

# Africana Criminal Justice: A Research Seminar

Professor:  
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Seminar Location: 758 Schermerhorn Extension  
Seminar Day/Time: Wednesdays, 11:00am to 1:00pm  
Credits: 4 hours/points

Office: 758 Schermerhorn Extension  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:00pm to 2:00pm, or by appointment  
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## ❖ Overview

This seminar explores core themes of the Africana Criminal Justice Project—a research, education, and organizing initiative addressing criminal justice in the Black experience—through assigned readings, in-class discussion, and a research module. The seminar will focus substantively on the racialization of criminal social control and the consequences of mass imprisonment for black families, communities, and our society overall. In addition to introducing students to important texts in these areas, we will develop new insights on crime and punishment in the black experience through original research. Students will identify representations of crime and justice in black intellectual history, and with assistance from Columbia University research centers and the instructor, conduct oral history interviews with formerly incarcerated woman or man, focusing on their post-carcer experiences.

## ❖ Requirements and Grading

Students participating in the seminar will be expected to attend class regularly, read and critique assigned materials, and contribute to class discussion and small group collaborations.

Grades will be based on your overall participation in the seminar and four graded components of the research module, distributed accordingly:

In-class Participation; Presentations	20%
Research 1: Intellectual History Annotation #1	15%
Research 2: Intellectual History Annotation #2	15%
Research 3: Oral History Project Design & Execution	20%
Research 4: Oral History Transcript & Annotation	30%

Assignments will be due at the beginning of class on designated dates. Extensions will only be granted under extreme circumstances, and when requested prior to deadlines. Unexcused late assignments will be penalized one full letter grade per day.

## ❖ Research Module

The seminar incorporates an intensive research module where participants conduct original research on crime and justice in the Black experience. The research module includes two components: First, students will conduct exploratory research on crime, punishment and resistance to injustice in black *intellectual history*. Second, students will conduct a more extensive *oral history* research study to examine the impact of mass incarceration on black families and communities. The research components are described in more detail below:

### ***Intellectual History***

In the first section of the research module, students will locate and annotate two examples of criminal justice inquiry/engagement in the black intellectual tradition. Crime, punishment, and resistance to injustice have consistently occupied the thoughts of black scholars, artists, activists, and public intellectuals for more than a century, including many who have personally experienced incarceration—such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin, Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, George Jackson, Mumia Abu-Jamal, James Farmer, and Angela Davis. These contributions reflect a wide array of interpretive styles and disciplinary perspectives (i.e., social sciences, humanities, law, criminology, etc.), and provide a resource for understanding crime and punishment in the black experience. The Africana Criminal Justice Project has been developing a collection of annotated references, which will be made available to educators and researchers.

Your first assignment will be to find and annotate two references not already included in the ACJP bibliography. The annotations may be of a literary, scholarly, or political work relating to crime and justice by a black (African American or other) author, from any historical period. Artistic works (i.e., visual or musical) must have prior approval of the instructor. Students will share their selections with the class in brief presentations on the days they are due.

### ***Oral History***

The second and more substantial research component involves planning, executing, and producing an annotated transcription of an oral history interview with a formerly incarcerated black woman or man. Oral histories will be conducted with individuals identified by the instructor (with possible exceptions), and will focus on former prisoners who have since become effective advocates of change and positive contributors for their families and/or communities; for example, as leaders in community organizations, faith-based institutions, artists, entrepreneurs, social workers, youth organizers, or in other capacities. Drawing on assigned readings, the oral histories should focus thematically on the consequences of mass incarceration for black civic capacity and leadership, seeking to determine how a new generation of leadership can be culled from the masses of former prisoners.

One purpose of this project is to familiarize students with strategies for conducting innovative research on the impact of racialized criminal justice policies on individual and social relations. To prepare for this project, students will be introduced to major methodological issues and debates in oral history research, and will receive instruction from the director of Columbia University's Oral History Research Center. The Center for New Media Teaching and Learning at Columbia will provide technical support for recording (audio and in some cases video) of actual interviews. Interview subjects must consent to these recordings, using a provided consent form. Interviews are expected to last approximately one hour, and to be

completed in the month of April. If possible, arrangements should be made to conduct the interview on campus. The instructor will accompany each student during their interviews.

