Histories of the U.S. Carceral State: 
Race, Punishment, and Power
(Draft Syllabus - Subject to Change)

Professor: Max Mishler
Office: Olin-Sang 123
Office Hours: Wednesday 1-3pm or by Appointment
E-Mail: maximishler@Brandeis.edu
Course Meeting Times: Tuesday 9-11:50am

The United States is home to five percent of the world’s population but twenty-five percent of the world’s prisoners – with African Americans and Latinos comprising a disproportionate number of incarcerated Americans. The expansion of what scholar/activist Angela Davis calls the “prison industrial complex” has generated enormous profits for private prison corporations, growing deficits for state and local governments, and social crises in those communities targeted by systematic policing and imprisonment. It has also provoked public and scholarly debates about the history, ethics, and function of incarceration in modern society. This course takes the rise of an unprecedented carceral state in the United States during the twentieth century as its central focus. Drawing upon the fields of history, sociology, anthropology, geography, literature, and legal scholarship, we will examine mass incarceration through the prisms of state-formation, politics, empire, and capitalism. We will also explore early linkages among race, punishment, and governance - as well as theoretical debates over the definition of “carceral” and “state” - in order to properly contextualize our discussion of the late twentieth-century carceral state.

Learning Goals:
1. To develop a strong knowledge of the political, social, and economic origins of contemporary mass incarceration. By the conclusion of this course, students should have a strong command of the relevant scholarly literature and should be able to develop an original research proposal.

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:**

**Weekly Response Papers – 2-3 Pages (30%)** – These papers are opportunities for students to explore specific themes that emerge from readings or class discussion. Students are expected to make an original argument and to draw on textual evidence from course readings. Students may choose to submit a document analysis instead of a second response paper. These essays must situate a primary source historically, contextualize the document using secondary literature, and address the conditions of its production. Document analysis should ideally be related to the student’s final paper.

**Class Presentation (20%)** – Each student will be responsible for an in-class presentation (five-ten minutes) consisting of a critical introduction to the required readings and three questions about the readings capable of generating class discussion. Presentations should engage with an author’s argument, evidence, and methodology. Students can also address the political or ethical implications of particular readings.

**Final Paper – 10-12 pages (30%)** – One option for the final paper is a review essay that compares and contrasts two of the monographs from the suggested reading list with course readings, elaborating on such topics as methodology, chronology, evidence, social theory, or the relationship between scholarship, activism, and public policy. A second option is to write a research proposal for a longer seminar paper or thesis. These proposals should identify a research question, as well as potential archives and sources, and situate their proposed research within the interdisciplinary literature on race and punishment. Students must make a compelling case for the scholarly significance of their chosen topic. Review essays and research proposals must be no longer than 12 pages.

**Class Participation (20%)** – Students are expected to be active, respectful participants in class discussions. This requires that students complete all assigned readings and respect classroom etiquette. Please turn off all cell phones, IPods etc. while you are in class. Be respectful of your fellow students when they are speaking. If you need to leave early or arrive late for any reason, please let me know in advance.

**Recommended Background Readings:**
Required Readings
Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, and Opposition in Globalizing California (University of California, 2007).

Week 1 Histories of Mass Incarceration.
Tuesday, September 5, 2017
Review of the syllabus and the state of the field:
- The Carceral Landscape in the United States: Mapping Mass Incarceration
- By the Numbers: Quantitative Data and the Politics of Scholarship.

Week 2 Historicizing Mass Incarceration and the State
Tuesday, September 12

Week 3 Pre-Histories of the Carceral State.
Tuesday, September 19
Muhammad, Condemnation of Blackness, Introduction, Ch. 1-2
Gottschalk, Prison and the Gallows, Ch. 1-2

Week 4 Pre-Histories of the Carceral State.
Tuesday, September 26
Gottschalk, Prison and the Gallows, 3
Muhammad, Condemnation of Blackness, 3, 6, and Conclusion.
Tuesday, October 3 - Thursday Schedule. NO CLASS.

Week 5 Politics of Mass Incarceration I.
Tuesday, October 10
Murakawa, The First Civil Right (Complete).

Week 6
Tuesday, October 17
Gottschalk, Prison and the Gallows, Ch. 5

Week 7 The Political Economy of Mass Incarceration
Tuesday, October 24

Week 8 Neo-Liberalism and Punishment I
Tuesday, October 31
Wacquant, Punishing the Poor, Prologue, Ch. 1-3.

Week 9 Neo-Liberalism and Punishment II
Tuesday, November 7
Wacquant, Punishing the Poor, Ch. 4-6.

Week 10 Black Politics, Attica, and Mass Incarceration
Tuesday, November 14
Thompson, Blood in the Water, Part I-II
Robert Chase, “We Are Not Slaves: Rethinking the Rise of Carceral States through the Lens of the Prisoners’ Rights Movement,” JAH (June 2015)

* Discussion of paper topics.

Week 11 Black Politics, Attica, and Mass Incarceration
Tuesday, November 21
Thompson, Blood in the Water, Part III-V
Week 12 Attica and Its Legacies
Tuesday, November 28
Thompson, Blood in the Water, Part VI-VIII

* Final Paper Abstracts Due

Week 13 Attica, Its Legacies, and the Future of Mass Incarceration
Tuesday, December 5
Thompson, Blood in the Water, Part IX-Epilogue

Final Papers Due: Friday December 15

Suggested Reading:


Gibson, Mary. “Global Perspectives on the Birth of the Prison.” *American Historical Review* (October 2011): 1040-1063


