

Studies in Crime and Social Justice  
Spring 2007, Boston College  
Jessica Hedges, Instructor

Email: [jdhedges@yahoo.com](mailto:jdhedges@yahoo.com)  
Phone: 617-610-8255  
Office Hours: By Appointment

**Course Objectives:**

The goal of this course is to enable students to develop and apply sociologically informed, articulate, and politically meaningful definitions of "crime" and "social justice." We will consider what crime and social justice (or injustice) might mean when as indivisible constructs produced through specific *institutional* and *personal practices*. We will: (1) identify both historical and present personal notions about crime, and reflect on how these notions have evolved; (2) discuss various perspectives on the process through which laws and criminal justice institutions have been/continue to be constructed; (3) situate the contemporary study of crime within a "power-reflexive" analytic framework, attentive to the simultaneous operation of race, class, and gender as constitutive features of social power; and (4) discuss contemporary intellectual and practical efforts which challenge existing conceptual and political structures as they relate to crime and justice; (5) imagine/envision institutions which might parallel the personal notion of social justice we each develop throughout the course; (6) apply our questions and conclusions to a local, current, real-world scenario.

**Course Agenda: Assigned Readings:**

1. 1/22 **Introduction – Imagining Crime, Imagining Justice**
  - \* **Course Objectives/Expectations**
  - \* **Introduction to case study**

*Assignment:* Collect three articles regarding the increase in the homicide rate in Boston over the last two years. Summarize these articles. At the conclusion identify one local news source you will read at least 4 times a week with a focus on issues involving crime and justice. Start a portfolio of these news clippings to be handed in on 3/26.

2. 1/29 **Defining crime and diverting minds: Pyrrhic Defeats and Carnival Mirrors**
  - a) Elaine Brown, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Boston: Beacon Press 2002), Chapters 1-4
  - b) Jeffrey Reiman, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, (New York: Macmillan 1990), Chapter 1-2
  - c) Zehr, Howard, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, (Good Books: Intercourse PA 2002) pgs 1-40

3. 2/5 **Defining Crime, continued: The Boundaries Between Us**
- a) Elaine Brown, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press 2002) Chapter 5-10.
  - b) Zehr, Howard, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, (Good Books: Intercourse PA 2002) pgs 40-end.

Assignment: *How would you apply restorative justice principals to a scenario presented in one of your collected news clippings. Write a short (2 page) summary and bring to class this week.*

4. 2/12 **Mens Rea and Matters of Narrative**

- a) Handout: "Criminal Responsibility Social Responsibility and Angry Young Men"...By Abbe Smith.
- b) Elaine Brown, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press 2002) Chapters 11-15

Assignment: *Write a short (2-3 pages) response paper to The Condemnation of Little B. Discuss both your reaction to Michael Lewis' case, and your reaction to the social, historical, and political context in which Lewis was operating as understood by Brown.*

5. 2/19 **Bars at the Boundary - Gated Lives**

- a) Alan Elsner, *The Gates of Injustice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004) Chapters 1-5
- b) Meeropol, Rachel, *Americas Disappeared: Secret Imprisonment, Detainees, and the "War on Terror"* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005) pgs 1-71
- c) Jeffrey Reiman, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison, 3rd Ed.* (New York: Macmillan 1990) pp. Chapter 3-4

6. 2/26 **MIDTERM**

7. 3/5 **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

8. 3/12 **(More) Gated Lives**

- a) Handout: Lynch, Mona (2001) “From the Punitive City to the Gated Community: Security and Segregation Across the Social and Penal Landscape” University of Miami Law Journal.
- b) Alan Elsner, *The Gates of Injustice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall 2004) Chapters 6-end

*Assignment: Write a brief response (2 pages) paper to The Gates of Injustice. Propose solutions to three of the problems raised in the book*

**9. 3/19 Guardians at the Boundary: Police Power and its Perversions**

- a) Nelson, Jill: *Police Brutality* (New York: Norton 2000) pgs 1-100
- b) Meeropol, Rachel, *Americas Disappeared: Secret Imprisonment, Detainees, and the “War on Terror”* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005) pgs 72-131

**10. 3/26 Civil Rights, Civic Responsibilities**

- a) Handout: Complaint in Police Misconduct Case
- b) Nelson, Jill: *Police Brutality* (New York: Norton 2000) pgs 135-205
- c) Handout: The Bill of Rights

Assignment: *Hand in news portfolio*

**11. 4/2 Reframing the Boundary -Restorations, Reparations and Re-imaginings**

- a) Review: The Little Book of Restorative Justice, *supra*
- b) Handout: Selected readings regarding restorative justice initiatives

**12. 4/9 Restorations, Reparations and Re-imaginings**

- a) Handouts: Selected readings regarding restorative justice initiatives

**13. 4/16 PATRIOTS DAY – NO CLASS**

**14. 4/23- Imagining Crime/Imagining Justice Revisited - Final Presentations**

## 15. 4/30- Imagining Crime/Imagining Justice Revisited - Final Presentations

### Course Requirements:

#### 1. Active participation and short writing exercises: (25% of overall grade)

This is an intensive reading seminar. All participants are expected to actively contribute to seminar discussion and dialogue and to spend at least 6 hours per week reading and preparing course materials. All participants are also expected to periodically assume responsibility (in two-person teams) for a short presentation of assigned readings. For the week that participants assume responsibility for readings, they are expected to hand in short (2-3 pages) responses to the readings. Attendance is of course expected. There will also be several short writing exercises. These will count as part of your participation grade. (250 points)

2. Midterm Writing Exercise (25% of overall grade) Participants will be given several short essays to complete during class. This exercise will assess mastery over the readings, and progress in accomplishing the course objectives. (250 points)

#### 3. Final Paper/Project/Presentation (50% of overall grade)

Each participant will be responsible for contributing to a final project. As a class we will all become experts in a locally situated real-world scenario dealing with issues of crime and justice. Our scenario this semester will focus on the dramatic increase in the homicide rate over the past two years in Boston. Working groups will be formed during the second class. These working groups will focus on particular aspects of the issue and attempt to collectively raise questions and arrive at conclusions regarding the issue.

You should do whatever you can to become experts on the increase in the homicide rate in Boston. For instance you can attend community related events, and/or speak with members of the community who are involved in aspects of your projects, attend a trial, interview a law enforcement official or advocate, keep a log of media coverage, visit correctional institutions, or attend related forums.

You will then apply theoretical concepts discussed in class and readings to the scenario and create a final report and presentation. You will present your findings/conclusions with your working group. Each student should work on a discreet part of the final project, and identify the aspect of the project on which they worked.

The papers/projects should make explicit use of concepts discussed in class and in the readings, and should apply these concepts (as well as additional research, if desired) to an aspect of the case study. We will set aside time during class to discuss the progress on our projects. **On 2/12 you will be asked to share your ideas for your final projects, and to share what role each student will take in the final process.** Thus, be sure to set up a time to meet with your group before this date. Presentations will be given during the last week of class. (500 points)

