Description: This course examines the politics of criminalization, broadly defined as the process of increasing punitive treatment of those on the bottom of the socio-economic order—a process that has accelerated in recent decades in the U.S. The course uses scholarly sources to aid in analyzing news reports on the growing concern about this topic. Students will be given opportunities to use the scholarly sources to examine different aspects of this subject. The course investigates the historical roots of the growing criminalization of poverty especially in terms of its effects in re-inscribing the subordination of particular populations—low-income inner-city blacks and other racial minorities most especially. The course examines the economic, social, cultural and political changes that contributed to this process. Deindustrialization and the hollowing out of urban economies are given attention as important contextual economic factors which have created the conditions for a punitive turn in managing subordinate populations that have been cast aside, rendered superfluous and even made disposable by the changing political economy. The breakdown of the New Deal coalition and the waning of support for welfare programs are discussed as important political contextual factors. The rise of mass incarceration is studied in depth as a significant feature of the punitive turn in poverty management with attention to both its causes and effects. Changes in other public policies in a more punitive direction are also examined. The increased penalization of poverty itself and the effects on the poor are also highlighted with examples from labor market, the legal system and social welfare programming. The role of race is given special attention in all these developments, as most especially highlighted by the growing awareness of the higher probability of unarmed black men dying at the hands of the police and producing the protest movement Black Lives Matter. The capacity of the subordinated to participate in the political process, through conventional means as well as episodic protest, so to reverse these developments is examined as well. Concluding the course is consideration of constructive alternative responses, including specific public policy reforms that could over time move things more in a positive direction.

Required Texts:


Course Requirements:

Mid-term Exam: 30%
Final Exam: 50%
Overall Class Participation: 20%
Total: 100%

Mid-Term and Final Exams: The exams will ask students to apply ideas from the required texts to address specific issues raised in the articles assigned in the course outline. Class discussions will give students a chance to work on their applications of the required texts to the assigned additional readings. The exams will be take-home. Students will have two weeks to complete each exam after it is assigned. Exams should be typed, doubled-spaced, completed using Microsoft Word and submitted via email.

Overall Class Participation: Your participation grade will be determined in three ways: (1) attendance; (2) discussion of the assigned readings as related to the required books; and (3) reactions to points the instructor and others make in class.
Late Assignments and Make-Up Exams: The following are acceptable reasons for excused absences and late assignments: (1) serious illness; (2) illness or death of family member; (3) school trips; (4) major religious holidays, and (5) other circumstances found by the instructor to be “reasonable cause for nonattendance.” When there is an excused absence, students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work and/or exams. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of the absence, preferably in advance of the missed class. The burden of proof is on the student to provide sufficient documentation regarding the nature of the absence.

Academic Integrity, Cheating and Plagiarism: It is assumed that students in this course will work independently and that all work submitted for a grade is the work of that student. I consider the violation of this policy (including plagiarism) to be a very serious offense and will pursue any offense to the full extent permitted by the university.

Respect: Please do not talk to your neighbor during lectures or when one of the other members of the class is speaking. I realize you might occasionally miss a point in the lecture and might ask your neighbor what was said, and that is fine. But habitual gabbing while others are speaking is inappropriate.

Access:

Should you require use of accommodation or assistance from access services, please see: http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/studentservices/access

Course Schedule:

Politics of Criminalization: Overview
8/31 Review of Syllabus.

Alice Goffman, How We're Priming Some Kids for College — and Others for Prison (TED Talk, March 2015).

I Still Can’t Breathe: New York City as the Paradigm
9/2 Film: Litefeet.

Gottschalk, chapter 1.
Lerman and Weaver, chapter 1.

9/7 NO CLASS

The Decline of the Inner City

Gottschalk, chapter 2.

9/14 NO CLASS

The End of the New Deal Coalition


Gottschalk, chapter 3 (first half).

9/23 NO CLASS

The Rise of Neoliberalism


Gottschalk, chapter 3 (second half).

The Punitive Turn: The Death of the Social
10/5 Loic Wacquant, “The Punitive Regulation of Poverty in a Neoliberal Age,” Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 89 (September 2012): 38-40.


Mass Incarceration


Tracy Velázquez, “Young Adult Justice: A New Frontier Worth Exploring.”

Robert Reich, “We Need to End Mass Incarceration Now,” Moveon.org.


10/12 NO CLASS

Reentry
10/14 The Sentencing Project, “Youth Reentry.”

Gottschalk, chapters 4-5.

The Role of Race

Gottschalk, chapter 6.


Gottschalk, chapter 7.

10/21 MID-TERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED

Spreading Penalization


10/28   Gottschalk, chapters 8-9.

Penalization and Precaritization


Gottschalk, chapters, 10-11.

Criminalization and De-Democratization: Individual, Community and System Effects
11/9    Lerman and Weaver, chapter 2.

Individual Effects: Felony Disenfranchisement and Beyond
11/11   Lerman and Weaver, chapter 3.

Sentencing Project, “Felony Disenfranchisement: A Primer.”


Community Effects of Mass Incarceration
11/16   Bruce Western; Becky Pettit, “Beyond Crime and Punishment: Prisons and Inequality Contexts, 1, 3 (Fall 2002): 37-43.

11/18   Lerman and Weaver, chapter 4.

Criminalization’s System Effects


11/25   Lerman and Weaver, chapter 5.

Teaching Negative Citizenship: Learning to Fear the State
11/30   Yamiche Alcindor, “Ferguson Voters Make History and Increase Turnout,” USA Today April 8, 2015.

Lerman and Weaver, chapter 6.

12/3    Lerman and Weaver, chapter 7-8.

Criminalization and Negative Policy Feedback Effects

Responding to the Crisis of Criminalization


Gottschalk, chapter 12.


Lerman and Weaver, chapter 9.

12/14 Final Exam Assigned

12/28 Final Due No Later than 4 pm