

Studies in Crime and Social Justice  
Spring 2008, Boston College  
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**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 considered 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; (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; and (6) apply our questions and conclusions to a local, current, real-world scenario.

**Course Agenda: Assigned Readings:**

1. 1/16 **Introduction – Imagining Crime, Imagining Justice**
  - \* **Course Objectives/Expectations**
  - \* **Introduction to case study**

*Assignment:* Collect three articles regarding crime rate in Boston over the last two years. Summarize these articles (due next week). 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 brought to every class.

2. 1/23 **Defining crime and diverting minds: Pyrrhic Defeats and Carnival Mirrors**
  - a) Brown, Elaine, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Boston: Beacon Press 2002), Chapters 1-4
  - b) Reiman, Jeffrey, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, (New York: Macmillan 1990), Chapter 1-2

**3. 1/30 Mens Rea and Matters of Narrative**

- a) Brown, Elaine, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press 2002) Chapter 5-9.
- b) Handout: Smith, Abbe, "Criminal Responsibility Social Responsibility and Angry Young Men"

**4. 2/6 Titillated by Terror? Tantalized by Tragedy - Crime as Entertainment**

- a) Watch three crime shows (such as *Law and Order*, *Cops*, *CSI*, etc) and watch the local news three nights this week. Keep a log of your feelings/thoughts as you consume this entertainment/information. Note whether you normally consume this type of media. Analyze both the substance and the pervasiveness of this type of entertainment/ "information" in terms of concepts discussed in the readings thus far. Pick 2-3 concepts from the readings to frame your analysis. Your reflections (not including the log) should be 3-5 pages long, and should be turned in during this weeks class.
- b) Brown, Elaine, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press 2002) Chapters 10-12
- c) Handout: Beale, Sara Sun, (November, 2006) "The News Media's Influence On Criminal Justice Policy: How Market-Driven News Promotes Punitiveness," 48 *Wm and Mary L. Rev.* 397

**5. 2/13 Bars at the Boundary - Gated Lives**

- a) Elsnor, Alan, *The Gates of Injustice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004) Chapters 1-5
- b) Brown, Elaine, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press: 2002) Chapters 13-15
- c) Reiman, Jeffrey, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, 3rd Ed. (New York: Macmillan 1990) Chapter 3-4

**6. 2/20 MIDTERM**

**7. 2/27 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) Elsner, Alan, *The Gates of Injustice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall 2004) Chapters 6-end

*Assignment: Write a brief response paper (1-2 pages) to The Gates of Injustice and the Lynch article. Then, create a one page editorial or advertisement to inform the public about the collateral consequences of our current rates of imprisonment*

8. **3/5 Guardians at the Boundary: Police Power, Civil Rights, Civic Responsibilities**
- a) Nelson, Jill: *Police Brutality* (New York: Norton 2000) (selected excerpts)
- b) Handout: Complaint in Police Misconduct Case
- c) Handout: The Bill of Rights
9. **3/12 Guardians at the Boundary: Police Power, Civil Rights, Civic Responsibilities**
- a) Nelson, Jill: *Police Brutality* (New York: Norton 2000) (selected excerpts)
- b) West, Cornell “The Role of Law in Progressive Politics” (Handout)
10. **3/26 Reframing the Boundary – Critical Criminological Perspectives/ Restorations, Reparations and Re-imaginings**
- a) Zehr, Howard, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, (Good Books: Intercourse PA 2002) pgs 1-end
11. **4/2 Reframing the Boundary – Critical Criminological Perspectives/ Restorations, Reparations and Re-imaginings**
- a) Pfohl, Stephen, *Images of Deviance and Social Control: A Sociological History, 2nd Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1994). Chapter 10. [Available on electronic reserves]
- b) Handout: Selected readings regarding restorative justice initiatives

*Assignment: Design a model restorative justice program. To be presented in class.*

- 12. 4/9 Reframing the Boundary – Critical Criminological Perspectives/ Restorations, Reparations and Re-imaginings**
- a) Pfohl, Stephen, *Images of Deviance and Social Control: A Sociological History, 2nd Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1994). Chapter 11. [Available on electronic reserves]
  - b) Handout: Selected readings regarding restorative justice initiatives
- 13. 4/16 Imagining Crime/Imagining Justice Revisited - Final Presentations**
- 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 homicide rate over the past three years in Boston, and the causes behind these statistics. Working groups will be formed during the second class. These working groups will focus on particular aspects of the issue an attempt to collectively raise questions and arrive at conclusions regarding the issue.

You should do whatever you can to become experts on this issue. 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 1/30 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 weeks of class. (500 points).