

George Mason University
Department of Criminology, Law and Society
CRIM 307-001 Social Inequality, Crime and Justice
Spring 2024

When and where does this course meet?

This course meets on **Mondays and Wednesdays** from **12:00 – 1:15pm** in **Horizon Hall, Room 2017**.

Who is the instructor for this course?

Dr. Marie Mele Thomas, Associate Professor. I've been teaching criminology and criminal justice courses for many years, and Social Inequality, Crime and Justice is one of my favorite courses to teach! If you need to reach me outside of class, I will be available for virtual and in-person meetings throughout the semester. The best way to reach me is via email at mmeletho@gmu.edu.

What is this course about?

This course is about the realities of inequality, crime and justice in America, and how these realities reflect and re-create disparities based on class, race, gender, and other social statuses. The standard view of criminal justice asserts that criminal law is built on a consensus about harmful acts that reflect social norms, and that the system operates with blind justice. In this course, we will consider how this view is problematic by examining the social, political and economic conditions that shape the formation and administration of criminal laws in the United States. We will also consider how our criminal justice practices are often less about harmfulness of behavior and more about social stratification and inequity.

What are the course objectives?

As a result of completing this course, you will be able to demonstrate:

- An understanding of the role that inequality and privilege play in the development and administration of criminal laws.
- An understanding of the intersectionality of class, race and gender on the risk of and responses to criminal behavior.
- An understanding of the systemic biases in law enforcement, prosecution, and criminal punishment in America.
- An understanding of the role that mass incarceration plays in the criminal industrial complex.
- An ability to critique public policies that seek to prevent crime, and analyze the consequences of these policies for marginalized individuals and communities.
- An ability to express your views on a wide range of criminal justice issues in writing and in oral discussion.

What books will you read in this course?

Alexander, M. (2020). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press. ISBN: 1620971932 (paperback)

Barak, G., Leighton, P., & Cotton, A. (2018). *Class, race, gender, and crime: The social realities of justice in America*, 5th Edition. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield. ISBN: 1442268859 (paperback)

How will you succeed in this course?

Class Attendance/Participation

If you want to succeed in this course, you must attend class. Class attendance entails both active listening and participation in class discussions. If you are absent from class, please read the material for that week and keep up to date with any course assignments due that day, including journals and quizzes.

Weekly Readings

The best way to prepare for class is to complete the assigned readings. Readings will introduce you to the course material and create a platform for class discussion. It's important that you complete the assigned readings prior to class meetings and use the readings to facilitate your participation in class discussions and the completion of weekly assignments.

Class Discussions

Class discussions are opportunities for you to share your insights on the course readings and ask questions that further facilitate your understanding of the material. Given the sensitive nature of the topics we will discuss in this course, you are expected to contribute to class discussions in a mature and responsible manner. **Given the myriad differences in life experiences, it is essential to respect views or perspectives that differ from your own.** The expression of individual opinions is encouraged; however, prejudicial, derogatory, or demeaning remarks will not be tolerated. Before you speak, think about the impact your words will have on others, and consider the extent to which the point you are making is informed by facts or personal bias. Be prepared to support your viewpoint with empirical data if challenged by a classmate.

How will your learning be assessed in this course?

Journals

Submit a journal entry at the conclusion of each week. Journals will ask you to identify key points made in the material and identify areas for further discussion or analysis. To receive full credit for this assignment, you must fully answer the prompt questions in approximately 300 words. **Your answer must show your understanding of and critical thinking about the material.** Weekly journals will be posted on Blackboard at 12am on Sundays and are due by 11:59pm on Fridays. Journals submitted after the due date will not receive a grade. Each journal is worth 10 points, for a total of 140 points.

Quizzes

Complete two quizzes on the course material. The purpose of each quiz is to assess your retention of the material in the first and second half of the course. The quizzes are not “open book.” This means you cannot rely on the powerpoint slides, your class notes, or the assigned readings to complete the quizzes. Each quiz will consist of 30 questions, will be administered on Blackboard, and must be taken on the dates assigned. Each quiz is worth 60 points, for a total of 120 points.

Final Paper on The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness

Write a paper in response to the following prompt. Papers must be in APA format, and the body of the paper (minus the title page and references) must be approximately 5 pages in length.

