

## **COMM 499: An Introduction to Abolition**

2.0 Units

Fall 2020 – Fridays – 9am-10.50am

Section: 20773 R

Location: Online

Instructor: Dr. Francois Bar

Office: Online

Office Hours: by appointment

Contact Info: [fbar@usc.edu](mailto:fbar@usc.edu)

Co-Instructor: Jessica Hatrick

Office: Online

Office Hours: by appointment

Contact Info: [hatrick@usc.edu](mailto:hatrick@usc.edu)

### **I. Course Description**

As a result of the recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, and Breonna Taylor - among many, many others, conversations around police and prison abolition have entered the mainstream, as a response this group will gather to engage with the study of abolition. This study will look at the history of abolition as a theory, looking at the abolition of: slavery, the police, and the prison industrial complex.

### **II. Student Learning Outcomes**

To be collectively designed with students.

Optional: [unlearning objectives](#).

### **III. Course Notes**

People can partake as a reading group for no credit, or the course can be taken for credit and then must be taken for a grade.

### **IV. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

All readings can be found on blackboard or linked on the syllabus.

Participants are encouraged to attend the [Study & Struggle Program](#) put on by the Movement For Black Lives.

### **V. Description and Assessment of Assignments & Assignment Submission Policy**

Students are graded on

1. **Participation (15%):** You will be evaluated on your preparedness for section and your contribution to discussion. This means the depth of your engagement with the readings, rather than how much you talk. Forms of participation involve: speaking up during section, coming to office hours, emailing me, note-taking, discussing the readings with other students outside of class.
2. **Project 1 (20%):** 2-3 page response to an abolitionist or police/prison justice organization, suggested organizations below:
  - a. Black and Pink
  - b. California Coalition for Women Prisoners
  - c. Critical Resistance
  - d. Initiate Justice
  - e. Justice LA
  - f. MPD150
  - g. Prison Activist Resource Center
  - h. Survived and Punished
  - i. Other organization (check with instructors ahead of time)
3. **Project 2 (20%):** Details to come
4. **Final Project (45%):** Students have two options for the final paper due one week after the final class.
  - a. A 5-7 page research paper on one of the week's topics.
  - b. A creative project exploring what a future without police and prison would look like and a two page summary of your project. If you need funding for your project consider applying to the [Mobilize! Arts in Action Grant](#). This can take the form of:
    - i. Art (drawing, painting, sculpture)
    - ii. Creative writing
    - iii. Poem or song
    - iv. Sound or video

## VI. Grading

### a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation	30	15%
Project 1	40	20%
Project 2	40	20%
Final Project	90	45%
TOTAL	200	100%

b. Grading Scale

93 to 100%: A	80% to 82%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 92%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	63% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	73% to 76%: C	60% to 62%: D-
83% to 86%: B	70% to 72%: C-	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded.
B	Good; moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; only minor substantive shortcomings.
C	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most expectations are met; despite any shortcomings, demonstrates basic level of understanding.
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; more than one significant shortcoming; deficiencies indicate only the most rudimentary level of understanding.
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; deficiencies indicate lack of understanding.

d. Grading Timeline

Grading Timeframe and Missing or Inaccurate Score Inquiries/Disputes

For effective learning, students should receive timely feedback on assignments and exams. Therefore, every attempt will be made to grade assignments/exams and post grades within two weeks. Scores for all assignments and exams are regularly updated on Blackboard. You are responsible for notifying the Instructor within one (1) week of a score posting if you think a score is missing or inaccurate. Moreover, you only have this period of time to contest a score on an assignment/exam. If you fail to inquire/notify us of any discrepancy, missing score, or contest a score within one week of the date the score is posted, no further changes will be made.

**VII. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

Week 1 (Aug 21). Haiti {3 pages}

- [Required] Michel-Rolph Trouillot: “Unthinking a chimera” from Silencing The Past {3 pages}
- [Optional] Ada Ferrer: ““An Excess of Communication” The Capture of News in a Slave Society” in Freedom's mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the age of revolution {39 pages}
- [Look] [Haiti's Revolution in Art: Jacob Lawrence's Toussaint L'Ouverture Series](#)

Week 2 (Aug 28). Abolition of Slavery {6 pages + 54 mins}

GUESTS: [Initiate Justice](#)

- [Required] Manisha Sinha: “Introduction: The Radical Tradition of Abolition” in The Slave's Cause: a History of Abolition {6 pages}
- [Required] [“Britain and the Slave Trade”](#) (June 15th 2020 of History Extra Podcast) {54min}

