General Information

Canvas  https://canvas.brown.edu/courses/TBD

Where/When  We meet Mondays, 3:00–5:30 pm, in TBD.

Office Hours  Immediately before and after class, Fridays from 2-3 pm in 332 Blistein House, and by appointment. If you know in advance that you want to meet, please email me to reserve a 20-minute slot. Otherwise, you’re free to come by my office almost anytime. If I’m free, I’d love to talk.

Course Summary

This course examines the politics of race and the criminal justice system in the U.S. It proceeds in three parts. First, it examines the political origins and consequences of racial disparities in citizens’ interactions with the police, courts and prisons. Next, it considers how the public, the media, and politicians relate and respond to these issues. Finally, the course concludes by examining the prospects for reform and the consequences of inaction.

Why Should You Take This Course?

There are a myriad of reasons to take any course. Let me offer just two reasons to take this course. First, this stuff matters. The U.S. imprisons more people per capita than nearly any other nation in the world. This fact alone is troubling, and it becomes even more so in light of the systemic disparities evident at nearly every stage of the legal system. Simply put, traditionally disadvantaged groups in society—racial minorities, the poor, and, in particular, poor racial minorities—have far more frequent and far more severe interactions with the police, courts and prisons than more advantaged groups in society. Not surprisingly these disparities have profound social, economic, and, as we will see in this class, political consequences which serve to reinforce cycles of inequality and injustice.

This brings us to a second reason to take this course, which is that this stuff is hard. Hard in the sense that the topics we will discuss represent persistent and fundamental challenges for our society. But hard also in the sense that these issues pose questions for social scientists that are very difficult to answer. Why did prison population continue to grow in the past two decades when rates of both
violent and non-violent crime declined? How is it that citizens can see the same events in Ferguson (or Baltimore, or Charlotte) and draw such different conclusions about why these events occurred and what should be done in response? The approaches and potential answers to these questions that we will encounter require a combination of all things that make for good social science—clear theories, clever research designs, and convincing empirical analysis.

Taking this course will provide you with an understanding of the politics and policies associated with race and the criminal justice system. Such knowledge alone will be valuable to you as citizens in a democracy that has and will continue to struggle with issues of justice and equality. Further, by understanding how social scientists approach these difficult issues, this class will teach you skills and modes of reasoning that will be useful to you in your academic careers and beyond.

GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Course Goals

This course aims to provide a critical understanding of the politics and policies surrounding the issues of race and the criminal justice system in the U.S. It does so through close readings and in-depth discussions of classic and contemporary works on these issues in political science, sociology, and related fields. Beyond gaining a substantive understanding of key issues in these fields, you will learn to assess the role of data and evidence in the evaluation of a particular issue or policy and develop skills to constructively engage with these arguments through your own research and writing.

Course Expectations

This is a discussion-based seminar. I will provide some background and context to our discussions and do my best to ensure that dialog with the texts and each other proceeds in productive and respectful manner. Ultimately, however, the success of this class depends on you and the work you put in to the course. I expect that you will have done the readings and submitted your assignments on time (more on that below). In terms of participation, I expect that you will come to class eager to learn and engage with that week’s topics and with each other’s ideas in a critical and respectful manner. Finally, I expect that you will treat the assignments in this class not as chore or necessary evil but as an opportunity for discovery and development. These papers are a chance for you to clarify your understanding of a topic, form your own ideas on a topic and engage in ongoing scholarly and political debates. I look forward to seeing what you have to say and helping you say it in a way that clearly conveys your meaning and intent. To do this, requires that you start the process of writing early, and are revising your work often.
Community Standards

This is a discussion-based course. Political discussions can sometimes grow contentious. All students and the instructor must be respectful of others in the classroom. If you ever feel that the classroom environment is discouraging your participation or problematic in any way, please contact me.

