Incarceration is central to the understanding, if not perhaps usually to the self-understanding, of a society. It is an aperture into basic questions of values and practices.

What does mass incarceration mean? For the incarcerated, for those who anticipate incarceration, for those who believe they will be spared, to localities that are sites of prisons and camps, for everyone? How does it come about? In what sense do the initial physical structures of incarceration (the prison, the camp) relate to later forms of policy that involve the incarceration of millions of people? In what way can incarceration, and then mass incarcerations, be related to ideologies, such as racism? If so, are the ideologies constant over time, such that they can be treated as a constant, or does the institution of mass incarceration alter or reproduce them?

Is mass incarceration to be understood as a form of mass politics? A result of mass politics? Of the anticipation of mass politics? Of the failure of mass politics to take a certain anticipated form? As revenge upon those who are seen to spoil mass politics by their own inclusion? Given that some combination of these questions must certainly be answered in the affirmative, mass incarceration is certainly political from the perspective of its makers and its supporters. But what about the incarcerated themselves? Is a political prisoner someone whose aims are explicitly political at the moment of arrest? Or might a political prisoner be someone whose incarceration is better understood through political and historical analysis rather than through jurisprudence or criminology? And if a prisoner comes to understand their own case as evidence of a larger politics, is that person a political prisoner? Does it matter when dissent begins, and on which side of the bars or the barbed wire? What are we to make of the radically different and clashing evaluations of communism?
To answer such questions, we must take some account of the facilities of incarceration, the experience of incarceration, and the political history at the (distinct) moments when Soviet and American incarceration crossed into the millions. Brief account is taken of important comparative cases, such as Nazi Germany and communist Poland.

You will be evaluated on the basis of class participation (25%) and three written assignments (25% each). Class participation involves close reading of assigned texts before each seminar meeting. Due dates of assignments will be given in class. Your first written assignment is individual. You are to identify an incarcerated person, living or dead, and accumulate the sources that permit you to write a two-thousand word portrait. In this assignment you may use a variety of methods -- philosophical, historical, social scientific -- to be further discussed in seminar. Your second assignment is structural. On the basis of course readings, discuss (at the length of two thousand words) an institution (broadly understood) of one (or more) carceral system(s). Your third assignment is a review. Make sure to take careful notes on the books you are assigned. At the end of the class, write a book review (two thousand words) on the basis of what you have learned throughout the semester. We will discuss all of these assignments during the first seminar meeting.

Please complete the reading and make your notes by hand (or print them out) before seminar. We will not use digital gear in the classroom.

The following books are available for purchase at the Yale book store.


The other readings are posted on Canvas or available online following links below.
Introduction to Class (January 17)

Review of theoretical issues.

Review of historical chronology.

Philosophical Foundations (1) (January 24)


Timothy Snyder, "Live Free," selections (Canvas).

Philosophical Foundations (2) (January 31)


Cecil Williams, "A Conversation with Angela," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 3, Nos. 7-8, 1972, 36-48 (Canvas), see also this clip.


George Jackson, "Towards the United Front," in ibid, 141-147 (Canvas).


Philosophical Foundations (3) (February 7)

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 1848 (Canvas)


**Historical Foundations (1): Post-Reconstruction United States (Feb. 14)•**


Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors* (online)

**Historical Foundations 2: Revolution to Gulag (Feb. 21)**


**Excursus 1: Nazi Germany (Feb. 28)**


**Encounter with the Gulag (March 7)**


**American Mass Incarceration (1) (March 28)**

Loic Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration," *New Left Review*, Jan-Feb 2002, [online](#).

Vesla Weaver, “Frontlash” (Canvas).

**American Mass Incarceration: (2) (April 11)**


**Excursus 2: Polish Stalinism and Contemporary America (April 4)**


**The 1970s: Political Prisoners Redux (April 18)**


Timothy Snyder, "Live Free," selections, tk.

**Contemporary Russia (April 25)**


Short articles tk: Russian prison, Russian psychiatric prison, Russian incarceration in Ukraine, filtration, deportation.