Week 3 (Sep 4). The 13th Amendment {36 pages + 1hr40 mins}

GUEST: [Dr. Dennis Childs](#)

- [Required] Ava DuVernay's The 13th (only available on netflix, please reach out if you do not have a login) {1hr 40min}
- [Required] Dennis Childs: “‘Except as Punishment for a Crime’: The Thirteenth Amendment and the Rebirth of Chattel Imprisonment” in Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary {36 pages}

Week 4 (Sep 11). Policing Part 1 {61 pages}

- [Required] Derecka Purnell “How I Became a Police Abolitionist” in The Atlantic {7 pages}
- [Required] Chapters 1 and 2 from Alex Vitale The End of Policing {54 pages}
- [Optional] Chapters 3-10 and the Conclusion from Alex Vitale The End of Policing {174 pages}
- [Look] [The Justice Arts Coalition Galleries](#)

Week 5 (Sep 18). Policing Part 2 {42 pages}

GUEST: Kelly Savage (member of [Survived and Punished](#))

- [Required] Introduction and Chapter 1 from Max Felker-Kantor: Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD {42 pages}
- [Required] Excerpt from Policing the Planet
- [Optional] Chapters 2-9 and Conclusion from Max Felker-Kantor: Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD {205 pages}
- [Optional] Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy” Social Identities 9.2 {13 pages}

- [Look] [Swaraj Jail University Art and Design Academy](#)

Week 6 (Sep 25). Schools and Prisons {53 pages}

GUEST: [Anthony J. Williams](#) (10am-11am)

- [Required] Mariame Kaba & Erica Meiners: “Arresting the Carceral State” in *Jacobin* {4 pages}
- [Required] Savannah Shange, ““Why Can’t We Learn African?” Academic Pathways, Coalition Pedagogy, and the Demands of Abolition,” in *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, + Schooling in San Francisco*” {22 pages}
- [Required] Mike Davis and Jon Weiner “23. The Children of malcolm X: Black High School Activists (1968-69)” in *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* {21 pages}
- [Required] Anthony J. Williams, (2016). *The Road to Private Prison Divestment: Inside the University of California student campaign*. *Boom*, 6(2), 98–103. {6 pages}

Week 7 (Oct 2). Political Prisoners {80 pages}

- [Required] Chapters 1 & 3 from Assata Shakur: *Assata: An Autobiography* {42 pages}
- [Required] Dylan Rodriguez, “Introduction: American Apocalypse,” in *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* {38 pages}
- [Optional] Chapters 2, 4-21 and Postscript from Assata Shakur: *Assata: An Autobiography* {231 pages}
- [Look] [Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners Past Image Gallery](#)

Week 8 (Oct 9). Settler Colonialism and the Carceral State + Prison Uprisings {41 pages}

- [Required] Angela Davis: “Four: On Palestine, G4S, and the Prison-Industrial Complex” in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* {10 pages}
- [Required] Jenell Navarro and Kimberly Robertson “Mass Incarceration since 1492” in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* {8 pages}
- [Required] Dan Berger: “Introduction” in *Captive Nation* {19 pages}
- [Required] Attica Liberation Faction *Manifesto of Demands* (1971) {4 pages}
- [Look] Critical Resistance - [Imagine Freedom: Art Works for Abolition](#)

Week 9 (Oct 16). Expanding the Prison-Industrial Complex {74 pages}

- [Required] Ruha Benjamin: Introduction in *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* {48 pages}
- [Required] Eric Stanley and Nat Smith (eds.): Introduction in *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* {12 pages}
- [Required] Mae M. Ngai, “Introduction. Illegal Aliens: A Problem of Law and History” *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. {14 pages}

- [Optional] “The Johnson Reed Act of 1924 and the Reconstruction of Race in Immigration Law”; and “Deportation Policy and the Making and Unmaking of Illegal Aliens,” in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* {75 pages}
- [Look] [How Art Changed the Prison: The Work of CPA’s Prison Arts Program](#)

Week 10 (Oct 23). Carceral Capitalism {124 pages}

- [Required] Introduction and “6. Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety” from Jackie Wang: *Carceral Capitalism* {124 pages}
- [Optional] Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property”
- [Look] [The House That Herman Built](#)

