives, “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, & Justice.” On Canvas.

LISTENING (to be completed before class on 5/5):

Justice in America podcast, episode 20: Mariame Kaba and Prison Abolition

Available here, or wherever you get your podcasts: <https://theappeal.org/justice-in-america-episode-20-mariame-kaba-and-prison-abolition/>

Final projects due via Canvas by 5:00 PM on Wednesday, May 10. If your final project is an “unessay” that for whatever technological or practical reasons cannot be submitted via Canvas, please consult with me.