In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander asks us to look at the past to better understand the present. In your paper, discuss how the current day prison system in the U.S. reflects prior systems of control and oppression throughout American history. Cite specific examples of these systems and how they relate to criminal justice practices today. What pressures need to be applied to the current criminal justice system to prevent new systems of control and oppression from taking its place? Also, one of the take-away messages from the book is that our criminal justice system is beyond repair and needs to be reconstructed. If this is true, how can this reconstruction be realized? In your opinion, is this reconstruction necessary to create a more fair and equitable justice system? Why or why not? Support your argument with material from the book or other academic sources.

How will your final grade be calculated?

Final grades will be calculated using the following course requirements:

Journals	140 points
Quizzes	120 points
Final Paper	40 points
Total	300 points

Final grades will be calculated by dividing the total number of points accumulated by the total number of points available, and then multiplying that figure by 100. For example, if a student accumulates 260 points, the grade calculation is as follows: $260/300 \times 100 = 87\%$

Final grades will be determined using the following matrix:

A+	97-100	A	94-96	C+	77-79	C	74-76
A-	90-93	B+	87-89	C-	70-73	D	60-69
B	84-86	B-	80-83	F	0-59		

What policies are you expected to follow?

Cell Phones and Laptops

Cell phones and laptops are not permitted in the classroom. They are a significant distraction to you and your classmates, and impede your full participation in the class. If you require the use of a laptop for the sole purpose of taking notes, please come speak to me. Otherwise, all devices must be turned off and put away for the duration of the class.

Email

GMU policy provides email as the standard means of communication and requires that all email contact be through GMU email accounts. **Please check your GMU email regularly** so you don't miss time-sensitive information and course announcements.

Blackboard

GMU's online Blackboard program will be used for posting assignments, grades, readings, and course announcements. Here's how to access Blackboard:

- Go to: mymason.gmu.edu
- Log in using your email username and password.
- Click on the link toward the upper-right part of the screen that says "Courses"
- Under "Course List," click on "CRIM 307 (Spring 2024)."

If you need assistance accessing or navigating Blackboard, you can email courses@gmu.edu, call (703) 993-3141, or go to Johnson Center room 311.

Diversity and Inclusion

Mason promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. **Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.**

University Honor Code

Following is a summary of Mason's honor code; see the University Catalog and <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/> for additional information. Mason's honor code will be strictly enforced in this class and all violations will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. The Honor Code of George Mason University specifically prohibits cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing.

Cheating and attempted cheating include "willful giving or receiving of an unauthorized, unfair, dishonest, or unscrupulous advantage in academic work over other students." Examples include the use of unauthorized resources during an exam, copying another student's work (with or without their

permission), allowing another student to copy your work, using an assignment or test from another student, accessing tests or grades electronically for the purpose of getting an unfair advantage, and any other behavior that fits the general definition above.

Plagiarism includes “presenting as one’s own the words, the work, the ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions for this include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources, the writers’ own insights or findings from their own field research, and what has been termed common knowledge.” Examples include taking or buying a paper from someone else or the internet and presenting it as your own, and submitting as your own work a paper with substantial unacknowledged contributions from others. Information and graphics obtained from the internet (except for freeware clipart) must include source citations to avoid plagiarism. Your final paper will be submitted to Blackboard and screened by the SafeAssign plagiarism detection program. If you use another student’s paper as a significant, unacknowledged source for your paper, you will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Lying includes “the willful and knowledgeable telling of an untruth, as well as any form of deceit, attempted deceit, or fraud in an oral or written statement relating to academic work.” Examples include making up source materials or source citations in a paper, pretending to use an actual source that you didn’t really use, making up an excuse for missing a test or assignment due date, falsifying any written or electronic document, or presenting any other falsehoods through any method and in any context.

Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. For more information on your FERPA rights, please visit <https://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/>

What University resources are available to you?

Health and Safety Concerns

WAVES: Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education and Services

WAVES (Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education and Services) promotes wellness within the Mason community through health education, alcohol/drug assessment and education, and violence awareness, prevention and sexual assault response. We help students make healthy, safe choices and encourage lifelong, thoughtful healthy decision-making through individualized support, creative programming, and evidence-based education and outreach. You can reach the WAVES office at 703-993-9999 or at waves.gmu.edu. The office is located in SUB (Student Union Building) I, Suite 3200. Additional resources include:

- 24-Hour Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Crisis Line 703-380-1434
- Fairfax County Office for Women and Domestic and Sexual Violence Services 703-360-7273

- Arlington County Domestic Violence Services 703-228-4848
- Prince William County Sexual Assault Victims Advocacy Services (SAVAS) 703-368-4141
- Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault 1-800-838-8238
- Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network 1-800-656-HOPE <https://ohl.rainn.org/online/>

CAPS: Counseling and Psychological Services

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of free confidential services to students, faculty, and staff. Services are provided by a staff of professional clinical psychologists, social workers, counselors, learning specialists, and psychiatric providers. CAPS individual and group counseling, workshops, and outreach programs are designed to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. Visit caps.gmu.edu for additional resources.

- For consultation or emergency assistance during office hours call 703-993-2380.
- For assistance during non-office hours, call University Police at 703-993-4357.

Additional resources include:

- 703-527-4077 (CrisisLink)
- 1-800-273-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)
- 1-877-838-2838 (Veterans' Crisis Hotline)

Students with Disabilities

If you have (or think you may have) a disability or other condition that may affect your academic performance, please make sure documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (703-993-2474; ods.gmu.edu) to determine the necessary accommodations. By Mason policy, I can only make accommodations for students with certification from ODS.

English Language Skills

If you are not a native English speaker and are interested in linguistic or cultural enrichment services, you can contact Mason's English Language Institute at eli.gmu.edu.

Academic Skills

If you are interested in improving your academic skills, the university offers students assistance through Learning Services at caps.gmu.edu/learningservices. Learning Services offers workshops on the study cycle, effective note-taking techniques, individual learning styles, exam preparation, and effective time management.

Writing Skills

If you are interested in improving your writing skills, the university offers students assistance through the Writing Center at writingcenter.gmu.edu/

What is the course schedule for the Spring 2024 semester?

Date	Readings	Topic of Class Meetings	Assignments Due Friday at 11:59pm
Week 1 1/17	Course Syllabus <i>The limits of personal experience and the value of statistics</i>	Course Overview and Discussion of Reading	Week 1 Journal
Week 2 1/22- 1/24	Chapter 1 of Textbook <i>Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2023</i>	Mass Incarceration and the Criminal Industrial Complex	Week 2 Journal
Week 3 1/29-1/31	Chapter 2 of Textbook <i>Transformative Feminist Criminology</i> <i>A Decade of Convict Criminology</i>	Critical Criminological Theory	Week 3 Journal
Week 4 2/5-2/7	Chapter 3 of Textbook <i>Saving Capitalism</i>	Income Inequality and Class Privilege	Week 4 Journal
Week 5 2/12-2/14	Chapter 4 of Textbook <i>Beyond Black and White: An Analysis of Newspaper Representations of Alleged Criminal Offenders Based on Race and Ethnicity</i>	Race Inequality and White Privilege	Week 5 Journal
Week 6 2/19-2/21	Chapter 5 of Textbook <i>Women in Prison: How we are</i>	Gender Inequality and Male Privilege	Week 6 Journal
Week 7 2/26-2/28	Quiz #1 Study Guide	Quiz #1 Review	Quiz #1 Week 7 Journal (mid-semester survey)
Spring Break – No Class Meetings or Assignments!			
Week 8 3/11-3/13	Chapter 6 of Textbook <i>Intersectionality and Crime</i>	Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender Privilege	Week 8 Journal
Week 9 3/18-3/20	Chapter 7 of Textbook <i>Differential Representation of Latina and Black Female Victims</i>	Victimology and Victimization	Week 9 Journal
Week 10 3/25-3/27	Chapter 8 of Textbook <i>Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America</i>	Administration of Criminal Law	Week 10 Journal
Week 11 4/1-4/3	Chapter 9 of Textbook <i>Colorblindness and Cultural Scripting in Prosecution</i>	Law Enforcement and Prosecution	Week 11 Journal

Week 12 4/8-4/10	Chapter 10 of Textbook <i>Enduring Injustice: The Persistence of Racial Discrimination in the U.S Death Penalty</i>	Criminal Punishment and Sentencing	Week 12 Journal
Week 13 4/15-4/17	Quiz #2 Study Guide	Quiz #2 Review	Quiz #2
Week 14 4/22-4/24	Viewing of film 13th	Viewing of film 13th	Week 14 Journal
Week 15 4/29	Conclusion of Textbook	Discussion of Final Paper Course Evaluations!	Week 15 Journal Final Paper