Accessibility

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

Academic Integrity

Neither the University nor I tolerate cheating or plagiarism. The Brown Writing Center defines plagiarism as “appropriating another person’s ideas or words (spoken or written) without attributing those word or ideas to their true source.” The consequences for plagiarism are often severe, and can include suspension or expulsion. This course will follow the guidelines in the Academic Code for determining what is and isn’t plagiarism:

In preparing assignments a student often needs or is required to employ outside sources of information or opinion. All such sources should be listed in the bibliography. Citations and footnote references are required for all specific facts that are not common knowledge and about which there is not general agreement. New discoveries or debatable opinions must be credited to the source, with specific references to edition and page even when the student restates the matter in his or her own words. Word-for-word inclusion of any part of someone else’s written or oral sentence, even if only a phrase or sentence, requires citation in quotation marks and use of the appropriate conventions for attribution. Citations should normally include author, title, edition, and page. (Quotations longer than one sentence are generally indented from the text of the essay, without quotation marks, and identified by author, title, edition, and page.) Paraphrasing or summarizing the contents of another’s work is not dishonest if the source or sources are clearly identified (author, title, edition, and page), but such paraphrasing does not constitute independent work and may be rejected by the instructor. Students who have questions about accurate and proper citation methods are expected to consult reference guides as well as course instructors.

We will discuss specific information about your written work in class in more detail, but if you are unsure of how to properly cite material, please ask for clarification. If you are having difficulty with writing or would like more information or assistance, consult the Writing Center, the Brown library and/or the Academic Code (https://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/documents/academic-
code.pdf) for more information.

**Course Structure and Policies**

**Grading**

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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
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**Participation**

Learning is not a passive activity. Your active participation is a crucial part of this seminar and your grade. This includes both regular attendance in class and contribution to class discussion. I will allow one unexcused class absence; any additional ones require permission and/or a Dean’s excuse. You should complete all readings and submit all assignments before attending class.

**Response Papers**

Over the course of the semester, you will write three brief response papers (two-pages single spaced) based on the weeks assigned readings. Simply summarizing these readings is not enough. Instead, you should aim to 1) critically evaluate the week’s readings in terms of the logic of their claims and the quality of their evidence and 2) offer at least three questions about the readings which can help guide that weeks discussion. The questions can focus on a particular reading, but I encourage you to think about how different readings speak to each other. Papers are due the Sunday before class at 5 p.m. and can be uploaded to the course website or sent directly to me, after which I will circulate them to the rest of the class to be read before class on Monday. We will assign weeks on the first day of class.

**Final Papers**

The final paper for this course can either take the form of a policy memo or research note. Both should be approximately 20 pages double-spaced, not including references and any figures or tables which should be provided in the appendix.

Students electing to write a policy memo should start by identifying an issue area of interest to them (e.g. police, courts, or prison) and a specific policy debate in that field. For example, students may wish to know whether investigative stops are effective at reducing crime, or whether certain sentencing guidelines are effective at reducing recidivism. Students should place this debate within a larger policy context that illustrates the costs and benefits a certain course of action as well as the relevant alternatives. Next students will identify a specific case study or studies that shed light onto their policy question and draw conclusions from this case study in a set of policy recommendations directed toward a specific audience.

Students electing to write a research note will consider a specific research question that speaks to issues identified in the literature; provide a brief review of existing theory and research on this issue; clearly state an argument or hypothesis that extends, revises, or challenges this work and outline an empirical strategy to evaluate this claim. Finally students, should offer some expectations of what the
results of this empirical strategy might be, and offer some conclusions based these hypothetical findings.

A brief abstract outlining your choice of paper and proposed topic is due before class on March 13. A draft of your final paper is due before class on April 24. The following week, May 1, we will use class as a workshop to help you revise this paper. The final paper is due by **11:59 pm May 15**.

