



GESM 120 (Section 35385R): Crime & Punishment in L.A.

Units: 4

Spring 2023; T, Th 3:30-4:50 pm

Location: GFS 228

Instructor: Dr. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus,
Associate Professor of English

Office: THH 449D

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9am-12pm on Zoom; please email me for an appointment

Contact Info: rauterku@usc.edu

IT Help: USC Information Technology Services

Hours of Service: Telephone support available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Email support available Mon.-Fri. 8:00 am-6:00 pm.

Contact Info: consult@usc.edu; (213) 740-5555;

see also Dornsife Technology Services at:

dornsife.usc.edu/contact-cts/

Course Description

Nowhere in L.A. is the gap between the rich and the poor wider than it is in the criminal justice system. The rich and the famous go unpunished, while the poor go to prison. Race and gender compound this inequality, as people of color are disproportionately stopped by the police, beaten, murdered, charged with criminal offenses, and/or given harsher sentences than whites. What is the nature of crime in L.A.? Why do we often pursue punishment as opposed to more restorative forms of justice? And what does it say about us as a society?

In this seminar, students will explore the relationship between crime and punishment in L.A. by considering a wide range of narratives from a variety of perspectives, including autobiography, criminology, documentary film, history, and literary journalism. In particular, students will reflect on the period from the Watts Riots to the present day so as to develop an appreciation for how contemporary inequalities are influenced by the legacies of the past. We will discuss the impact of deindustrialization and white flight on the city, the Rodney King beating/trial, the L.A. Riots, the O.J. Simpson trial, the epidemic of blue-on-black homicide, mass incarceration, and criminal justice reform.



By the end of the class, students will have a greater understanding of the complex forces that contribute to crime in L.A. and that shape our responses to it. Students will also learn how to think about local problems in relationship to larger, national conversations about racial/social/economic disparities and social justice. The goal of this seminar is to introduce students to the modes of humanistic analysis, to think critically about the world we inhabit, and to contemplate what it would take to create a more equitable society.



Learning Objectives

- Understand human experience as narrative
- Engage with large, abstract ideas such as justice, ethics, and democracy
- Learn how to read, think, and write critically about complex issues
- Reflect on how race, class, and gender affect our lives and experiences, especially within the criminal justice system
- Learn how to assess contemporary social problems from multiple vantage points and how to develop informed opinions about them.

Course Notes

Grading Type: Letter

This is a web-enhanced course that utilizes Blackboard. I will post assignments, supplemental readings and links to digital content on the platform.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Beginner; access to Blackboard, Zoom, and the ability to stream digital content on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, etc.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Books:

1. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010)
2. Jill Leovy, *Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America* (2015)
3. Sanyika Shakur, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (1993)
4. Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994)

Films:

1. John Ridley, *Let It Fall* (YouTube)
2. Ezra Edelman, *O.J.: Made In America*, (ESPN+, Hulu, and Disney+)

Web Materials:

1. The L.A. Riots: The Independent and Webster Commissions Collections:
<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-los-angeles-riots-christopher-and-webster-commissions-collections/index?path=webster-commission-records>

**Note: additional readings will appear on Blackboard*

**** All books are available for purchase/rent at the USC Bookstore: 840 Childs Way, Los Angeles 90089 (213) 740-0066**

Description and Assessment of Assignments:

1. **Personal Essay (3-4 pages)**—What is your personal investment in the themes of this class? What brought you here? How have you been affected by issues of crime and punishment? Which aspect of the criminal justice system most intrigues you? Why? How might your background/upbringing have shaped your views? Explain.
2. **Reaction Paper (2-3 pages)**—Select one of the assigned readings and draft an informal response to it. Prioritize your personal experience reading and thinking about the work. What experiences and/or feelings did it evoke? What impact did it have on you? What are the major takeaways? And how might you utilize the information you received as you go forward? You will present your paper to the class on the day that we discuss the corresponding material.
3. **Midterm Assignment: Critical Thinking Essay (5-7 pages)**—Select a topic or a work that we have discussed and create an original argument about it. Your thesis should be complex—neither easily provable or disprovable. Using relevant examples and evidentiary material, support your argument across several paragraphs. Your essay should have a highly organized structure. You need

to draft an introduction that grabs the reader’s attention, introduces your topic, provides brief background information and context, and states your thesis. Include body paragraphs that advance your argument using topic sentences, concrete details (examples), and commentary (presentation and interpretation of evidence). Anticipate counterarguments and disprove. Draft a conclusion that sums up the value of your argument in a larger context. What are the stakes? Why does it matter?

