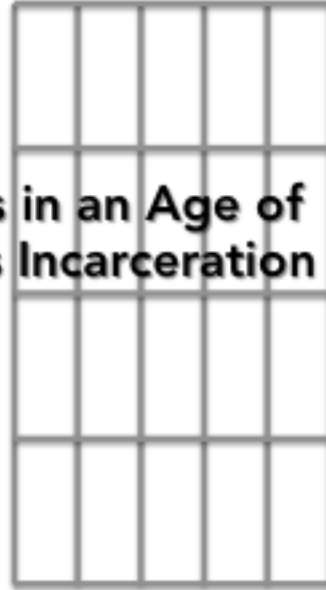


Hope and Hopelessness in an Age of Mass Incarceration

CHUM & PHIL 354
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In the United States over 7 million people are, in some form or other, caught in the “correctional” system and have their freedom significantly restricted. Over 2 million people are incarcerated. A disproportionate number of those incarcerated are people of color, particularly Black, Latino/a, and indigenous men. Women, too, are a growing part of the prison population, as are queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming people. Young people, particularly impoverished Black youth, are funneled into “correctional supervision” through the school to prison pipeline. For many people in the country today, avoiding prison seems hopeless.

For others, however, the institutions that hold millions of citizens captive are largely hidden from sight and awareness. Most people don’t know what prisons are in their area unless they work at one, were incarcerated there, or know someone who is incarcerated there. For people suffering in poverty, particularly in urban areas, contact with police and prisons is typical; for most white people prisons remain anonymous structures. Other than notorious prisons like Alcatraz, Attica, or Guantanamo Bay, most people can’t name prisons in their own state, let alone know how many prisoners are held in them. Beyond this institutional invisibility, those locked within prison walls remain ghost-like to the general public. They are abstractions or statistics, when they are considered at all. In this condition it is hard to imagine how people can have hope.

This interdisciplinary course, grounded on philosophical reflections on hope, respect, and exclusion, will critically explore the ethical, social, and political issues raised by mass incarceration. We will be particularly interested in whether and under what conditions hope is possible for those marginalized under the carceral system. We will be exploring both the structural questions that emerge under our massive system of incarceration and attend to the particular thoughts and experiences of those captive within it.

Course Readings – There will be both required readings and recommended readings for this course. You will also be reading texts that you find on your own. The main texts include: Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*; Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*; Lisa Guenther's *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlife*; Christopher LeBron's *The Color of Our Shame*; and Angela Davis' *Are Prisons Obsolete?* There will also be readings on the course Moodle.

I would prefer computers are not used in class for note taking or reading. You should print out all of the Required Readings to bring to class (when they are not books). Of course, please feel free to print other articles if you feel that would be helpful for your engagement in the seminar.

Course Requirements –

- **Participation/Discussion (~60%)**: Participation is the most important part of this seminar. Each seminar participant will be expected to shape the seminar discussion. You will be required, as part of your participation grade, to present your ideas every week, but during Week 4 and 8 you will have particular presentation assignments (roughly 25% of your grade). You will also present your final project.

Being able to articulate a philosophical position (whether one supports the position or not) is a central part of understanding that position, this is why discussion is a central part of the class. However, not all discussion is equally valuable. Talking to hear one's voice is not constructive participation. Repeating one's own point of view is not constructive participation. I cannot take responsibility for others talking too much or too little. We all need to help each other participate optimally.

Often the topics we deal with will be difficult or controversial. This is one of the reasons that discussion will be so important. Participation requires not only reflectively and respectfully discussing the material and your thoughts about it, but also carefully listening to others. Listening carefully involves attempting to hear and understand what another is saying, resisting the temptation to jump to uncharitable conclusions or interpretations of what is being said, and being willing to express the need for clarification when a topic is difficult to understand. A responsible participant will also be aware of how much they are speaking and will strive to reach a balance between talking too much and talking too little. They will also be sure that their contribution is relevant to the topic at hand.

Respecting others, even when you disagree, is crucial for successful class discussion.

Philosophical discussions are arguments in which people present and defend their views as forcefully and clearly as they can. This can be done in ways that are better or worse. Cool, calm and collected argumentation, with a good dose of humor and humility, is usually better.

- **Final Paper and presentation (~40%)**

More details about this will be provided in class.

