

Social Change vs. Appropriation; Abolition vs. Reform

Contact Information

Cynthia Chandler
Justice Now
cynthia@jnow.org
510.325.4127

Course Description

The course will examine the role and limits of the law in effecting radical social change as seen through critical examination of the current work of the prison reform movement and the counter modern resurgence of the prison industrial complex abolition movement. Emphasis will be placed on evaluation of legal tools for effecting gender liberation, racial justice, and anti-violence strategies (including anti-state violence). In addition to critiquing the role of law, students will be asked to explore the viability and possibility of combining the law with communications, human rights, organizing, and other tools to impact social change: generally asking who should use the law and how, toward what end, and how do you know when you get there. The course is intended to prepare students for on-the-ground problem-solving as practitioners and activists surrounding lawyering, coalition building, evaluating one's impact, ethical use of one's power, and what to do if your strategies fail.

Course Materials

Assigned reading available on course website; no need to purchase other sources for required readings. Additional handouts and CD *The We That Sets Us Free* will be provided. Students can pick up a copy of *The We That Sets Us Free* from Jan McNew in 31 Cargill Hall beginning Wednesday, June 9, 2010.

Course Requirements

- (1) Class Participation: Students are expected to attend all classes unless they receive prior permission to be absent and make plans to make up the work in a timely fashion. All students will be asked to comment on and respond to the reading and to actively engage in class discussion. We also will have in-class activities, as well as role-playing.
- (2) Written Requirement: Students will be asked to write a SHORT reflection piece IN CLASS twice during the course. The piece should demonstrate knowledge of the reading materials, analysis of the topics discussed in course to date, and include your personal thoughts – creativity and demonstrated grappling with subject matter is what I'm looking for! I am not looking for summaries of the reading but rather, your own ideas as they relate to the class reading, discussion, and in-class assignments.
- (3) Group Project: Students will work together in small groups during the final session to develop a presentation on one of several possible hypotheticals highlighting themes of the course.

Class 1—Thursday, June 10, 6:15-9:15pm (3 hours): Introductions and Defining the Prison Industrial Complex

Class Dedicated to Patty Contreras

Half of the class will be spent on introductions and establishing ground rules for the course. The second half will center on defining the scope of the Prison Industrial Complex and tensions between prison reform versus radical social change efforts over the history of imprisonment. Please come prepared to share what inspires you to take this class and what you hope to accomplish.

Readings:

1. *What is Abolition*, Critical Resistance
2. *What is the Prison Industrial Complex*, Critical Resistance
3. *Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition*, Angela Y. Davis
4. *Globalization and US Prison Growth: from military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian Militarism*, Ruth W. Gilmore
5. *The Prison Industrial Complex in Indigenous California*, Stormy Ogden
6. Cassandra Shaylor and Cynthia Chandler, *Reform Vs. Abolition: Points of Tension and Connection*, in DEFENDING JUSTICE: AN ACTIVIST RESOURCE KIT 241 (Palak Shah ed., 2005 by Political Research Associates).
7. Challenging White Supremacy Workshop materials
8. *Changework*, Tema Okun

Class 2—Friday, June 11, 1:30-5:30pm (4 hours): Litigation, Direct services, and Change

Class Dedicated to Rosemary Willeby

Discussion will surround the role/success/failure of class-action litigation and direct legal services in addressing the prison industrial complex, as well as the question of who should (morally, ethically, strategically) direct social change efforts and the role of legal work in movement building (and who gets to run the movement). We will begin the class by watching “Truth to Power,” a video of excerpts taken from 2 days of testimony of people in California women’s prisons on abusive conditions, followed by a discussion of conditions and legal violations occurring in that context. The second half of class will examine the pros/cons of three legal models for addressing abuses against this specific population: modern dominant class-action litigation strategy as represented by the Prison Law Office; activist-infused class-action litigation as represented by Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and the California Coalition for Women Prisoners; and direct legal services (including peer-based underground education and representation) as a movement building tool as represented by Justice Now.

Reflection piece due at end of session.

