**#Mass Incarceration in America**

**Arts & Sciences 1137.xx, Freshman Seminar**

**1 Semester-hour Credit**

**Tuesday 11:30-12:25 Bldg/Room TBA**

##### Instructor: Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries Office Hours: Tues 2:30-3:30 pm

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# COURSE DESCRIPTION

America has an incarceration problem. There are currently more than 2.2 million people in prison or jail and another 5 million on probation or parole. And many millions more are impacted by mass incarceration because they are the parents, spouses, partners, and children of people under government supervision. It is no surprise then, that mass incarceration is one of the leading social justice issues of the day

This course will put mass incarceration into historical and contemporary context. It will be divided into four parts. Part 1 will focus on the long history of racial criminalization in America, from slavery through the Black Power era. Part 2 will look at the war on drugs, examining its political roots during President Nixon’s Administration, maturation during President Reagan’s time in office, and acceleration during President Clinton’s tenure. It will also focus on patterns and practices of policing, as well as real world issues related to addiction, including the changing nature of drug use, such as the reasons for the surge in opioid-based addiction over the last decade and a half. Part 3 will examine the courts and the criminal justice system, taking a hard look at prosecutorial (mis)conduct, especially plea bargaining, shortcomings within the bail system, challenges facing impoverished defenders, and the role of judges in sentencing and sentencing reform, including alternatives to incarceration. In Part 4, the seminar will focus on everyday prison life and the cost and politics of prison privatization. It will also examine the challenges of reentry for the formerly incarcerated, which range from putative probation and parole restrictions to felon disenfranchisement.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The overarching aim of this course is to help students better understand the origins, evolution, and consequences of mass incarceration in America. At the end of the course, students will be able to explain the historical processes behind the criminalization of blackness and the reasons for the persistence of racial disparities in the criminal justice system. They will have a clear sense of the centrality of the war on drugs to the problem of mass incarceration, the social and fiscal costs of extreme imprisonment, and the challenges of re-entry for formerly incarcerated individuals. They will also gain a thorough understanding of how the criminal justice system works, from policing to prosecutions to parole. In addition, they will learn the mechanics of organizing a social justice campaign.

# REQUIRED TEXTS

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

**ONLINE FILMS**

Unless otherwise stated, all online films are accessible the OSU Online Media Library at: <http://go.osu.edu/SecuredMediaLibrary>

**COURSE POLICIES**

***Attendance***

Your presence is ***required*** at every class; attendance will be taken before class begins. Each absence after three (3) will result in a full final letter grade deduction. Six (6) absences, which is the equivalent of missing half the semester, will result in a grade of E for the course.

***Class* *Participation***

Each class will revolve around large and small group discussions of all the material assigned for the week (readings and films/documentaries). In all classes, students will be expected to participate actively in discussions, which are intended to help students more fully understand the subject material. The discussions are also intended to promote collaborative learning; students can learn as much from each other as they can from the professor.

***Documentary Film/Reading Reflections***

Each student will write **three, 250 word,** stream-of-consciousness reactions/reflections to the weekly reading/viewing assignment. Group membership, which is based on the first letter of your last name, is as follows: Group 1 (A-G); Group 2 (H-K); Group 3 (L-R); Group 4 (S-Z). Please see the weekly schedule at the end of the syllabus for the dates your group submits papers.

The reaction/reflection should capture your thoughts as you work your way through the week’s material - what stood out to you? What, if any, questions do you have? What about the reading/film should we discuss in class?

Upload your response/reflection by Noon (12pm) the Monday before class as a MS Word document to the appropriately labeled Carmen/Canvass drop box.

***Social Media***

Each student is required to make regular posts to an agreed upon social media outlet in which s/he draws on class material (readings, discussions, films) to reflect on major news stories connected to mass incarceration. The weekly news story/topic will be announced in class.

# *Student Evaluation*

Grade calculation:

Class participation: 33%

Weekly Reflection: 33%

Social Media Posts: 33%

Being Happy: 1%

Grading Scale:

A: 93 and above C+: 77-79 E: 62 and below

A-: 90-92 C: 73-76

B+: 87-89 C-: 70-72

B: 83-86 D+: 67-6

B-:80-82 D: 63-66

**Academic Misconduct**

**It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct** <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>**.**

**Mental Health**

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student’s ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life’s Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting [ccs.osu.edu](http://ccs.osu.edu/" \o "CCS website" \t "_blank) or calling [614­-292-­5766](tel:%28614%29%20292-5766" \t "_blank). CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on call counselor when CCS is closed at [614­-292-­5766](tel:%28614%29%20292-5766" \t "_blank) and 24 hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-­800­-273-TALK or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/" \o "National Suicide Prevention website" \t "_blank).

