

Instructor: Stacy Bell

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Office: Humanities 105

Office hours: TTh 11-12, MW 2-4, and by appointment

Required Texts

Are Prisons Obsolete?, Angela Davis

A Woman Doing Life, Erin George

Going up the River, Joseph T. Hallinan

In Cold Blood, Truman Capote

Methland, Nick Reding

Newjack, Ted Conover

Miscellaneous readings, films, music.

The United States has the world's highest incarceration rate: Americans comprise 5% of the world's population but 25% of the world's prison population. Incarceration costs about \$66 billion per year. Half of those in U.S. jails and prisons have committed nonviolent offenses. Is America's incarceration system sustainable? Are the lives of those affected by the system—incarcerated people, their families, law enforcement, prison employees—in balance?

Course objectives:

- To critically read and analyze contemporary fiction and nonfiction depictions of incarceration in the U.S.
- To gather and analyze a corpus of mainstream depictions of incarceration.
- To collect and share narratives, through collaboration with incarcerated women, about the experience of incarceration.
- To apply the process of rhetorical analysis to identify the prevailing arguments about incarceration.
- To consider the justifications for incarceration from various perspectives, including religion, social science, public health, and law.
- To discover, through research, analysis, and reflection, your attitude toward and understanding of incarceration in the U.S. today.

This course is a seminar organized around discussion of shared readings, guest lectures, and fieldwork. Guest lecturers will include professors Mike McQuaide and Amanda Pendleton, as well as experts in law, religious studies, and prison education. We hope to travel to Lee Arandale State Prison up to three times this spring so that you may work collaboratively with incarcerated women in the process of collecting real narratives about life in prison.

Assignments & Evaluation:

Reflective responses: You will write a 1000 word reflective response [10%] to each book. 10% x 6 = 60%

Your essays are evaluated holistically. Successful essays should meet the following objectives, depending on the nature of the assignment:

- To identify the argument in an assigned text
- To find evidence in the text to support your interpretation
- To construct a well organized essay with a clear introduction and thesis, a body that supports the thesis, and a logical and appropriate conclusion
- To produce coherent, functional English grammar and usage
- To demonstrate mastery of the appropriate mechanics for quoting and citing sources
- To proofread and edit your written work carefully before submission
- To respond to feedback in the process of revision

Reading quizzes: Reading the books is essential to your ability to contribute to discussion and to develop deeper understanding of the issues and themes on which this course is constructed. You will take a short reading quiz [2.55%] for each book. $2.5\% \times 6 = 15\%$.

Final project [25%]: You will present your final project at a formal gathering of the honors students on April 15.

Attendance: I expect students in an honors seminar to come to class. After two unexcused absences, I will begin deducting one point from your final average for each additional absence.

Business

Blackboard: Your class conference, including all information about assignments, your grades and your class syllabus, is available to you on Blackboard. You are responsible for knowing the information and materials posted there.

Office Hours: Please sign up for an appointment. There will be a sign up sheet outside my door every week. If you cannot see me during office hours, speak to me after class to arrange an appointment.

Late Essays: Your essays are due at the *beginning* of class on the specified date. I will lower the grade for an unexcused late essay by one full letter grade for each day it is late; after one full week the essay will receive a grade of zero.

Attendance: I will not distinguish between tardies and absences. You may miss two days of class without penalty; after that, you will lose 10 points from your attendance grade for each absence.

Email: Use email for the following reasons:

- To cancel an appointment
- To notify me of an absence
- To ask a legitimate question about an assignment
- To say hello!

I delete emails requesting information contained in the syllabus. I delete emails about grades. Let's have those conversations in person; let me know and I will be happy to talk to you in my office. Your grades and averages will be available to you on our Blackboard site.

Plagiarism: The work you submit for class must be your own. You may not submit an essay more than once. If you use another author's words or original ideas in your writing, you must give credit to the author by using MLA documentation form. An essay suspected of plagiarism will be turned over to the Honor Council. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, see me.

Electronic toys: Laptops are permitted only when I require them for class. Silence your phone and put it away during class. If you use your phone as a dictionary or translator, let me know.

A Note about Printing: Blue and gold makes green! You can print on recycled paper, and double-sided essays save paper. You must turn in paper copies of all essays, no exceptions. I cannot print your essays for you.

JANUARY

- 15 Introduction and Objectives
- 17 Professor Mike McQuaide: Prisons as Total Institutions
- 22 *Going up the River*
Reflective analysis due
- 24
- 29 *Notes from a Woman Doing Life*
Reflective analysis due
- 31

FEBRUARY

- 5 *In Cold Blood*
Reflective analysis due
- 7
- 12 Morning trip to Jackson State Prison
- 14

19

21 CLASS WILL NOT MEET TODAY.

26 *Methland*
Reflective analysis due

28

MARCH

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7 CLASS WILL NOT MEET TODAY.

12 Spring Break

14 Spring Break

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APRIL

2 *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
Reflective analysis due

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