The Politics of Crime and Punishment
PSC 31807-E
Spring 2018
Monday and Wednesday 2:00-3:15
Shepherd 20

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Office Hours
Monday 3:30-5:30
NAC 4/143B
Other Times by Appointment

Description: This course presents an argument about how we should understand crime and punishment. In brief, it argues that as much as crime and punishment are topics for legal, social, cultural, or moral inquiry, they are topics for political inquiry. That is, in order to understand the practice of crime, criminalization, and punishment one must understand the politics behind them. And the politics of crime and punishment, at their core, are built into questions of the state including how state institutions are expanded, consolidated, and legitimated. By considering the relationship between crime, punishment and the state through a comparative lens, this course will present some of the diverse ways in which political leaders and their opponents have used crime and punishment to shape, extend, or resist state institutions over time. The course is comparative in nature, which means material is primarily drawn from outside of the United States, though the US and New York will be discussed via conversation with the politics of other countries.

Course Assignments: The primary assignments for the course are three take home exams and performance in one in-class debate.

Grading and Evaluation: The course will be graded on a 100-point scale. Each exam will be worth 20 points (roughly six pages of typed writing for each exam). The in-class debate will be worth 20 points. Attendance and participation will be worth 20 points.

Learning Outcomes: Through course readings, students will be able to analyze current events featuring the criminal justice system both globally and within the United States gaining a heightened understanding of the relationship between crime, punishment, and the state. They will also develop writing, oral presentation, and critical thinking skills through the course assignments.

Course Content and Comportment: The course material, lectures, and discussions deal with sensitive topics that may be uncomfortable or challenging for students. Should students be concerned about completing a particular reading or participating in a particular discussion because of the content, they are encouraged to approach the instructor to talk about the concerns so alternative arrangements can be made. Likewise, to facilitate discussion of difficult political topics, students are expected to have a presumptive generosity towards one another, even during
moments of disagreement. A key learning objective of the course is for students to learn how to argue effectively, a goal that assumes a generous engage both with the arguments a student makes and the objections that a student’s argument receives.

**Attendance:** Student attendance is crucial to the success of the course and students’ ability to learn in it. Reflecting this importance, attendance and participation are major components of the grade. To ensure students attend class, they will **lose five points on their participation grade for each unexcused absence, although I will excuse the first absence without penalty.** Late work hours or a delayed train are not legitimate excuses for missing a class. Absences for medical or family emergencies are excusable. If a student writes me *before* class letting me know about an emergency that requires them missing class (e.g. sickness, death in the family), I will generally excuse the absence if a student acts in good faith. I will not accept excuses after the fact, though. **To reward perfect attendance, I will also give students an extra five percent on their final grades for perfect attendance (i.e. no classes missed even for legitimate reasons).**

Lateness on an exam or missing an in-class debate are not acceptable, except in case of a serious emergency. **In such an instance, a note from a relevant authority attesting to the emergency (e.g. doctor) is required.** I will not allow a student to turn in an exam if such a note is not provided and if the reason for failing to complete the exam in a timely manner is not legitimate (e.g. illness; family emergency).

**Books to Purchase:** None

**Course Overview**

**Section 1: Setting the Stage through Theory and Literature**

**Week 1 – Course Introduction**
Class 1 Jan. 29 – Course Introduction
No Reading

Class 2 Jan. 31 – Overview Lecture


Week 2 – The Politics of Crime in Theory
Class 1 Feb. 5 – The Great Criminal


Class 2 Feb. 7 – Spectral States and Divine Violence


Week 3 – The Politics of Punishment in Theory
Class 1 Feb. 12 – No Class
No Class (CUNY Cancellation)

Class 2 Feb. 14 – The Limits of the Disciplinary State


Week 4 – The Politics of Punishment in Literature
Class 1 Feb. 19 – Class Cancelled
No class (CUNY Cancellation)

Class 2 Feb. 20 – Criminal Spectacles and Punitive Spectacles
NOTE: Tuesday Class


Class 3 Feb. 21 – In-Class Debate
Debate 1: Crime is useful.
Assignment 1: Take Home Exam 1 Handed Out

Section II: Crime

Week 5 - The Experience of Crime

Class 1 Feb. 26 – The Drama of Crime


Class 2 Feb. 28 – Talking about Crime


DUE Take Home Exam 1

Week 6 – Crime: Resistance or Parasitism?

Class 1 March 5 – Crime as Resistance


Class 2 March 7 – Crime as Social Parasitism


Week 7 – Crime and the State

Class 1 March 12 - The Criminal State

Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. New York: Cambridge University Press.


Class 2 March 14 – The Vigilante State


Week 8 - Performing Protection
Class 1 March 19 – The Politics of Crime Statistics


Class 2 March 21 – Broken Windows Policing


Week 9 – The Social Complications of Being Policed
Class 1 March 26 – Guest Speaker
Other Readings TBA

Class 2 March 28 – In-Class Debate

**Debate 2:** Crime is a form of resistance.

**Assignment 2: Take Home Exam 2 Handed Out**

**Week 10 – SPRING BREAK**

Class 1 April 2 – Class Cancelled
No Class (Spring Break)

Class 2 April 4 – Class Cancelled
No Class (Spring Break)

Section III: Punishment

**Week 11 - The Court**

Class 1 April 9 – Dramas of Sovereignty and Resistance


**DUE Take Home Exam 2**

Class 2 April 11 – Class Cancelled
No Class (CUNY Cancellation)

**Week 12 – Carceral States**

Class 1 Apr. 16 – Fear and Global Cultures of Control


Class 2 Apr. 18 – Rolling Back Welfare and Rolling Out the Prison

**Week 13 – Prison Thought**

Class 1 Apr. 23 – Prison and Civil Disobedience  


Class 2 Apr. 25 – The Intimacy of Prison Power  

**Week 14 – The Politics of Prison Violence**

Class 1 Apr. 30 – The Economic Logic of Prison Gangs  


Class 2 May 2 – The Cultural Logic of Prison Gangs  


**Week 15 – Extra-Legal Punishment**

Class 1 May 7 – Lynching and Law in the United States  
**GUEST SPEAKER:** Michael Pfeifer, John Jay College


Class 2 May 9 – Lynching and Law in Latin America


**Week 16 – The Death Penalty**
Class 1 May 14 – Landmark Legal Decisions
Majority Opinion, Gregg v. Georgia, Case no. 74-6257, United States Supreme Court: Selections.

The State vs. Makwanyane and M Mchunu, Case no. CCT/3/94, Constitutional Court of South Africa: Selections.

Class 2 May 16 – In-Class Debate
**Debate 3**: Capital punishment is acceptable and sometimes necessary.

**Assignment 3: Take home exam 3 handed out**

**FINAL EXAM DUE: May 23 by 5pm**