

Studies in Crime and Social Justice  
Fall 2009, 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 might mean when considered as indivisible constructs produced through specific *institutional* and *personal practices*. We will: (1) identify 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, while being particularly attentive to the simultaneous operation of race and class 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 reflect 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. **9/14 Introduction – Imagining Crime, Imagining Justice**
  - \* **Course Objectives/Expectations**
  - \* **Introduction to case study**

*Assignment:* Collect three articles regarding criminal justice issues facing the Boston area currently or over the last several 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. **9/21 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. **9/28 Mens Rea and Matters of Narrative**
  - a) Brown, Elaine, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press 2002) Chapter 5-9.
  - b) Smith, Abbe, “Criminal Responsibility Social Responsibility and Angry Young Men” (electronic reserves)
  
4. **10/5 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 class this week.
  - b) Brown, Elaine, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press 2002) Chapters 10-12
  - c) 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 (electronic reserves)
  
5. **10/12 Columbus Day – no class**
  
6. **10/19 Bars at the Boundary - Gated Lives**
  - a) Brown, Elaine, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Beacon Press: 2002) Chapters 13-15
  - b) Reiman, Jeffrey, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, 3rd Ed. (New York: Macmillan 1990) Chapter 3-4
  - c) 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*.
  
6. **10/26 MIDTERM**

7. 11/2 Working Groups ---

*No readings: bring a progress report on your projects to class.*

8. 11/9 **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) The Bill of Rights (memorize one of the First Ten Amendments!!!!)

9. 11/16 **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
- b) Restorative justice readings – on electronic reserves

10. 11/23 **Reframing the Boundary – Critical Criminological Perspectives/ Restorations, Reparations and Re-imaginings**

- a) Handout: Selected readings regarding restorative justice initiatives

11. 11/30 **Imagining Crime/Imagining Justice Revisited - Final Presentations**

12. 12/7 **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. This semester we will focus on either: 1) youth violence; 2) high rates of imprisonment; 3) drug related violence within housing projects; and 4) life without parole for juveniles -- all issues confronting the city of Boston. For each issue, the group will locate and study creative criminal justice initiatives in response to these issues. Working groups will be formed during the second class. These working groups will focus on particular aspects of the issue chosen in an attempt to collectively raise questions and arrive at conclusions regarding the issue and related initiatives.

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 may even consider who would be on a panel addressing these issues, and think about what would be required to put such a panel together.

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 10/5 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).