

Comparative Crime and Punishment  
Criminal Justice 496/PoliSci 404  
Preliminary syllabus  
Mon and Thurs, 12:35pm-1:55pm  
HSB 106

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Office hours: 2:00pm-3:00pm M/Th  
<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the democratic world. Why is this? Is there something distinctive about American culture and/or politics that produces these outcomes? Are we simply a more crime-prone people, a more punitive people that imposes exceptionally harmful sanctions on even low-level offenders?

This is certainly not the way we think of ourselves. In this class, we will explore the US case in a comparative context, seeking to understand how different democratic political systems confront problems of crime and the degree to which they use imprisonment as a primary response. In order to do this, we will seek to understand what factors contribute to imprisonment, how and with what consequences crime becomes a politically salient issue and what extremely high rates of violence and incarceration can tell us about politics and inequality more generally in the United States, compared to other democratic countries.

In the first section of the class, we will examine the realities of incarceration and violence in the US and explore some of the explanations that scholars have offered for these outcomes. We will compare the US to other countries broadly but focus the first few weeks on understanding the US case. In the second half of the course, we will look more closely at rates of crime and punishment in other democratic countries, which are generally much lower than in the US, and try to understand what explains these differences. We will use crime and punishment issues to think more broadly about comparative democratic systems, inequality and race.

The course has four main requirements: class participation, in-class writing assignments, a midterm and a final paper. The final paper

### **Academic Integrity**

“Academic freedom is a fundamental right in any institution of higher learning. Honesty and integrity are necessary preconditions of this freedom. *Academic integrity requires that all academic work be wholly the product of an identified individual or individuals. Joint efforts are legitimate only when the assistance of others is explicitly acknowledged.* Ethical conduct is the obligation of every member of the University community, and breaches of academic integrity constitute serious offenses.” <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html#Integrity> (emphasis added)

I expect that all of the work you hand in to me is work that you have produced on your own and that any information you obtain from other sources is properly cited. While I encourage students

to study together, when you submit work for this class, it must be wholly your own. If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, please see the university policy on academic integrity at the URL above or see me. Plagiarizing someone else's work (including cheating on exams) will result in a failing grade and suspected violations of academic integrity will be referred to the appropriate Dean for investigation. If you have any questions or concerns about my expectations, please do not hesitate to ask me.

You should also be familiar with the following websites:

University Office: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>

Office of Student Conduct: <http://judicialaffairs.rutgers.edu>

### **Disability Accommodation**

“Rutgers University is committed to providing an environment where all students can equally participate in the academic experience. The accommodation of students with disabilities who meet admissions requirements is mandated by both federal and state law. Rutgers University supports these laws by pledging to comply with their requirements.”

<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~polcomp/fachand.shtml#sec1>

If you anticipate needing any type of reasonable accommodation in this course or have questions about accessibility, please contact me immediately.

### **Reading and assignments**

#### Required books

*Out of the Ashes*, David Lammy

*Crime is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence Is*, Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins

\*Additional readings are marked with an asterisk on the syllabus and are available on the course sakai site or as otherwise indicated.

#### Assignments

*Participation (15%)*: Class participation is required and only quality contributions will count for participation credit. If you have not done the readings, please do not be an aggressive participant as your remarks will not be as helpful for our discussion as those of your peers who are prepared for class.

*In-class writing (20%)*: There will be five in-class writing assignments, roughly one page each. These assignments will address the assigned readings and will ask you to reflect on specific topics we have been discussing. I will drop the two lowest grades but there will be no make-ups.

*Midterm (30%)*: This is an in-class exam that will take place on March 13<sup>th</sup>. The exam will involve several short answer questions addressing facts about crime and imprisonment cross-nationally, as well as a longer essay question addressing some of the theories that explain these realities.

*Final paper (40%):* This is a 10-12 page paper that addresses the primary class theme: what explains high rates of imprisonment in the US? The paper will draw primarily on class material but requires an additional outside book reading, as well as presentation of data comparing the US on crime (violence) and imprisonment with two other countries. We will discuss details on the paper in class.