**Course Time Allotment**

This seminar will meet 14 times, including the last class that will be held during reading period. Over these 14 weeks, you should expect to spend 2.5 hours per week in class (35 hours total); approximately 8 hours per week reading and reviewing required readings (96 hours total, since there are no mandatory readings the first and final weeks); approximately 2.5 hours writing each of your 3 response papers (7.5 hours total); approximately 3 hours researching and writing a proposal for your final paper; between 20-25 hours researching, writing, and revising your final paper; and at least .5 hours meeting with me in person to discuss your work.

**Readings**

The following texts are required for the course and available for purchase at the bookstore:


Copies of additional chapters and articles assigned for each week will be posted to the course website.

**Schedule**

**Note:** This schedule is preliminary and subject to change. In particular, the books that we will read (and you will purchase) are fixed, but the required articles and supplemental readings (that I will provide) may vary. The additional readings are not required, but may be useful as you develop and research your final paper. If you miss a class make sure you contact me or one of your colleagues to find out
about changes in the lesson plans or assignments.

**Problems**

The course begins by assessing the origins and consequences of racial disparities in the criminal justice system (CJS) in the U.S. It starts by providing a broad overview of racial disparities in the CJS and their political consequences, before turning to more specific questions about the effects of citizens’ interactions with the police, courts and prisons and the political ramifications of these experiences.

1 — January 30, 2017— Introduction and Course Overview

**Topics:** Why should you take this course? What will we do?

**Readings** NONE!

2—February 6—The Politics of Race and the Criminal Justice System: What’s at Stake?

**Topics:** Why are race and crime so intertwined in American politics? What do we mean when we talk about disparities in the CJS? What are the origins and consequences of such disparities?

**Readings**

**Assigned:** Lerman, A. E. and Weaver, V. (2013). Race and crime in american politics: From law and order to willie horton and beyond


**Additional:** Not required, but potentially useful.


3—February 13— The Custodial Citizen

**Topics:** How do citizen’s interactions with the criminal justice shape their political attitudes and behavior?

**Readings**

**Assigned:** Lerman, A. E. and Weaver, V. M. (2014). *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control.* University of Chicago Press Chapters 2-7, really the whole thing if you can


4—February 20—Police

**Topics:** What is racial profiling? How would we measure or identify it? What’s the difference between implicit and explicit racial bias?

**Readings**


**5—February 27—Courts**

Topics: How do courts and sentencing laws influence outcomes in the CJS? When, how and why does the race of defendant, judge, jury, and prosecution matter?

Readings


Criminology, 49(2):401–441


6—March 6—Prisons

DUE: Mid-semester check-in. Please schedule a time to come meet with me in 332 Bliststein House

Topics:

Readings


Politics

The second portion of the course takes up the question of how various actors in the political system both influence and are influenced by the issues of race and the
7—March 13—CJS and Citizen Behavior

DUE: Final Paper Proposal

Topics: What effect does contact with the criminal justice system have on political behavior? What are the consequences of these effects?

Readings


8—March 20—CJS and Citizen Attitudes

Topics: How do different racial and ethnic groups view the criminal justice system? How can we explain variation across groups in support for specific policies?
Readings


Spring Break—March 27—NO CLASS

9—April 3—CJS and Media

Topics:  How does the media and the way it covers issues of race and crime influence the way people think about these issues?

Readings


**10—April 10—CJS and Politicians**

**Topics:** How do politicians respond and potentially create demands for certain criminal justice policies?

**Readings**


**Potential Solutions**

In the final portion of the class, we focus on potential solutions to the issues and problems we’ve discussed so far. We’ll also reserve time for you to work on your final papers.
11—April 17—Potential Reforms

Topics: How might we change the practice of policing?

Readings


12—April 24—Potential Reforms

DUE: Final Paper Draft

Topics: How might we change the criminal justice system more broadly?

Readings


13—May 1—Paper Workshop

Topics: We’ll spend class providing constructive feedback to your papers.

14—May 8—Bringing it all together: Presentations and Closing Discussions

Topics: A final discussion of the takeaways from the class

DUE—May 15—Final Papers