**Race, Class & the American Prison**

UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO

Instituto de Relações Internacionais (IRI/USP)

Disciplina: Temas Contemporâneos de Política dos Estados Unidos (BRI 0068)

Professora: [Micol Seigel](http://www.indiana.edu/~amst/faculty/seigel.shtml) (mseigel@indiana.edu)

Monitora: Luah Tomas (luahbt@usp.br)

Período letivo: Agosto-Setembro 2018, 4a-feira, 1:30-5:10p, sala 2A

**I. Objetivo.** This course aims to offer students a critical perspective on racism and political economy in U.S. prison policy and practice. Thematic units will introduce historical points of continuity shared across the three major racialized disciplinary regimes in US history: slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and mass incarceration. Theoretical material will provide skills with which to understand “race” as a historically-contingent, regionally-variant, socially-constructed concept. Considering the changes wrought by the economic paradigm of neoliberalism will help students explore the political economy of contemporary prisons and policing, the latter particularly visible and important in the last four years with the emergence of the protest Movement for Black Lives, better known by its Twitter handle, #BlackLivesMatter.

**II. Metodologia.** The course works historically and critically across the interdiscipline of Critical Prison Studies to offer an unusual approach requiring analysis of the ideological contours of prison policy and practice. Definitely not quantitative, well beyond qualitative, this method is interpretive, sometimes even speculative, recognizing the heuristic challenges of a system that so blatantly flaunts its illogics and the frustrations of all of its own stated goals. Pedagogical method focuses on active engagement via discussion, student presentation, and the individual experience of research and academic writing.

**III. Avaliação**. Grades will be based on the following:

**Seminar participation, 25%.** Students are expected to attend class on time, having completed the assigned reading in a way that allows them to discuss it intelligently, though they need not understand it entirely prior to the seminar meeting. Absences will deduct points proportionate to the percentage of course meetings missed (there are seven sessions in all).

**Readings presentation, August 22, 15%.** Working in groups of two or three, students will present one of the cluster of articles to extend and deepen the understanding of race developed in Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham’s classic “Metalanguage of Race” article from *Signs*, 1992. Each group should present the content fully, including the context, historiography, argument, and intervention, assuming other students in the class will NOT have read the piece.

**Radio interview of SAP student, August 29-September 12-September 19, 25%.**

• August 29: students will select incarceration-related topics of interest to both SAP and USP participants. Possibilities include: relationships with family; health care in prison; electronic monitoring; myths and realities of prison life; race and racism in the criminal justice system; popular organization (prison gangs); alternatives to incarceration. Each group must have 1 USP student and at least 1 SAP student. Groups will meet. Discuss how all group members will prepare over the course of the next week. What research will you (the USP student) do? What conversations or self-reflection will the SAP student(s) try to have?

• September 12: USP and SAP students share research, experiences, and ideas. Based on this exchange, plan the interview. Block out areas of discussion; write a short set of questions together.

• September 19: perform the interview. Team up with another group. Each team should have 2 USP students and any number of SAP students. 1 USP student performs his or her interview while the other one translates. Do sequential translation (i.e., don’t talk over each other), making sure the Portuguese-speakers pause frequently to let the translator speak. When one group is finished, switch. SAP students not being interviewed should provide feedback on content and radio legibility (clarity and volume of speaking voice).

**Final paper, due September 30, 35%.** Each student will write a 1250-1750 word (5-7 page) research paper on a topic of their choice. Note that stages of the project are distributed across the term of the course. Papers can be written in Portuguese or English, with extra credit offered for English. Prof. Seigel will read and grade all papers based on content. She will also evaluate language for papers written in English; papers written in Portuguese will receive a grade for language from the monitora.

* **Option 1:** News or political phenomena; newspaper research. Choosing an aspect of the prison system of interest to them, students should locate 4-6 articles discussing the issue or phenomenon in *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and/or *Chicago Tribune* (USP’s library does not offer these newspapers, but their websites allow readers to view up to five articles/ month without a subscription). Students should compose a coherent narrative out of the articles rather than a serial summary of the pieces selected.
* **Option 2:** Activist engagement; internet research. Students should choose a US-based activist group or movement, locate its online presence, and consider its history, development, vision, mission, footprint, engagement, goals and prospects. Ambitious students might consider corresponding with the organization and integrating the response into the narrative presentation. Activist organizations are myriad; a sparse beginning includes Assata’s Daughters; #BLM; Black Youth Project 100; Critical Resistance; Disarm NYPD; Dream Defenders; Durham Beyond Policing; INCITE! Women of Color against Violence against Women; LA for Youth; Lifted Voices; Spirithouse; Unity and Struggle; Venus Project.
* **Option 3:** Departing from the radio interview with SAP students, write a paper comparing Brazilian to US prison conditions/relations/organization/evolution/etc. Perform newspaper or internet research as for options 1 & 2, above, to discover the US material. Use the interview and your general knowledge as the basis for the discussion of Brazil (so: no further research into the Brazilian case).