The final component of this project involves producing a transcript of the interview, and annotating selections from this transcription. This means first transcribing (writing out, verbatim) the recorded interview content, then making notes on select portions of the transcript. Annotations should draw connections between your interview and materials discussed in the seminar readings and/or discussion, and reflect on the interview experience. Your annotated transcription should begin by identifying the substantive and methodological issues you intended to address and providing background characteristics of your subject. Your annotations within the transcript should reflect on the implications of specific passages for our understanding of theoretical, political and methodological issues raised in seminar readings and discussions, and indicate any personal reflections (i.e., surprises, sources of confusion, issues to explore further, etc.) you had in the process of conducting the interview and/or producing the transcript. To be sure, you are not expected to produce an exhaustive oral history research paper. Rather, the final product is a transcript with annotations relating central issues and problems raised in the seminar and reflecting upon your oral history research experience. Further detail on this assignment will be provided during the semester.

### ❖ Readings

The seminar makes use of several books, all of which are required, can be purchased at Labyrinth Books, and borrowed at Butler Reserves. The instructor will occasionally distribute articles and other handouts throughout the semester. The books for the seminar are:

Bandelet, Asha (1999). *The Prisoner's Wife*. New York: Pocket Books.

Gwaltney, John L. (1993). *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*. New York: New Press.

Mauer, Marc (1999). *Race to Incarcerate*. New York: New Press.

Mauer, Marc and Meda Chesney-Lind, eds. (2002). *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*. New York: New Press.

Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson (1998). *The Oral History Reader*. New York: Routledge.

### ❖ Course Schedule

#### **PART I. Intersections of Race, Crime and Justice in the Black Experience**

Focus on the general problem of racialized mass incarceration; Understanding punishment as a social institution; The Africana Criminal Justice Project.

*Week 1 (1/22/03). Discuss:* ACJP Bibliography [Handout]

Ward and Marable, "Toward a New Civic Leadership" [Handout]

*Week 2 (1/29/03). Read:* David Garland, "Punishment as a Social Institution." [Handout]

Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*; Pp. 1 - 55

**Week 3 (2/5/03).** **Read:** Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*; Pp. 56 - 117  
Angela Davis, "Race and Criminalization" [Handout]

**Week 4 (2/12/03).** **Deadline:** *Annotation #1; Brief presentations*

**Read:** Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*; Pp. 118 - 194

## **PART II. Consequences of Mass Incarceration for Individuals, Families, and Communities**

Focus on the collateral consequences of mass imprisonment, including specific issues of felon disfranchisement, private/public and local/global considerations, and the hyper-marginalization of black ghettos.

**Week 5 (2/19/03).** **Read:** Mauer & Chesney-Lind, *Invisible Punishment*; Pp. 1- 58; 79 - 95  
Sentencing Project, Loosing the Vote [Handout]

**Week 6 (2/26/03).** **Read:** Mauer & Chesney-Lind, *Invisible Punishment*; Pp. 115 - 193  
Sentencing Project, Regaining the Vote [Handout]

**Week 7 (3/05/03).** **Read:** Loïc Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis." [Handout]  
Bandelet, *The Prisoner's Wife*; Pp. 13 - 98

**Week 8 (3/12/03).** **Deadline:** *Annotation #2; Brief presentations*

**Read:** Bandelet, *The Prisoner's Wife*; Pp. 99 - 205

-----**SPRING BREAK: March 17 to 21**-----

## **PART III. Oral History Module: Research Methods and Project Design**

Focus on oral history research methods; What is oral history?; Doing Oral History; Using Oral History.

**Week 9 (3/26/03).** **Read:** Perks & Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*; Chs. 2, 4, 6, 8  
Gwaltney, *Drylongso*; Introduction

**Week 10 (4/02/03).** **Read:** Perks & Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*; Chs. 9, 10, 14  
Gwaltney, *Drylongso*; "Ruth Shays" (Pp. 27-38).

**Week 11 (4/09/03).** **Read:** Perks & Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*; Chs. 18, 20, 22  
Gwaltney, *Drylongso*; "Janet McCrae" (121-6) and "Melvin Wilmot" (127-9)

**Week 12 (4/16/03).** **Deadline:** *Oral History Research Plan*

**Read:** Perks & Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*; Chs. 24, 26, 27, 28  
Gwaltney, *Drylongso*; "Edith Baker" (188-9) and "Margaret  
Lawson" (194-9).

**PART IV. Complete Oral Histories: Interviews, Transcripts, and Annotations**

Focus on completing oral history research; Transcriptions and annotations; Completing final paper.

**Week 13 (4/23/03).** **Read:** Perks & Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*; Chs. 32 and 38  
Gwaltney, *Drylongso*; "Jonathan Melton" (267-87)

**Week 14 (4/30/03).** *Last Week of Class!!!*

**Deadline:** *All interviews must be completed; Deadline for feedback on  
drafts of transcript and annotations.*

**Read:** No readings; In-class presentations on oral history experience.

**Final Annotated Transcriptions are Due in my Mailbox: Monday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, by 5pm.**