4. **End of Term Assignment: Reflective Essay (10-12 pages)**—Write a reflective essay in which you discuss what you learned in this class. How has it changed your perspective? How did you grow? Which reading/viewing assignments made the biggest impression on you? How will you take what you learned in this class and apply it to your life going forward and/or use it to bring about positive change? I will provide a more detailed assignment sheet well in advance of the due date.

Grading Breakdown

| Assignment | Points | % of Grade |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| Attendance & Participation | 100 | 10 |
| Personal Essay | 100 | 20 |
| Reaction Paper | 100 | 20 |
| Midterm Paper | 100 | 25 |
| Final Paper | 100 | 25 |
| TOTAL | 500 | 100 |

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

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

Assignment Rubric

A-range (90-100): Essay provides a sophisticated analysis of the topic or work in question; contains an identifiable argument and engages with the material in a complex way to illuminate cultural, historical or political issues relevant to its discussion. The essay is well-written and highly polished. The essay is formatted according to MLA or Chicago citation guidelines.

B-range (80-89): Essay provides a solid analysis of the topic or work in question and attempts to engage with the material in a complex and thorough manner, but it does not fully address all of the relevant issues or does not provide a thorough accounting of the cultural, historical, or political factors involved. The essay may have a few compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may contain minor citation errors.

C-range (70-79): Essay does not provide a compelling analysis of the topic or work in question and does not earnestly attempt to address the cultural, historical, or political realms in a complex way. The argument is underdeveloped. The essay may have several compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may have multiple citation errors or may not properly cite sources or include a bibliography.

D-range (60-69): Essay lacks an argument and does not do the work of analysis. The essay does not engage with the relevant material and does not address cultural, historical, or political issues. The essay may be rife with compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may not reflect the use of a citation method.

F (59 and below): The essay does not demonstrate appropriate scholarly effort/engagement, or the student failed to submit the assignment.

Grading Philosophy

For each written assignment you complete and submit, you will receive a brief narrative statement (about 3-4 sentences) summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of your paper. You will also receive two scores: one for content (i.e. the quality and rigor of your ideas or argument), and another for composition (i.e. how well you write, including organization, grammar, mechanics, and usage). At the end of the semester when I compute final grades, I will average the two scores to calculate a final composite score for each assignment. The rationale for this particular grading scheme lies in my acknowledgement of the very subjective nature of grading. It is extremely difficult to assess learning, and personally, I believe that our current educational system encourages students to place too much focus on the grade and too little focus on the learning. This is an earnest attempt to prioritize the learning and to de-emphasize the grade.

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are due on the day listed on the syllabus. Please submit all work directly to me via email. Your work should be submitted as a MS Word document so that I can use the “reviewing” feature to comment on your paper. The file name should be: your first and last name_the name of the class_and the name of the assignment.

Grading Timeline

All assignments will be graded and returned no later than two weeks after submission. Final papers will not be returned unless requested.

Additional Policies

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Consistent attendance and participation is critical to your success in this class. If you miss a class, then you should reach out to another student in the class for notes or make an appointment to see me during office hours. Please do not come to class late or leave early, as this is disruptive to me and your fellow classmates. If you need to arrive late or leave early on a specific day, please let me know as soon as possible.
2. **Course Format/Meeting Structure:** The format of this course is a mixture of lecture, discussion, and applied learning activities. I’m a big fan of the “flipped” classroom, in which activities that would traditionally be assigned as homework are completed during class time. Towards this end, I may use freewriting exercises, media, visual art, op-eds, supplemental readings, or other aids to enhance our understanding of the material and structure our time in class. Always bring your reading and writing materials to our meetings. Class will generally begin with an ice-breaker/warm up activity—e.g. we might discuss a quote, screen a clip, or engage in a freewriting activity. After this, I/or another student might present important information in the form of a mini-lecture, guided discussion, or a reaction paper. Other times, I will give you an applied learning activity to work on in a pair or smaller group. Class will end with a summary/wrap-up of the material discussed.
4. **Email:** I will respond to emails during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 5 pm. Emails sent outside of this window will be responded to during the next business day. I generally reply to emails within a day, but if it takes me longer, please be patient.
5. **Office Hours:** I am available, by appointment, for virtual office hour visits via Zoom. If you’d like to schedule a virtual visit, please email me for a 20-minute consultation. In office hours, I can elaborate on class discussions and help with assignments.
6. **The Writing Center:** While I am always happy to meet with you in office hours to discuss the materials we read/discuss in class as well as assist you with approaches to your written assignments, if you need writing help, then I recommend that you make an appointment for a consultation with a tutor at the writing center. The staff is comprised of scholars and teachers trained in Composition and Rhetoric as academic fields and can assist you with the writing process from start to finish. You can book a consultation here: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>.
7. **In-class Behavior:** You are expected to demonstrate proper academic etiquette at all times. Please do not check and/or send emails while in class, text-message, or complete assignments for other

classes. Please refrain from voicing opinions that may be perceived as being offensive or insensitive.