## Class schedule

### Part I: Understanding the U.S.

*Week one: Thursday Jan 23<sup>rd</sup>: Introduction to class themes*

What do US rates of violence and imprisonment look like compared to other countries? Why is the US such an outlier? This first class will explore the explanations and assumptions we each bring to the class and think about how researchers might go about finding answers to these questions.

*Week two: Monday Jan 27<sup>th</sup> and Thursday Jan 30<sup>th</sup>: Just how bad is it?*

How much higher are US incarceration rates relative to other countries? What are some of the explanations for these differences? Do the two major political parties vie for the position as the 'most tough' on crime? If so, why?

\*Sentencing Project, "Comparative international rates of incarceration"

\*Jacobs, "What and how we punish"

\*Tonry, "Determinants of Penal Policy"

*Week three: Mon Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> and Thurs Feb 6<sup>th</sup>: Race and/or moral panics?*

Is racism a key part of the US obsession with incarceration, as Alexander argues? Alternatively (or in addition), perhaps Americans misjudge the realities of crime and are fearful of the 'wrong' things, as Glassner suggests.

\*Alexander, "Introduction" (to *The New Jim Crow*)

\*Forman, James, "Racial Critiques of New Jim Crow"

\*Glassner, "Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things"

*Week four: Mon Feb 10<sup>th</sup> and Thurs Feb 13<sup>th</sup>: Lethal violence*

This week we take a close look at lethal violence in the US, compared to violence in other democratic countries. What are the most important differences between the US and other countries? Why is lethal violence the focus of analysis here? How might rates of violence be related to incarceration rates?

Zimring and Hawkins, chs 1-3

*Week five: Mon Feb 17<sup>th</sup> and Thurs Feb 20<sup>th</sup>: Race, violence and history*

What do patterns of homicide look like across US history? Why are rates of homicide higher for African-Americans than for whites? What does this mean for American crime and punishment? What are some of the factors that Roth claims have an impact on rates of homicide in the US?

Zimring and Hawkins, chs 4-5

\*Roth, ch 1

*Week six: Mon Feb 24<sup>th</sup> and Thurs 27<sup>th</sup>: American exceptionalism?*

What distinctive features of American culture and politics contribute to violence and punishment?

\*Zimring and Hawkins, chs 7 and 9

\*LaFree, "Too much democracy or too much crime?"

*Week seven: Mon March 3 and Thurs March 6: True American exceptionalism: The death penalty*

The United States is an outlier in the democratic world in that it retains the use of the death penalty. What can this tell us about US punitive culture and politics?

<http://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/Innocence/Innocence-data.htm>

\*Reading TBA

*Week eight: Mon March 10: Are crime and punishment related to inequality?*

Zimring and Hawkins, ch 6

\*Downes and Hansen, Punishment and Welfare

\*Katz, "Why aren't U.S. cities burning?"

**Thurs March 13<sup>th</sup>: IN-CLASS MIDTERM**

**March 17<sup>th</sup>: SPRING BREAK**

**Part II: The US in comparative democratic context**

*Week nine: Mon March 24<sup>th</sup> and Thurs March 27<sup>th</sup>: Data on crime and imprisonment in the US, UK, Netherlands and Scandanavia*

This week we explore datasets that can help us gain some perspective on crime and imprisonment across different democratic countries.

*Week ten: Mon March 31<sup>st</sup> and Thurs April 3<sup>rd</sup>: England and Wales*

Lammy, pgs. 1-100

*Week eleven: Mon April 7<sup>th</sup> and Thurs April 10<sup>th</sup>: England and Wales con't*

Lammy, 100-end

*Week twelve: Mon April 14<sup>th</sup> and Thurs April 17<sup>th</sup>: Netherlands*

\*Downes, "Visions of Penal Control in the Netherlands"

\*TBA

*Week thirteen: Monday April 21<sup>st</sup> and Thurs April 24<sup>th</sup>: Scandanavia*

\*Green, "Comparing Penal Cultures: Child on child homicide in Britain and Norway"

\*Lappi-Seppala, "Penal Policy in Scandanavia"

\*Video: Norway massacre

*Week fourteen: Monday April 28<sup>th</sup> and Thurs May 1<sup>st</sup>: Crime and Punishment around the globe*  
\*Readings TBA

*Week fifteen: Monday May 5<sup>th</sup>:*  
Presentations of outside readings

**Monday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, papers due**