THE WAR ON CRIME: CRIME, CRIMINALIZATION, AND URBAN AMERICA

“If I grow up, I’d like to be a bus driver.” This was the chilling response of ten-year old Lafayette Rivers, a Chicago public housing resident, when Wall Street Journal reporter Alex Kotlowitz asked him about his future prospects. His conditional response—“if I grow up”—captures the profound insecurity that results from growing up in a poverty-entrenched and high-crime ghetto. In this class, we will examine American society, culture, and government through the lens of crime and criminalization. We will explore what it means to live in and with crime, and how government policies have sought to deal with crime. Exploring the psychological side, we will read the story of Lafayette Rivers and his family as narrated in the There are No Children Here. We will also approach our topic from a historical perspective, studying the origins and development of the ghetto. We will draw on documentary films and consider how a popular TV-series, The Wire, portray criminal life. Finally we will examine the policies that constitute the War on Drugs and the immense growth in the prison population over the past few decades. What are the social, economic, and human costs of crime and punishment? How, if at all, have American society benefited from the War on Crime?
TEXTS


All other readings will be on D2L or accessible via the internet (links in syllabus below). For a full bibliography see D2L.

DOCUMENTARIES (screened in class)
Reefer Madness, Louis Gasnier, 1937
The Birth of a Nation, D.W. Griffith (1915
The House I live In by Eugene Jarecki 2012
Poverty in Chicago by Brian Schodorf, 2006

ASSIGNMENTS / REQUIREMENTS
Class Participation (20%)
Biweekly reader response posted to D2L (40%)
2 formal papers, the first of which may be revised (20% each)

Student Background Presentations: students will read a couple of extra texts (very short ones) and briefly present from them to the class to provide context

Student Moderation—see separate sheet for guidelines.
READING SCHEDULE

Week 1  Introductions
21 January
  Course Objective, Syllabus, Discussion of Concepts and Approach

23 January  On Crime and the Politics of Crime
  Stuart Scheingold, *The Politics of Law and Order* (excerpt)*
  Simon, Frampton, Haney-Lopez, “Introduction (from *After The War on Crime)*”

Week 2  Living with Crime
28 January
  Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here*, front matter and chapters 1-4 (1-42)
  Screen *Poverty in Chicago*

23 January
  Hirsch, *The Making of the Second Ghetto*, Chapter 1

  Student Background Presentation: __________________________
  *Up South* (text, two clips) http://ashp.cuny.edu/ashp-documentaries/up-south/

Week 3
4 February
  Kotlowitz, Chapters 5-9 (43-92)

  Student Background Presentation on urban schools: __________________________

  Jonathan Kozol, 1967, "Death at an Early Age":
  Kozol lecture: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6u-gIToYLg
6 February

Hirsch, Chapter 2: An Era of Hidden Violence (40-67)

Student Background Presentation 1: __________________________
Urban uprisings / "race riots"


Detroit 1967 riots: http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/d_index.htm

Week 4
11 February

Kotlowitz, Chapter 10-14 (93-139)

Student Background Presentation on psychological studies:__________________________


University of Rochester, "How Chronic Stress Short-circuits Parenting" (summary of Melissa Sturge-Apple's research findings): http://www.rochester.edu/news/show.php?id=3913

13 February

Hirsch, Chapter 3: Friends, Neighbors, Rioters (68-99)

Student Moderators: ____________________

Week 5
18 February

Kotlowitz, Chapters 15-18 (131-178)

20 February

Hirsch, Chapter 4: The Loop Versus the Slums (100-134)

Student Moderators: ____________________
Week 6
25 February
Kotlowitz, Chapters 19-23 (179-225)

27 February
Paper #1 due for peer review
Hirsch Chapter 6: Divided We Stand (171-211)

Week 7
4 March
Paper #1 due to professor
Kotlowitz, No Children Here, Chapters 24-26 (226-256)

6 March
Hirsch Chapter 7: Making the Second Ghetto
Student Moderators:___________________________

Week 8
11 March
Kotlowitz, No Children Here, Chapters 27-31 (257-298)

13 March
Kotlowitz, Epilogue
Hirsch, Epilogue
Student Moderators:___________________________

17-21 March, Spring Recess
**Week 9**
25 March

Provine, Intro and Chapter 1 (1-36)

*Screening The House I live In* (documentary, Jarecki 2013)

27 March

Gabriel Grand, “Meet Carl Hart, the Scientist Debunking America’s Myths about Drugs”*


Continue screening *The House I live In*

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**Week 10**
1 April

Provine, Chapter 2: Race in America’s First War on Drugs (37-62)

Student Moderators: ___________________________

*Screening The Birth of a Nation* (segment)

3 April: *Class is cancelled; professor is away.*

Watch Michelle Alexander’s lecture, based on her book *The New Jim Crow* and write a one page reaction and response paper to post to D2L (individually, in pairs or groups--)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gln1JwDULi4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gln1JwDULi4) (70 minutes)

Optional, Loïc Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration” (12 pages)*

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**Week 11**
8 April

Provine Chapter 3: Negro Cocaine Fiends, Mexican Marijuana Smokers... (63-90)

*Screening of Reefer Madness* (1937)

10 April

Provine, Chapter 4: Congress on Crack (63-90).

Student Moderators: ___________________________
Week 12
15 April
   Provine Ch. 5: Racial Impact (120-139)
   Student Moderators: ____________________________

17 April
   Provine, Chapter 6: Racial Justice and Epilogue (140-168)
   Student Moderators: ____________________________

Week 13 A New Way of Representing Crime? – The Wire

22 April
   Paper #2 Due to Professor.
   Read The Wire entry on Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wire
   In-class screening of The Wire episode

24 April
   C.W. Marshall & Tiffany Potter, "I am the American Dream" (1-15)*
   Sherryl Vint, “Situating The Wire” (9-29)*
   In-class screening of The Wire episode

Week 14
29 April
   David Alff, "Yesterday's Tomorrow Today: Baltimore and the Promise of Reform" (23-36)
   Peter Clandfield, "'We Ain't Got No Yard': Crime, Development, and Urban Environment" (37-49)
   In-class screening of The Wire episode
1 May

Two articles on *The Wire*, TBA (see D2L)

In-class screening of *The Wire* episode

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**Week 15  Rethinking the War on Crime**

6 May

Mary Louise Frampton, “Transformative Justice” (207-221)*

Sasha Abramsky, Is This the End of the War on Crime?” *The Nation*, online: [http://www.thenation.com/article/end-war-crime#](http://www.thenation.com/article/end-war-crime#)

Becker & Murphy, “Have We Lost the War on Drugs?” *Wall Street Journal* (2013), online: [http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324374004578217682305605070#printMode](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324374004578217682305605070#printMode)


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8 May

Due: 1-2 page reflection and discussion; course wrap up and evaluations