Readings:

1. *Lawyers at the Prison Gates: Organizational Structure and Corrections Advocacy*, Susan Sturm
2. *California Prison Receiver Seeks Release Of Ill Inmates*, Don Thomas
3. *The We That Sets Us Free* (listen to at minimum the spoken tracks of the CD)

Class 3—Saturday, June 12, 12-4pm (4 hours): Policy Work and the Lessons of Appropriation: Identifying a Wolf In Sheep’s Clothing, or Is Change Change and at What Cost?

Class Dedicated to Cookie and Misty Rojo

In the face of limitations of the law in effecting change, legislation has been proposed to address “the prison crisis.” This class will examine the efficacy of one of the most prolific trends in prison policy: advocacy directed toward the needs of sub-populations of people in prison (i.e., the innocent, elderly, terminally ill, women, children, transgender people, etc.). Such legislation is usually either aimed at decarcerating or protecting specific “vulnerable” classes of people in prison. Discussion will surround the political/cultural impact of such policy, the danger of cooption of such policy, and who should direct policy generally, through examination of one powerful national special-population campaign and Justice Now’s fight to defeat it: gender responsive prison expansion.

Policy and coalitional-practice group roll-play exercise.

Readings:

1. CA Penal Code 1170(e)
2. CA SB 1399 (Leno)
3. Proposition 66
4. *Gender responsiveness Strategies for Women Offenders*, Barbara Bloom, Barbara Owen, Stephanie Covington
5. *Prison Proposal Is Disturbingly Akin to Eugenics*, Robin Levi and Vanessa Huang
6. *Sentenced to Panties Only*, Cookie Conception
7. *Is This Gender Responsive?*, Misty Rojo

Class 4—Thursday, June 17, 6:15-9:15pm (3 hours): Strategic Communications, Coalitional Work, & Human Rights as Tools for Change

Class dedicated to Theresa Martinez

With traditional legal and policy efforts facing barriers to effecting systemic or institutional change, activists have looked to new language, new strategies, and new tools to impact change. This is a skills building class, with break-out individual and small group exercises in strategic communications and coalition design. The goal is to make

everyone more impactful communicators and organizers, as well as versatile in seeing how political issues and movements intersect globally. We will also examine who has access to these skills, who has access to promoting their messaging, who makes an effective messenger, and how lack of access and/or adherence to mission hinders social change efforts.

Readings:

1. Spitfire Materials
2. *Joint Statement Against Eugenics and Prison Construction*, Justice Now and Committee on Women Population and the Environment
3. *Coalition Politics*, Bernice Johnson Reagon
4. *Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens, The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?*, Cathy Cohen
5. *Reproductive Rights are Human Rights*, Sister Song
6. *Shackling as Human Rights Violations for Pregnant Women*, Sister Song

Class 5—Friday, June 18, 1:30-5:30pm (4 hours): Non-Violent Responses to Harm, Building Community not Prisons, & Decarceration

Class dedicated to Judy Ricci

The goal of this class is to discuss strategies for building a safe, compassionate world without prisons, including: alternatives accountability and safety models that do not rely on policing and prisons, community development and sustainability, and decarceration. What systems must be in place for radical social change? Who can effect such change?

Second Reflection Piece Due at End of Session

Readings:

1. *What is to Be Done?*, Ruth W. Gilmore
2. *The Color of Violence: Introduction*, Andrea Smith, Beth Ritchie, Julia Sudbury, and Janelle White
3. *Gender Violence and the Prison-Industrial Complex*, Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
4. Generation 5's politics and positions (read links available at www.generationfive.org)
5. *Are the Cops in our Heads and Hearts?*, Paula Rojas
6. Excerpts from *Instead of Prisons*
7. *Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization*, The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute

Class 6—Saturday, June 19, 12-4pm (4 hours): Applying Knowledge and Experiencing Polemics

Students will divide into groups to consider strategies for addressing one of a choice of polemics highlighting issues raised by the course. Groups will present on their grappling. Formats may include presenting collectively developed action plans, presenting a fishbowl debate representing differing views/outcomes, designing a communications and/or policy campaign, etc.