Prison: A Global History  
(Draft Syllabus)

Instructor: Max Mishler  
Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:30-5:30pm  
Email: maxmishler@brandeis.edu

This course will consider the development of prisons as the dominant form of punishment in the modern world. Early human societies sought to ensure social cohesion by publicly shaming deviant members of the community. The growth of state-level societies, however, increasingly rendered moral suasion ineffective in the face of social change and population growth. Thus political and economic elites developed new, elaborate techniques of punishment capable of ensuring law and order: banishment, torture, execution, and incarceration. During the eighteenth century, social reformers in North America and Europe sought to perfect and “humanize” punishment. Their critique of excessive violence and profound belief in the possibility of individual reform led many to advocate incarceration in new penitentiaries as an alternative to public, corporal punishment. While histories of the penitentiary tend to focus on Europe and North America, this course examines the birth of the modern prison across the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will explore both broad similarities and important differences between the historical trajectories of the modern prison in various societies, comparing and contrasting scholarly approaches to the history of modern punishment. We will also investigate the rise of mass incarceration in the United States, as well as new bi-partisan efforts to reduce our nation’s prison population, but our discussions will situate these developments within a broader global context. In addition, I have paired course readings with original sources that will allow students to engage first-hand with the archive of the modern penitentiary. We will also examine cultural productions, such as literature, film, podcasts, and music, that illuminate how prison is represented in contemporary societies throughout the world.

**Learning Goals:**

1. To develop a strong knowledge of the trans-national history of incarceration. By the conclusion of this course, students should have a clear understanding of the origins, function, and legacies of the modern prison in various societies throughout the world.

2. To foster critical thinking and analytical skills, so that students can apply them to a variety of textual and non-textual sources.

3. To strengthen oral communication, written expression, and research skills.

**Course Requirements**

Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.) If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.
You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to turnitin.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the University. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS – Library Guides.

**Grading**

**PARTICIPATION:** (25% of the course grade). In working out this portion of the grade, attendance in class and the quality of interventions (both questions and comments) will be considered. It is the student’s responsibility to complete all assignments and to arrive in class prepared to discuss all readings. Students must submit TWO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS to Latte (Due by 6pm on the night before class) that reflect substantive engagement with course readings. Students will also be expected to make one ten-minute in-class presentation pertaining to course readings and/or primary documents during the semester.

**SHORT PAPER:** (20% of the course grade) You will be required to write one short paper (3 to 5 pages) reacting to readings from any particular section of the course. For the purposes of the assignment, sections can be defined as two to three weeks of course readings, including non-contiguous weeks (permitting, for example, a paper that compares colonial prison regimes in Asia, Africa, or India).

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS:** (20% of the course grade) You will be required to write a short document analysis paper (3 to 5 pages) that explores authorship, audience, language, political or social significance, and the broader context of its production. Students should make an original argument about how the document sheds light on the key themes of the course.

**FINAL PAPER:** (35% of the course grade) You will be required to write a longer (12-15 pages) paper that addresses a major historiographical or theoretical question raised by the course. Students must submit an outline and bibliography two weeks prior to the deadline.

**Required Texts:**

All other readings will be available as PDFs online.

Week 1: Course Introduction and Overview
Friday January 12, 2018
Introductions and Review of Syllabus

Week 2: Global Prison History and the Birth of the Penitentiary
Tuesday January 16


Friday, January 19


Week 3: The Birth of the Penitentiary
Tuesday, January 23


Friday, January 26
Podcast: *Ben Franklin’s World* Episode 080 - “Liberty’s Prisoners”


**Week 4: Convict Transportation**

**Tuesday, January 30**


**Friday, February 2**


**Week 5: Prison and Asylum in South Asia**

**Tuesday, February 6**


**Primary Documents:** Anon, “Prison Discipline in India,” *Calcutta Review* 12, 6 (1846).


**Friday, February 9**


**Week 6: Crime and Punishment in South East Asia**

**Tuesday, February 13**


**Friday, February 16**


**FEBRUARY BREAK: Feb. 19 - Feb. 23**

**Week 7: Prison and Punishment in East Asia**
**Tuesday, February 27**

Suggested Reading: Frank Dikotter, *Crime, Punishment, and the Prison in Modern China* (Columbia, 2002).

**Friday, March 2**


**Week 8: Punishment, Race, Gender, and Emancipation**
**Tuesday, March 6**

**Friday, March 9**

Week 9: Crime and Punishment in the Middle East
Tuesday, March 12
Ufuk Adak, “Central Prisons in Istanbul and Izmir in the Late Ottoman Empire: In-Between Ideal and Reality,” Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association Vol. 4, No. 1 (May, 2017).

Friday, March 16


Suggested Reading: Ervand Abrahamian, Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran (Berkeley, 1999).

Week 10: Crime and Punishment in Colonial Africa
Tuesday, March 20

Friday, March 23


Week 11: Comparative History of Gender and Incarceration
Tuesday, March 27
Daniel Botsman, “Or Pity and Poison: Imprisoning Women in Modern Japan,” in Gender and


SPRING BREAK: Mar. 30 - Apr. 6

Week 12: The Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America
Tuesday, April 10
Ricardo Salvatore and Carlos Aguirre, “The Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America: Toward an Interpretive Social History of Prisons”

Friday, April 13


Week 13: The Rise of Mass Incarceration in the United States
Tuesday, April 17

Primary Documents: Prison records from late nineteenth-century U.S. South.


Friday, April 20
Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow, Ch. 4-5.


**Week 14: Mass Incarceration, Welfare, and Immigration**

* Scheduled meetings with Professor Mishler to discuss final papers.

**Tuesday, April 24**


**Wednesday, April 25 (Friday Schedule) - Last Class**

Mary Bosworth, “Foreigners in a Carceral Age: Immigration and Imprisonment in the United States.”

*In-Class Discussion of Final Papers

**Final Papers Due: Friday May 11**

**Further Reading**


