

HIST 6104/7104: Incarceration Capitalism

Summer 2016: July 6 - August 4, 2016

M, W, Th 12:00-2:45 pm

This class will examine historical literature in two "emerging" subfields of US history and seek connections between them. In a 2013 article titled "In History Departments, It's Up With Capitalism," the *New York Times* asserted, "After decades of 'history from below,' focusing on women, minorities and other marginalized people seizing their destiny, a new generation of scholars is increasingly turning to what, strangely, risked becoming the most marginalized group of all: the bosses, bankers and brokers who run the economy." Historians of the "carceral state" would argue that prisons, prisoners, and the criminal justice system have also been at the margins of our scholarly attention for too long. Scholars who study prisons and the history of incarceration seek explanations for why America incarcerates a greater percentage of its population than any country in the world. We will read new and important works in these two subfields, but focus primarily on works that examine the South.

It should go without saying that this class is going to be a lot of work in a short time. We are condensing an entire semester into four weeks. Be prepared to put most other projects on the back burner and to spend most evenings and weekends reading and writing. Not only are many of these books and articles going to require mental energy, they are also likely to require emotional energy. These are some difficult stories and some painful narratives of the past, and we're reading a lot of them in a short time. Listening, respecting and supporting each other are always important skills to bring to a class, and I suspect they will be particularly important in this one.

Written Assignments

You will write a long (15-20 page) final essay on the eleven assigned books, using a question/topic/prompt that I give you. A list of possible topics is at the end of the syllabus. You are free to mention or incorporate the articles we read into the essay as well. This is due Monday August 8. You will also write two shorter (5-6 page, double spaced) reviews of books from the syllabus of your choice. These are due the day that we read these books.

Class participation: 20%

Book reviews: 20% each

Final paper: 40%

Class meetings

You are expected to read **all** of the material in advance of each class. It may also be helpful to read reviews of that week's monograph in academic journals. Participation is key to the learning process. By engaging in discussions and debates, you become actively engaged with the course material, not simply consumers of it. Remember that class participation is about quality more than quantity.

Each week (except the weeks where the readings are all articles) one or two students will begin the class discussion of the book. If it is your turn to take this role, you should be prepared to summarize the key points of the book and explain its historiographic significance. Bring discussion questions to ask the class to consider. Finally you should be prepared to report on the author and the impact of this book. How was this book received? Did it win prizes? How and where was it reviewed? What is the author's academic background and training? Discuss their career trajectory, body of scholarship, and larger impact on the profession.

Class 1: Wednesday July 6

"In History Departments, It's Up With Capitalism," *New York Times*, April 2013
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/education/in-history-departments-its-up-with-capitalism.html>

"Interchange: The History of Capitalism," *Journal of American History* (2014) 101 (2): 503-536

Timothy Shenk, "Apostles of Growth," *The Nation* online, November 5, 2014,
<http://www.thenation.com/article/188369/apostles-growth>

Jeffrey Sklansky, "The Elusive Sovereign: New Intellectual and Social Histories of Capitalism" *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (April 2012): 233-48.
https://indigo.uic.edu/bitstream/handle/10027/10521/the_elusive_sovereign.pdf?sequence=2

Jeffrey Sklansky, "Labor, Money, and the Financial Turn in the History of Capitalism." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11 (Spring 2014): 23-46.

Class 2: Thursday July 7

Heather Ann Thompson and Kelly Lytle Hernandez (editors), *Journal of American History*, Special Issue, "Historians and the Carceral State." Read p. 18-184.
<http://jah.oxfordjournals.org/content/102/1.toc>

Marie Gottschalk, "Are We There Yet? The Promise, Perils and Politics of Penal Reform," *Prison Legal News*, January, 2016, page 1
<https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2016/jan/1/are-we-there-yet-promise-perils-and-politics-penal-reform/>

Class 3: Monday July 11

Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books, 2014)

Class 4: Wednesday July 13

Robin Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Class 5: Thursday July 14

Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Harvard University Press, 2012)

Class 6: Monday July 18

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009)

Class 7: Wednesday July 20

Bruce Baker and Barbara Hahn, *The Cotton Kings: Capitalism and Corruption in Turn-of-the-Century New York and New Orleans* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

Class 8: Thursday July 21

Bart Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism* (Norton 2014)

Class 9: Monday July 25

Talitha L. LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South the New South* (UNC, 2015)

Class 10: Wednesday July 27

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Harvard University Press, 2010)

Class 11: Thursday July 28

Pippa Holloway, *Living in Infamy: Felon Disfranchisement and the History of American Citizenship*

Marc Meredith Michael Morse, "Discretionary Disenfranchisement: The Case of Legal Financial Obligations." Working Paper. Copy at <http://j.mp/1eH4BTa>

Class 12: Monday August 1

Robert Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire* (Metropolitan Books, 2010) (chapters 1-3)

Class 13: Wednesday August 3

Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (UNC, 2014)

Possible Final Essay Questions

1. Historians of capitalism and of the carceral state face a challenge in locating power and authority in the structures and systems their work seeks to examine. To what extent have they succeeded or failed in this task? (Implicit in this question is the assumption that locating power and authority is an important task for historians, but you can critique that also if you want.)
2. Much, if not most, scholarship in the history of capitalism and the history of the carceral state is written with an eye on contemporary issues and with a political agenda. What generalizations can you make about the political agendas of these scholars? In other words, can you identify common goals or ideologies that these works share?
3. This class has been premised on the idea that there are two historical fields that we've explored. But do these readings in fact cohere around two common fields? In short: Is there a history of capitalism and a history of the carceral state? If so, what strengths are derived from viewing them as fields? If not, might there be other, better ways to categorize these works?
4. What productive connections can be drawn between the history of capitalism and the history of the carceral state? Should these fields engage each other more? (Or possibly less?) What are the benefits and/or pitfalls of reading them in conjunction with each other?
5. Some have suggested that scholars in both the history of capitalism and the history of the carceral state face a challenge in writing accounts of the past that are more than just histories of powerful white men. Is this a legitimate critique of the field? To what extent have these scholars succeeded or failed in this task? (Like question 1, implicit in this question is that writing a history that is primarily, if not solely, about white men is a problematic undertaking, but if you want to challenge that assumption, feel free.)