Week 11 (Oct 30). Carceral vs Anticarceral Feminism {24 pages + 1hr 24 mins}

- [Required] Critical Resistance and Incite! Women of Colour against Violence: “Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex” in *Colour of Violence: the Incite! Anthology* {4 pages}
- [Required] Victoria Law (2014) *Against Carceral Feminism* in *JacobinMag.com* {4 pages}
- [Required] Introduction from Sarah Haley’s *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* {16 pages}
- [Required] [Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition](#) on *The Intercept* {1hr 25mins}
- [Optional] Patrice Douglass, “Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying”
- [Optional] Chapter 5 “Sabotage and Black Radical Feminist Refusal” from Sarah Haley: *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* {54 pages}
- [Look] Nicole Fleetwood *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*

Week 12 (Nov 6). Transformative Justice, Care Work, and Mutual Aid {146 pages + 27 mins}

- [Required] “Chapter 6: Abolitionist Alternatives” from Angela Davis: *Are Prisons Obsolete?* {12 pages}
- [Required] Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (2014) ‘Transformative Justice and Community Accountability’ {1 page}
- [Required] Aorta Collective (2013) ‘Punitive, Restorative & Transformative Justice: The basics’ {4 pages}
- [Required] Waakoodiwin (2016) *In Lieu of Justice: Thoughts on Oppression, Identity & Earth* {7 pages}
- [Required] “Looking Out” (S01E04 of *Ear Hustle*) {27 minutes}

- [Required - skim] Hilliard, D., & The, D. H. P. N. F. (2008). Black panther party : Service to the people programs. {85 pages}
- [Required] Ren-Yo Hwang, “Deviant Care for Deviant Futures: QTBIPOC Radical Relationism as Mutual Aid against Carceral Care” in TSQ {20 pages}
- [Optional] What is Mutual Aid? {5 minutes}
- [Optional] Chapters 1-5 from Angela Davis: Are Prisons Obsolete? {97 pages}

Week 13 (Nov 13). Abolitionist Futurities {97 pages}

GUEST: [Dr. Andrew Dilts](#)

- [Required] Justice by Mariama Kaba (in 50 Feminist Utopias) {11 pages}
- [Required] Allegra McLeod, “Envisioning Abolition Democracy” {37 pages}
- [Required] Tyron P. Woods, “‘Something of the Fever and the Fret’: Antirackness in the Critical Prison Studies Fold,” in Conceptual Aphasia in Black {28 pages}
- [Required] Andrew Dilts, “Crisis, Critique, and Abolition” in A Time for Critique {21 pages}
- [Optional] Akwaeke Emezi: Pet {203 pages}

## **VIII. Policies and Procedures**

### **Basic Needs**

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify us if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable us to connect you with resources.

### **Course Content**

The content and discussion in this course will necessarily engage with violent – sometimes graphic content - every week. Much of it will be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. Please make sure to look after yourself throughout and take time to process the information provided. Should you ever need to step back from the discussion, please feel free to and then message the instructor’s to let them know that you needed some space.

### **Email Policy**

Please email Jessica as your primary contact for this course, she will try to answer all emails within two business days. If you have not heard back from her by then, try sending another email.

### **Student Conduct**

Be respectful. Some of the topics we discuss may be sensitive. It is okay for you to disagree with me or each other, but please do so respectfully. One of our goals is to make the class a place where we can explore topics that are at times difficult with respect, openness, and empathy for others who may not share your views or experiences. Our notion of respect in this classroom will follow Robert James Jr.'s (@SonOfBaldwin) belief that "We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist."

## **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

### **Academic Integrity Policy:**

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

### **Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course, without approval of the instructor.

### **Synchronous session recording notice**

Live class sessions will be recorded and made available to students through Blackboard (including transcriptions). Please remember that USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. As a student, you are responsible for the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing SCampus policies regarding class notes (<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/>). These rules will be strictly enforced, and violations will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

### **Going back to Campus**

Although we are starting the semester with online instruction only, conditions may improve. In such case, courses listed as hybrid will give opportunity to students to attend class in person.



This will happen only by following the strictest health guidelines and safety protocols. These are listed in the Trojans Return page. Please take the time to read this ahead so that you are prepared in case it is possible to return to in-person instruction.

#### Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on **Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness**.

#### **Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press*

*“0” after hours – 24/7 on call [studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*

[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symlicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symlicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710*

[campussupport.usc.edu](http://campussupport.usc.edu)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Annenberg Student Success Fund*

<https://annenbergsuccessfund.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

## **Community Guidelines**

- Communication is different when virtual
- Confidentiality - share the message not the story
- Embracing the discomfort while being gentle with each other
- Make space/take space

- Oops and Ouch - ouch:if someone says something hurtful; oops: if you say something hurtful
- Use “I” statements
- Using emojis/facial expressions

### **Technology**

- Video on during class preferred but not required
- Recordings by request
- Try discord for other communication