Please note my policy on extensions of duedates: all requests for extensions made at least 48 hours before the deadline will be granted. No reason need be provided. No extensions will be granted after this moment, which means, in this case, after midnight on Friday, September 28.

**PROGRAM (Subject to change)**

**1. August 8: Course introduction**

 *The 13th*, dir. Ava DuVernay (2016).

**2. August 15: Slavery & Prison: Overview**

**TOPIC SELECTION** **DISCUSSION**: Come prepared to offer a tentative idea for your final paper

**√** Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* I, no. 181 (May/June 1990): 95-118.

**√** Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (NY: New Press, 2010)[[breve comentário em portugues](http://newyorkibe.blogspot.com/2011/03/o-novo-jim-crow-controle-e-morte-social.html)].

John Oliver, *Prosecutors:* *Last Week Tonight*, 5 August 2018, available on [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET_b78GSBUs). See also segments on the [Supreme Court](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ9prhPV2PI), [Public Defenders](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USkEzLuzmZ4), [Immigration Court](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fB0GBwJ2QA), [Justice Scalia](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzysBy9ohzY), and [Elected Judges](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poL7l-Uk3I8&list=RDpoL7l-Uk3I8&start_radio=1).

**3. August 22: Getting on the same page about race**

Note revised syllabus! Changes begin this week with revision of final project deadlines

**Required for all:**

**√** Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 251-274.

**For presentation:**

**√** Robin D. G. Kelley, “On Violence and Carcerality,” *Signs* 42, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 590-600.

**√** Dayo F. Gore, “Difference, Power, and Lived Experiences: Revisiting the ‘Metalanguage of Race,’” *Signs* 42, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 608-613.

**√** George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the ‘White’ Problem in American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sept. 1995): 369-387.

**√** Christina Sharpe, “The Wake,” chapter 1 of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 1-24.

[*Out in the Night*](http://www.outinthenight.com/),Dir. Blair Dorosh-Walther (2014).

**4. August 29: Debt**

Download “Voice Record Pro” or similar tape-recording app

**Conjoined class #1 at SAP (Secretaria de Administração Penal), Rua Líbero Badaró, 600**

If you can’t find us, call, text, or zap Prof. Seigel at 1-213-595-5192

INTERVIEWS: CHOOSE TOPICS AND TEAMS

Kite Line (WFHB radio program): <https://kitelineradio.noblogs.org>; [www.wfhb.org/](http://www.wfhb.org/). Podcast available on Apple podcast, Downcast, and other podcast platforms.

Donna Murch, “Paying for Punishment: The New Debtors’ Prison,” *Boston Review* August 1, 2016; <http://bostonreview.net/editors-picks-us/donna-murch-paying-punishment>.

Alex Lichtenstein, “Flocatex and the Fiscal Limits of Mass Incarceration: Toward a New Political Economy of the Postwar Carceral State,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 113–125, <https://academic.oup.com/jah/article/102/1/113/686863>.

September 5 – *feriado –* no class

Monday, September 10, 14:00h, **OPTIONAL** panel discussion of abolition including Prof. Seigel at [Tapera Taperá](http://taperatapera.com.br/), Galeria Metrópole, Av. São Luís, 187, Centro, Loja 29, 2º andar – SP 01046-001.

**5. September 12: Prison Future?**

**TOPIC SELECTION: Final project topic due** to Prof. Seigel via email before midnight.

**RESEARCH MATERIALS DUE**: If you will use newspaper articles or web-based material for your final project, please provide a hardcopy of these to Prof. Seigel in class.

**Conjoined class #2 at SAP**

INTERVIEWS: SHARE RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE; WRITE QUESTIONS TOGETHER

“Use of Electronic Offender-Tracking Devices Expands Sharply,” Pew Trust Issue Brief, September 7, 2016; <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/09/use-of-electronic-offender-tracking-devices-expands-sharply>.

**√** Alex S. Vitale and Brian Jordan Jefferson, “The Emergence of Command and Control Policing in Neoliberal New York,” chapter 12 in in Jordan Camp & Christina Heatherton, eds., *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter* (NY: Verso, 2016), pp. 133-144.

James Kilgore, “[Repackaging Mass Incarceration](http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/06/06/repackaging-mass-incarceration/),” *Counterpunch* June 6, 2014.

**6. September 19: Abolition**

**Conjoined class #3 at SAP**

INTERVIEWS: RECORD

*Visions of Abolition*, dir. Setsu Shigematsu (2011).

**√** Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (NY: Seven Stories Books, 2003); chapters 1-2-3-6 (pp. 9-59 & 105-115).

**7. September 26: Topic TBA**

Class at IRI, sala 1A (regular classroom)

*The Prison in Twelve Landscapes*, dir. Brett Story (2017).

Readings TBD

**SEPTEMBER 30: Final research papers due** to Prof. Seigel via email in word (not pdf).