8. Synchronous Session Recording Notice:

All synchronous sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously. USC prohibits the sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Please take note of the following policy:

S Campus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

**Note: assignments are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.*

| | Topics/Daily Activities | Readings and Homework | Deliverable |
|---------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| Week 1 | T 1/10: introductions, course overview/syllabus, and sign up for reaction paper presentations! Th 1/12: Who and What is L.A.? The race gap in L.A. County incarceration rates | Read the syllabus in its entirety. Secure the required texts if you have not already done so and spend some time reviewing the course BB page. Mike Davis, Ch. 1: “Sunshine or Noir,” from <i>City of Quartz</i> , pp. 15-54 | |
| Week 2 | T 1/17: Davis Th 1/19: Davis con’t. | Mike Davis, Ch. 1: “Sunshine or Noir,” from <i>City of Quartz</i> , pp. 54-88 Josh Sides, “Straight into Compton” | |
| Week 3 | T 1/24: Sides Th 1/26: <i>Let It Fall</i> | Watch <i>Let It Fall</i> Anna Deavere Smith, <i>Twilight</i> , Introduction, Prologue, and pp. 11-20 | |
| Week 4 | T 1/31: The Rodney King Trial and the L.A. Riots; <i>Twilight</i> , Introduction, Prologue, and pp. 11-20 Th 2/02: <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 21-65 | <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 21-65 <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 66-146 | Personal Essay 2/02 |
| Week 5 | T 2/07: <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 66-146 Th 2/09: <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 147-187 | <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 147-187 <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 188-256 | |
| Week 6 | T 2/14: <i>Twilight</i> , pp. 188-256 Th 2/16: Stevenson | Brenda E. Stevenson, “Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin” Start Midterm Paper | |

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|----------------|---|--|---------------------------|
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| Week 7 | T 2/21: Stevenson and Midterm Paper Th 2/23: Sample | Steven B. Sample, "USC and the Rebuilding of Los Angeles" Watch <i>O.J.: Made In America</i> , Part 1; Leola Johnson and David Roediger, "Hertz, Don't It? Becoming Colorless and Staying Black in the Crossover" | |
| Week 8 | T 2/28: The O.J. Simpson Trial; <i>Made In America</i> , Part 1; Johnson and Roediger Th 3/02: Toobin; <i>Made In America</i> , Part 4 | Jeffrey Toobin, "An Incendiary Defense"; Watch <i>O.J.: Made In America</i> , Part 4 <i>Made In America</i> , Part 5 | Midterm Paper 3/02 |
| Week 9 | T 3/07: <i>Made In America</i> , Part 5 Th 3/09: Coates | Ta-Nehisi Coates, "What O.J. Simpson Means to Me" Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> , Introduction and chs. 2 and 5 | |
| Week 10 | Spring Break/No Class | No reading...have a great spring break! | |
| Week 11 | T 3/21: Racial Inequality, Crime, and Incarceration; Alexander and <i>The New Jim Crow</i> Th 3/23: <i>Monster</i> , pp. xi-31 | Sanyika Shakur, <i>Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member</i> , pp. xi-31 <i>Monster</i> , pp. 35-94 | |
| Week 12 | T 3/28: <i>Monster</i> , pp. 35-94 Th 3/30: <i>Monster</i> , pp. 97-158 | <i>Monster</i> , pp. 97-158 <i>Monster</i> , pp. 161-260 | |
| Week 13 | T 4/04: <i>Monster</i> , pp. 161-260 Th 4/06: <i>Monster</i> , pp. 261-352 | <i>Monster</i> , pp. 261-352 <i>Monster</i> , pp. 355-383 | |
| Week 14 | T 4/11: <i>Monster</i> , pp. 355-383 Th 4/13: <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 3-43 | Jill Leovy, <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 3-43 <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 44-130 | |
| Week 15 | T 4/18: <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 44-130 Th 4/20: <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 131-175 | <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 131-175 <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 176-272 | |
| Week 16 | T 4/25: <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 176-272 Th 4/27: <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 273-319 | <i>Ghettoside</i> , pp. 273-319 | |
| FINAL | | | Final Paper 5/04 |

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

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

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu