

AIMS

Note: “Aims” are the general goals of the course, which will permeate all that we do and be treated in specific parts of the course. It is also hoped that these aims are such that students will continue working on them, in some manner, beyond the end of the semester.

1. To examine the *political dimensions of Christology*, as they illumine issues relating to contemporary mass incarceration in the United States.
2. To assess *present Christian practices and resources* by which Christians are engaging contemporary U.S. prison institutions and life.
3. To develop nuanced *criticism of theological discourse’s abstraction* from political arenas and concrete sites of suffering, zones of social abandonment.
4. To analyze the meanings of the “*becoming human*” of the *divine logos* in relation to the human suffering of long prison sentences, isolation and abandonment, rape, torture and accompanying despair.
5. To focus and develop Christian theological beliefs and practices as *resources of hope* for facing the social, economic – political - conditions weighted by “incarcerated bodies.”
6. To explore ways of building *bridges and coalitions between church and wider public organizations and movements*

OUTCOMES

Note: “Outcomes” differ from “Aims,” because they articulate what more precisely it is hoped that course participants will be able to show at end of semester.

1. Course participants will show awareness of, and ability to analyze, the extent of various *practices of incarcerating bodies* in U.S. history and in contemporary practice and policy. (Evaluated through the Midterm requirement)
2. Course participants will display skills of *critical theological dialogue* and engagement between Christian traditions (beliefs, practices, symbols), on the one hand, *and* the suffering and institutional practices of incarceration, on the other. (Evaluated through the Final Paper requirement)
3. Course participants will demonstrate ability to work in groups on issues of mass incarceration, in a way that involves dimensions of inter-faith, ecumenical, and

church/society work. (Evaluated by the Taskforce requirement)

REQUIREMENTS

Note: The instructor will provide fuller explanation of each of these requirements during class.

1. On-time regular attendance at all class sessions (let me know if you cannot attend a class). Coming to class with assigned readings completed – accept for the first week - so that you are ready to be an active participant, as listener and/or contributor, to class dialogue. (5 percent of final course grade; small, but often a key swing factor for borderline cases)
2. The Incarceration Midterm Paper: This will be a 6- to 8-page paper (typed, double-spaced), which (a) selects one particular site of contemporary incarceration, and (b) relates it analytically to a larger context of U.S. incarcerating practice, historical or contemporary. (40 percent)
3. The Theology Final Paper: This will be a 6-8-page paper (typed, double-spaced), which takes some belief or practice of Christian theology, usually Christology, and develops it as a resource for both critical resistance and hope in relation to contemporary U.S. incarceration. (40 percent)
4. The Taskforce Process. Participating in each class session's Taskforce hour, planning your group's theoretical and practical approach to a select problem in U.S. carceral society. Toward the end of your semester, your group will present its work and plans, as Taskforce, to the larger class. (15 percent)

NOTE: Determining Final Grades. This is always a difficult process and my grading method is not an exact science. This does not mean, however, that it is purely impressionist or subjectivist, either. The general rule of thumb is determined by the percentages indicated above.

COURSE PROCEDURE

General Class Sessions. *The three-hour block* of class time on Tuesday afternoons will be used, in the first two hours, for instructor's lectures, audio-visual work and class dialogue. The last class hour will be used for Taskforce Meetings.

About the Taskforces. The particular focus of a Taskforce will depend, to a significant degree, on the interests brought by course members. Therefore, we will negotiate our selection of these at the beginning of the course. But as an initial proposal, I am proposing the following Taskforce projects:

- (a) The RHU Taskforce. A group working on developing awareness and practices relating to Restricted Housing Units, and other “solitary confinement” practices in the U.S.
- (b) The US Mass Incarceration Taskforce. A group working on the sheer fact of the phenomenal extent and pervasiveness of imprisonment in the U.S. Why the large numbers, the extensive problems? What beliefs or actions might alter the “mass incarceration fever?”
- (c) The End Torture and Prison Rape Taskforce. A group working on the phenomenon of torture and rape in prisons, and focusing efforts to end such practices through movements and analysis. What is the nature of the problem, what *is* being done, is *not* being done – what needs to be done?
- (d) The Children of the Incarcerated Taskforce. Rendering visible the children of incarcerated parents and identifying-ways of responding to their needs.
- (e) The Immigrant Detention and Policing Taskforce. A group identifying the ways police and imprisonment practices are impacting immigrant groups in the U.S. today, and developing redressive policies.
- (f) The Legal Violations and Protections Taskforce. This group identifies the ways U.S. legal and constitutional provisions, and international law, *both* are violated by contemporary incarceration practices, *and also* may be resources for redressing those practices.
- (g) The Liturgical Arts & Carceral System Taskforce. This group examines and reconstructs Christian liturgical performances (in church settings or other sites) so that they engage communities in fruitful resistance and social revolutionary change. (“Carceral” refers to the many forms of culture and institution that make up or permeate various practices of incarceration.)

Logic of the Course Reading. For the logic at work in the layout of readings in the course agenda, see the introductory paragraphs that are inset at the beginning of each part.

TEXTS

SPECIAL NOTE: Do not purchase all of these books right away. During the first class session, I will offer more insight about the texts that will aid in decision-making about purchase. Asterisk (*) marks the books within which the most extensive required readings will occur.

ABU-JAMAL, Mumia and HILL, Marc Lamont. *The Cell and the Classroom: Conversations on Black Life in America*. Third World Press, 2011.

*ALEXANDER, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press, 2010.

FRANKLIN, H. Bruce. *Prison Writings in Twentieth Century America*. Penguin,

HERIVEL, Tara, and WRIGHT, Paul. *Prison Nation: The Warehousing of America's Poor*. Routledge, 2003.

*LOGAN, James Samuel. *Good Punishment? Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment*. Eerdmans, 2008.

PARENTI, Christian. *Lockdown America: Policing and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*. New edition. Verso Books, 2008.

*SNYDER, T. Richard. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*. Eerdmans,

*TAYLOR, Mark Lewis. *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America*. Fortress Press, 2000.

AGENDA

NOTE: When reading through this “Agenda,” please exegete meticulously the language in *italics* which introduces each of the course’s two “Parts.”

PART ONE – PRACTICES & THEATRICALS OF U.S. INCARCERATION

The task before us in this first part of the course is to develop a portrait of the structures and dynamics of the phenomenon of mass incarceration and the politics – indeed, the “theo-politics” - that sustain it. The multidimensional experience of imprisonment, as both individual and social experiences, will be set in political contexts of the coloniality of power and of U.S. geopolitical struggle today. At work throughout are constructions of race, gender and sexuality.

JAN 31 JESUS OF NAZARETH - GOD CRUCIFIED? - EXECUTED, LYNCHED, BOMBED ? [75 pages required]

Taylor, “Introduction,” *The Executed God*, ix-xvi, 1-16.

Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, ix-xii, 1-16.

Abu-Jamal and Hill, “Introduction” and “Who Am I? Whose Am I?,” ix-xi, 1-19.

Logan, “Introduction: The Problem of Imprisonment in the U.S.,” “in *Good Punishment?* 1 -16.

Recommended:

Western, “Introduction,” and “Did the Prison Boom Cause the Crime Drop?” xi-xiv, 1-8, 168-88.

FEB 7 INCARCERATION IN A THEATRICAL OF TERROR (99 pages)

Taylor, “The Theatricals of Terror,” *The Executed God*, 21-47.

Alexander, “Preface” and “Introduction,” *The New Jim Crow*, xiii, 1-19.

Parenti, “The Rise of Big-House Nation,” and “Prison as Abattoir,” and “Balkans in a Box,” 163-210

Daniel Burton-Rose, “Our Sisters’ Keepers,” and “Not Part of My Sentence,” in Herivel and Wright, 262-8.

Recommended:

Logan, “Reproducing Criminality and the Prison-Industrial Complex,” in *Good Punishment?*, 17-37, 62-3.

Any or all of the following brief articles in Herivel and Wright, *Prison Nation*: “The Politics of Prison Labor,” “The New Bedlam,” “The Restraint Chair,” “The Limits of Law,” 120-28, 168-73, 216-6, 315-16.

**FEB. 14 MASS INCARCERATION AS DECOLONIZING STRUGGLE –
THEATRICALS, SACRIFICE & THE COLONIALITY OF IMPERIAL POWER
(75 pages)**

Taylor, *The Executed God*, 48-61.

Alexander, “The Rebirth of Caste,” *The New Jim Crow*, 20-57

Dow, “Secrecy, Power and Indefinite Detention,” in Herivel and Wright, *Prison Nation*, 93-99.

Abu-Jamal and Hill, “Black Life in the Age of Incarceration,” in *The Classroom and the Cell*, 77-96.

Recommended:

Logan, “Collateral Consequences of Large-Scale Imprisonment,” in *Good Punishment?* 65-100.

**FEB. 21 FROM “GULAG AMERICA” TO PAX AMERICANA –
PRISON AND MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEXES (99 pages)**

Taylor, *The Executed God*, 62-79.

Alexander, “The Lockdown,” *The New Jim Crow*, 95-136.

Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, 17-32.

Winslow, “Capital Crimes: The Corporate Economy of Violence,” in Herivel and Wright,
Prison Nation, 41-54.

Parenti, “Epilogue,” 245-58.

Recommended:

Logan, “Prisons and Social Alienation,” *Good Punishment?*, 101-2, 126-42.

**PART TWO –
THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENTS**

This Part begins a specific theological engagement of the issues encountered in the first Part. “Theology” here is an engagement of, a response to, a struggle within, issues of the contemporary period to which we were introduced above. This theological engagement will involve retrieval, deconstruction and reconstruction of key beliefs and practices in Christian theological histories. The focus will be especially on Christology, i.e. what is believed and practiced about Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ.

**FEB. 28 “JESUS AND THE SOLDIERS OF EMPIRE” -
WAY OF THE CROSS AS “ADVERSARIAL POLITICS” (90 pages)**

Taylor, *The Executed God*, 70-98.

Alexander, “The Color of Justice,” *The New Jim Crow*, 95-136, 173-208.

Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, 33-54.

[MID-TERM BREAK - March 2 - 11]

**MAR 13 - "STEALING THE SHOW" -
THE WAY OF THE CROSS AS "CREATIVE/DRAMATIC ACTION"**
(73 pages)

Taylor, *The Executed God*, 99-118.

Alexander, "The Cruel Hand," *The New Jim Crow*, 137-73.

Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, 55-73.

Karl Barth, "The Criminals with Him!" in *Deliverance to the Captives: Sermons and Prayers*. Harper & Brothers, 1961. 75-84. **E-Reserves.**

**MAR 20 "IMPIOUS GALILEANS TODAY" -
THE WAY OF THE CROSS AS "BUILDING PEOPLES' MOVEMENTS"**
(87 pp.)

Taylor, *The Executed God*, 127-36.

Logan, "'Good Punishment: Toward a Politics of Ontological Intimacy,'" 201-53.

Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, 74-100.

**MAR 27 "TRIUMPH OF GOD" AND INCARCERATED BODIES
THE WIDER POWER OF THE PEOPLE (107 pages)**

Taylor, *The Executed God*, 119-26, 137-54.

Alexander, "The New Jim Crow," in *The New Jim Crow*, 173-208

Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, 101-25

APR 3 **“TOWARD A FULLNESS OF REBELLION”
ON CHRISTIAN LIVING AND THINKING** (85 pages)

[**Note:** *Student Taskforce presentations may begin this week.*]

Taylor, *The Executed God*, “Epilogue,” 155-63.

Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment*, 126-57.

Alexander, “The Fire this Time,” 209-48.

Jimmy Santiago Baca, “Past Present,” in Franklin, *Prison Writing in 20th Century America*, 358-65.

APR 10 **DREAMING, THINKING, ACTING FORWARD**

[**Note:** *Student Taskforce presentations may be ongoing this week.*]

From Franklin’s *Prison Writing*, key women poets: Norma Stafford, Carolyn Baxter, and Kathy Boudin, 239-41, 248-51, 329-34.

--*Prisoner Creative Arts Project PCAP*

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/pcap>

additional trailer:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQh5HxR8ACY&feature=player_embedded#!

--*Safe Streets Arts Foundation*

<http://www.safestreetsarts.org/>

--*The Prison Arts Coalition*

<http://theprisonartscoalition.com/>

End Notes for Cover Citations & Black Board “Welcome Page” (Syllabus cover art by **Tim Blunk**, cover of *Hauling Up the Morning/Izando la Mañana*, cited below, no. 2)

1. Countee Cullen, “A Festival in Christendom” (1920), cited in James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Orbis Books, 2011. 96.
2. Chim Trang, from “The Rising Song,” in *Hauling Up the Morning/Izando la Mañana*:

Writings & Art by Political Prisoners & Prisoners of War in the U.S. Red Sea Press, 1990, 335.

3. Omitted.
4. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Letter to the Corinthians," in *Bestemmia: Tutte le poesie*. Vol. 1. Ed. Graziella Chiarcossi e Walter Siti. Milan: Garzanti, 1993. 37-77 (trans. from and cited in Hardt, below, p. 579).
5. Michael Hardt, "Exposure: Pasolini in the Flesh." For Giorgio Agamben. In *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*. Special Issue: Deleuze, Guattari and the Philosophy of Expression. Ed. Brian Massumi. Vol. XXIV. No. 3 (September 1997): 579-87, p. 581.
6. Cited in J. Morley and H. Ward, eds. *Celebrating Women* (Women in Theology and the Movement for the Ordination of Women, 1976. Often cited as "unpublished."