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PRISON ABOLITION CLASS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The following is a syllabus for a course on Prison Abolition that was co-taught by the founder of Black and Pink, Jason Lydon. This collection of readings is intended as a primer for readers on the creation and function of the US prison industrial complex. The course was taught in a divinity school and there is an emphasis on the role of religion and theology in this collection of readings. Many secular abolitionist efforts miss some of the important connections between religion and the creation as well as resistance to the US carceral state. Enjoy these readings in groups or on your own.

Session 1 -

- [*Cruel and Unusual: The Culture of Punishment in America*](#), Anne-Marie Cusac (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009) Ch. 1 “When Punishment Is the Subject, Religion Is the Predicate” (pages 17-30)
- [*With Liberty For Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America*](#), Scott Christianson (Northeastern University Press; Boston, 1998) Ch. 2 “A Land of Prisoners and Keepers” (pages 39-67)

- [*Cruel and Unusual: Punishment and US Culture*](#), Brian Jarvis (Pluto Press: Virginia, 2004) Ch. 1 “The Birth of a Prison Nation” and half of Ch 2 “The Scarlet Letter and the Long Forever of Puritan Punishment” (pages 1-33)

Session 2 – The Birth of the Penitentiary

- Required Readings

- [*Cruel and Unusual: The Culture of Punishment in America*](#), Anne-Marie Cusac (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009) Ch. 2 and 3 “A Heart Is Not Wholly Corrupted’ Revolution, Religion and Punishment” and “Reforming the Reforms” (pages 31-71)
- [*“Penitence for the Privileged: Manhood, Race, and Penitentiaries in Early America,”*](#) Mark E. Kann in *Prison Masculinities* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2001) pages 21-31
- [*With Liberty For Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America*](#), Scott Christianson (Northeastern University Press; Boston, 1998) Ch. 4 “Little Man in the Big House” (pages 110-162)

Session 3 – The 13th Amendment, Convict Leasing, and The New Jim Crow

Required Readings

- [*With Liberty For Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America*](#), Scott Christianson (Northeastern University Press; Boston, 1998) Ch.5 “Scandal and Reform” (pages 163-203)
- [*The New Abolitionists: Neo-slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*](#), Joy James (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2005) “Introduction: Democracy and Captivity” (pages xxi-xxv)

Suggested Reading

- Begin reading [*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*](#) Michelle Alexander (The New Press: NYC, 2010)

Session 4 – White Supremacy and the Racialization of Incarceration

Required Readings

- [*“The American Indian in the White Man’s Prisons: A Story of Genocide,”*](#) Little Rock Reed in *The New Abolitionists: Neo-slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*, Joy James (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2005) pages 133-150
- [*Cruel and Unusual: Punishment and US Culture*](#), Brian Jarvis (Pluto Press: Virginia, 2004) Ch. 4 “Punishment, Resistance and the African-American Experience” (pages 78-125)

Suggested Reading

- [*“A Brief History of the New Afrikan Prison Struggle”*](#) Sundiata Acoli in *Black Prison Movements USA* (Africa World Press: Trenton, 1995) pages 5-26
- Finish reading *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* Michelle Alexander (The New Press: NYC, 2010)

Session 5 – Death Penalty

Required Reading

- [Peculiar Institution: America's Death Penalty in an Age of Abolition](#), David Garland (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Harvard, 2010)

Suggested Reading

- [“The Death Penalty in Black and White: Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Decides,”](#) Richard C. Dieter Report from Death Penalty Information Center June 1998
- “Death Penalty, Still Racist and Arbitrary,” David R. Dow Op-Ed in New York Times July 8, 2011
- [“Homophobia, Gender Deviance, and the Death Penalty”](#) in *Queer (In)justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States* Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock (Beacon Press: Beacon Press, 2011) pages 79-90

SPRING BREAK

read [When the Prisoners Ran Walpole: A True Story in the Movement for Prison Abolition](#), Jamie Bissonette (South End Press: Cambridge, 2008)

Session 6 – Presentation by Jamie Bissonette and/or Bobby Delello on the story of Walpole

Required Reading

- Catch up on reading if behind

Suggested Reading

- [“Psychological Warfare at Norfolk Prison Camp,”](#) Juno Bakali Tshombe/Craig Dee Anderson in *Who Took the Weight? Black Voices from Norfolk Prison* (Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts: Boston, 1972) pages 91-97

