Strong emotions swirl around issues of crime and punishment. When Darren Wilson, a uniformed white police officer, shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager – America erupted. Protesters marched and rallied against police violence. Police responded with tear gas and armored trucks rolling through city streets. Protesters torched cars and smashed shop front windows. The KKK handed-out fliers threatening “lethal force.” TV news and social media carried the conflict into millions of American homes. The images of Ferguson meshed with a popular culture already saturated with law and order. With the never ending news cycle of school shootings and local thugs. The nightly menu of *CSI* and *Cops* and *Law and Order Special Victims Unit*. We are immersed in this culture, bombarded with images that convert hard questions of morality and justice into the black and white of front page criminals. It gets hard to make sense of what it all means.

I want this class to be a place of learning and reflection, an opportunity for a deeper look at the truth of crime and punishment in America. These are emotion-laden issues that provoke reactions in the gut and in the stomach. An academic classroom provides the time and space to think more deeply about their meaning – not only in terms of social science, but politically and ethically. We will approach the class from a sociological perspective. This means taking an *historical view* on the current moment, and in particular, tracing the roots of a system of mass imprisonment that now keeps more than two million people behind bars. It means thinking about *interrelationships and broad connections*, the way that individual “criminals,” for example, are embedded in social relations that not only push them to act in some ways and not others – but define who and what will be punished as “criminal” at all. And it means paying attention to *power*, the way that prisons feed off and into entrenched inequalities in access to power – the power to kill, to grab and detain, to punish and exclude – and the powerlessness that so often bubbles just beneath individual acts of drug abuse and interpersonal cruelty.

We live at a time when issues of crime and punishment are at the forefront of national politics and debates about the future of the country. I hope the class will provide a set of tools for seeing more clearly and making decisions about where you stand.

**CLASS FORMAT AND GRADING**

I see sitting and listening to someone else talk as a blunt way to learn, much less effective than being actively engaged in talking about and processing new ideas with others. So I’ll avoid lecture as much as possible. I want the class to be a *learning community* where we read and grapple with sometimes tough questions – and do this together as a group. During classes, you’re more likely to hear the voices of other students than mine. Running the course this way relies on everyone doing the work and coming with questions and ideas. Not only will you ‘get out only as much as you put in’, as the saying goes, but the whole class stands to gain (or not) from your commitment to reading, digesting,
and engaging with the work. The two elements of the final grade related to this aspect of the course are:

- Participation: 10 percent
- Reading Quizzes: 25 percent

Over the semester, there will be 5 or 6 in-class quizzes testing your knowledge of the reading for that week. You won’t know in advance on which weeks there will be quizzes (or not). They will be easy for anyone who did the assigned reading. But they mean you will need to come each Wednesday having done the background work.

As well as a place for learning and digesting an assigned set of materials, I want the class to support independent work on a topic of your own choosing. Much of the final grade will be based on a semester long project that proceeds through a series of stages: a short proposal, then a longer midterm paper, and a longer still final - each stage building on the one before. Outside class time, we’ll meet and discuss the project individually as you move along, and inside class, we’ll set aside time for sharing work in progress with other students working on similar topics. Our final meeting of the semester will involve everyone coming together and presenting what they found. The elements of the final grade related to this aspect of the course are:

- Research Paper: 55 percent
- Mid-term Paper: 25 percent
- Final Paper: 30 percent
- Final presentation: 10 percent

One last thing: please note that this course is not part of the Boston College social science core.

**ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASS**

There will be no laptops or other electronic devices (computer, iPad, iPhone, etc.) allowed during the class period. I know people like to use these for note taking, but on the whole, these tend to be more of a distraction than a learning aid. If you have a special reason why you need to use a computer to take notes, please schedule a meeting to discuss with me during office hours.

**PUNISHMENT IN AMERICA**

**Week One: Introductions, January 14th**

No reading for this week.

**Week Two: Mass Imprisonment, January 21st**

Western, Bruce. 2006. *Punishment and Inequality in America*, pp. 11-51.
Suggested Reading

Wacquant, Loic. 2009. Class, Race and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America.

Week Three: If Punishment is not (mainly) about Crime Control – then What? January 28th


Suggested Reading

Wacquant, Loic. 2009. Punishing the Poor.

Week Four: Mass Imprisonment as the Revival of Racial Caste, February 4th


Suggested Reading

Wacquant, Loic. 2002. From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the Race Question in the US.

Week Five: Prison Life - Voices from Inside, February 11th

Baca, Jimmy Santiago. A Place to Stand, pp. 1-6.

Suggested Reading

Gregory Frederick. 2003. Prisoners are Citizens.

Week Six: The Broad Footprint of Mass Imprisonment - Schooling, February 18th

Suggested Reading

Hirschfield, Paul. 2008. Preparing for Prison? The criminalization of school discipline in the USA
Monahan, Torin and Rodolfo Torres. 2010. Schools under Surveillance: Cultures of Control in Public Education.

Week Seven: The Broad Footprint of Mass Imprisonment - Families, February 25th


Suggested Reading

Comfort, Megan. 2007. Punishment beyond the Legal Offender.

Week Eight: Spring Break, March 4th

No class or reading for this week

Week Nine: The Broad Footprint of Mass Imprisonment – Community, March 11th

Special Topic: Ferguson and Police Violence in Black Communities
Readings will be distributed in class

Suggested Reading


CRIME IN AMERICA

Week Ten: Hustling and Street Crime, March 18th

Suggested Reading

Young, Jock. 1999. *Cannibalism and Bulimia: Patterns of Social Control in Late Modernity.*

**Week Eleven: Drugs and Addiction, March 25th**

Mate, Gabor. 2010. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts,* pp. 133-220.

Suggested Reading


**Week Twelve: Crimes not Usually Talked About: White Criminals and Middle-Class Offending, April 1st**


Suggested Reading

Mohamed, Rafik and Erik Fritsvold. 2010. *Dorm Room Dealers: Drugs and the Privileges of Race and Class.*
Linnemann, Travis and Tyler Wall. 2013. *‘This is Your Face on Meth’: the Punitive Spectacle of ‘White Trash’ in the Rural War on Drugs.*
Pierce, Todd. 1999. *Gen-X Junkie: Ethnographic Research with Young White Heroin Users in Washington, DC.*

**Week Thirteen: Crimes of the Powerful: Suite Crime and Financial Fraud, April 8th**


Suggested Reading

Hagan, John. 2010. *Who are the Criminals?*

**Week Fourteen: Violence, April 15th**

**Suggested Reading**


**Week Fifteen: Anti-Violence Strategies in an Age of Mass Imprisonment, April 22nd**


**Suggested Reading**


**Week Sixteen: Student Presentations, April 29th**