Schedule of Reading (subject to change)

Week 1: September 8 — *Introductions and Central Park Five film*

Week 2: September 15 — *Hope*

Required Reading: Calvin Warren “Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope”; James Baldwin and Audre Lorde “Revolutionary Hope: A conversation”; and two news articles McIntyre “Prison: The Birthplace of Hopelessness ”; Robertson “For 45 Years Prison ...”

Philosophical Background Reading: (I highly recommend looking these over, we will be referring back to them over the course of the semester)

-Adrienne Martin *How we Hope: A Moral Psychology* (Intro and Ch. 1 in particular) 2013.

- Matthew Ratcliffe “What is it to Lose Hope?” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 12(4) December 2013: 597-614.

-Ariel Meirav “The Nature of Hope” *Ratio*, XXII 2009: 216–233.

- Darren Webb “Modes of hoping: *History of the Human Sciences* 20 August 2007: 65–83.

-Victoria McGreer “The Art of Good Hope” “The Art of Good Hope” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592 March 2004: 100–127.

-John Braithwaite “Emancipation and Hope” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592 March 2004:79-98

-Luc Bovens “The Value of Hope” 1999 *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 59, 667–681.

Assignment: Very close reading – read Warren twice/explore a part of the piece that is intriguing, confusing, upsetting, “wrong” and bring in a text or an argument to pair/illuminate that part.

Week 3: September 22 — *Mass Incarceration* (controversies, terminology, concerns)

Required Reading: If you haven’t read *The New Jim Crow*, please read it by this week. Please also read: Lois Wacquant “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration” and “Class, Race & Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America”; James Forman “Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow”

Recommended Reading: There are many books on mass incarceration, prisons, and policing, representing a variety of perspectives. Some that I recommend include (there are many others):

Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007). *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis*

Marie Gottschalk (2014) *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics*

Elizabeth Hinton (2016) *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*

*Joy James ed. (2005). *The New Abolitionists: (Neo) slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*

*Victoria Law (2009). *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*

Naomi Murakawa (2014) *The First Civil Right*

Parenti, Christian (2008, new edition). *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*

Western, Bruce (2006) *Punishment and Inequality in America*

Global context:

Bas Dreisinger (2016) *Incarceration Nations*

Sudbury, Julia (2005). *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison Industrial Complex*

Week 4: September 29 — Reflections from/on the Inside*

Assignment: For this week you are each to read a prison memoir and present that voice to the class. You will do research to find a memoir. I encourage you to discuss your research with each other so a broad and diverse number of voices are represented. I will provide you with ideas for the format and length of your presentation.

Week 5: October 6 — Afro-Pessimism

Required Reading: Please read Ta-Nehisi Coates *Between the World and Me*. Also read Frank Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought: An Interview with Saidiya Hartman," *Qui Parle* 13 (2) (Spring/Summer 2003) and Jared Sexton "The Social Life of Social Death," *Intensions* 5 (Fall/Winter 2011).

Recommended Reading: "We're trying to destroy the world" Anti-Blackness & Police Violence After Ferguson An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III" and "Wanderings of the Slave: Black Life and Social Death" by R.L.

Required attendance at Frank Wilderson's Center lecture 6:00 Monday, October 10.

Week 6: October 13 — Solitary Confinement and Phenomenology of Incarceration

Required Reading: Please read Lisa Guenther's book, particularly the Introduction and Chapters 1, 3, and 5.

Week 7: October 20 — Non-human Captivity

Required Reading: Please read Chapter 6 of Lisa Guenther's book and my "Dignity, Captivity and an Ethics of Sight. See also: <http://ethicsofcaptivity.weebly.com/>

Week 8 : October 27 — Dignity while Incarcerated*

Assignment: For this week you may want to go back to the prison memoir you read for Week 4 or read another one to explore the idea of dignity in prison. Again, I will provide you with ideas for the format and length of your presentation.

Week 9: November 3 —The Color of our Shame

Required Reading: Please read Christopher Lebron's book.

Week 10: I have a conference in Europe, but I encourage you to meet without me and tell me what happens.

Week 11: November 17 — Prison Abolition

Required Reading: Please read Angela Davis' book and Allegra McCleod "Prison Abolition and Grounded Justice" See also:
<http://www.blackandpink.org/resources-2/abolition/>

Week 12 THANKSGIVING – no class

Week 13 & 14 – Presentations and Conclusions