Session 7 – Women and Incarceration

Required Reading

- [Resistance Behind Bars: the Struggles of Incarcerated Women](#) Victoria Law (PM Press: Oakland, 2009) “Overview” and “Unlikely Communities” (pages 1-28) *Bad copy job, my apologies*
- [“Cruel But Not Unusual – The Punishment of Women in US Prisons,”](#) Marilyn Buck and Laura Whitehorn in *The New Abolitionists: Neo-slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*, Joy James (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2005) pages 259-271
- [“Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex”](#) in *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology* (South End Press: Cambridge, 2006) pages 223-226
- [“Severed Ties: The Incarcerated Mother,”](#) in *Black Prison Movements USA* (Africa World Press: Trenton, 1995) pages 27-32

Session 8 – Heteropatriarchy and the Prison Industrial Complex

Required Reading

- [“Queering Anti-prison work: African American Lesbians in the Juvenile Justice System,”](#)

Beth Richie in *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* edited by Julia Sudbury (Routledge: NYC, 2005) pages 73-86

- [Queer \(In\)justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States](#) Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock (Beacon Press: Beacon Press, 2011) Ch. 5 “Caging Deviance: Prisons as Queer Spaces” pages 92-117
- [“Making It Happen, Mama: A Conversation with Miss Major” in Captive Genders: Trans-Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex](#) edited by Eric Stanley and Nat Smith (AK Press: Oakland, 2011) Ch. 19

Suggested Reading

- [“P.I.M.P: Prostitutes in Municipal Politics” in Policing Public Sex](#), edited by Dangerous Bedfellows (South End Press: Boston, 1995) pages 251-262
- [“Transforming Carceral Logics: 10 Reasons to Dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex Through Queer/Trans Analysis and Action by S. Lamble](#) in *Captive Genders: Trans-Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* edited by Eric Stanley and Nat Smith (AK Press: Oakland, 2011)

Session 9 – Healthcare and Prisons

Required Reading

- [“Private Health Care in Jails Can Be a Death Sentence,”](#) Paul von Zielbauer in *Prison Profiteers: Who Makes Money From Mass Incarceration* Edited by Tara Herivel and Paul Wright (The New Press: NYC, 2007) pages 204-227
- [“Engaged in Life: Alan Berkman on Prison Health Care](#) (as told to Susie Day) in *The New Abolitionists: Neo-slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*, Joy James (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2005) pages 289-294
- [“Regulatory Sites: Management, Confinement and HIV/AIDS” by Michelle Potts in Captive Genders: Trans-Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex](#) edited by Eric Stanley and Nat Smith (AK Press: Oakland, 2011) Ch.7

Session 10 – Police and Guard Labor: The First Line of the Prison Industrial Complex

Required Readings

- *Our Enemies in Blue*, Kristian Williams (South End Press: Cambridge, 2007) ch 6 “Police Autonomy and Blue Power”
- [“Garrison America,”](#) Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev in *Economists’ Voice* March 2007 pages 1-7
- [“Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color”](#) in *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology* (South End Press: Cambridge, 2006) pages 138-156

Session 11 – Theology and Abolition

Required Readings

- [The Fall of the Prison: Biblical Perspectives on Prison Abolition](#), Lee Griffith (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1993) “Prisons and the Bible” pages 87-

118 and “Prisons and Discipleship” pages 177-203

- [Death Blossoms: Reflections from a Prisoner of Conscience](#), Mumia Abu Jamal (South End Press: Cambridge, 1996) pages 34-60
- [“A Theology for the Penal Abolition Movement,”](#) Jason Lydon in *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* (Taylor and Francis Group: Philadelphia, 2011) pages 296-303
- [Good Punishment: Christian Moral Practice and US Imprisonment](#), James Samuel Logan (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 2008) “Mining Stanley Hauerwas: Foundations for a Christian Social Ethics of Good Punishment,” pages 143-174

Session 12 – Transformative Justice

Required Readings

- (skim) [“Toward Transformative Justice”](#) Generation 5
- [Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System](#), Laura Magnani and Harmon L. Wray (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2006)
- [“Beautiful, Difficult, Powerful: Ending Sexual Assault Through Transformative Justice,”](#) The Chrysalis Collective in *The Revolution Starts at Home*, edited by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samrasinha (South End Press: NYC, 2011) Ch. 14

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