**Students with Disabilities**

**The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options.  To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services.  After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information:** [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu)**; 614-292-3307;** [slds.osu.edu](http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/)**; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue**.

**Biographical Statement**

#### Since arriving at The Ohio State University in 2003, I have taught a range of courses on African American history, most regularly the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and African American History through Film. In 2012, I received The Ohio State University Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching, the university’s highest teaching award. My published work, including my first book *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt*, focuses on contemporary African American activism. I am currently editing a volume on best practices for teaching civil rights history.

#### WEEKLY SCHEDULE

### **Week 1**

### **Tue, Aug 21 – Course Overview**

Introductions

### **Week 2**

### **Tue, Aug 28 – Talking About Race, Racism, and Mass Incarceration**

Online Film: *13th*

(Group 1 (A-G): Reflection Due 12pm Monday, Aug 27)

### **PART 1:**

**“Criminalizing Race”**

### **Week 3**

### **Tue, Sep 4 – Original Sin: Slavery in America**

Online Film: *Unchained Memories*

(Group 2 (H-K): Reflection Due 12pm Monday, Sept 3)

### **Week 4**

### **Tue, Sept 11 – How Free is Free? Black Life after Slavery**

Reading: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow,* ch 1 “The Rebirth of Caste”

Online Film: *Slavery by Another Name*

(Group 3 (L-R): Reflection Due 12pm Monday, Sept 10)

### **Week 5**

### **Tue, Sep 18 – The High Point of Black Protest: The Civil Rights Movement**

Reading: Jeffries, “Remaking History: Barack Obama, Political Cartoons, and the Civil Rights Movement” in Crosby, ed., *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up* (Available on Canvass)

Online Film: *Soundtrack for a Revolution*

(Group 4 (S-Z): Reflection Due 12pm Monday, Sept 17)

**PART 2:**

**“The New Jim Crow”**

### **Week 6**

### **Tue, Sep 25–What do you mean you don’t see race? From Civil Rights to Colorblindness**

Reading: Taylor, *From #BLM to Black Liberation,* ch 2 (pp: 51-74)

(Available on Canvass)

Online Film: *Vanguard of the Revolution: The Black Panther Party*

(Group 1 Reflection)

### **Week 7**

### **Tue, Oct 2 – The Rise of Mass Incarceration**

Reading: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, ch 2 “The Lockdown”

(Group 2 Reflection)

### **Week 8**

### **Tue, Oct 9 - Just Say No…To Reagan**

Online Film: *Letter to the President*

(Group 3 Reflection)

### **Week 9**

### **Tue, Oct 16 – Three Strikes: Clinton Gets Tough on Crime**

Reading: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow,* ch 3, “The Color of Justice”

(Group 4 Reflection)

**PART 3:**

**“The Criminal *In*Justice System”**

### **Week 10**

### **Tue, Oct 23 – F\*#K the Police! The Double Standard of Justice**

Reading: Taylor, *From #BLM to Black Liberation,* ch 4 (pp: 107-134)

(Available on Canvass)

Online Film: *The Central Park Five*

(Group 1 Reflection)

### **Week 11**

### **Tue, Oct 30 – Where’s Daddy? The Death and Life of Oscar Grant**

Reading: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow,* ch 4 “The Cruel Hand”

Online Film: *Fruitvale Station*

(Group 2 Reflection)

### **Week 12**

### **Tue, Nov 6 – A New System of Mass Oppression**

Reading: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, ch 5 “The New Jim Crow”

(Group 3 Reflection)

**PART 4:**

**“A Movement is Born”**

### **Week 13**

### **Tue, Nov 13 – Prison Privatization**

Reading: “The Prison Industry in the United States: Big Business or a New Form of Slavery,” by Vicky Pelaez (Available online at: www.globalsearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=8289)

(Group 4 Reflection)

### **Week 14**

**Tue, Nov 20 – The Search for Justice**

Reading**:** Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, ch 6 “The Fire This Time”

### **Week 15**

### **Tue, Nov 27 – #BlackLivesMatter: A Movement**

### Reading: Taylor, *From #BLM to Black Liberation,* ch 6 (pp: 153-190)

(Available on Canvass)