

Punishment, Prisons, and Justice
Reading Group Spring 2021

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This reading group will interrogate theories and practices of punishment in relation to the American criminal justice system—a system that incarcerates people at a world-leading rate and severely impedes post-incarceration reentry into society. Discussion will be anchored by my recent book, *The Limits of Blame: Rethinking Punishment and Responsibility* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2018), and will include a range of other perspectives on punishment and prisons—retributive justice, focused deterrence, restorative justice, reparations, and prison abolition—in order to grapple with the ethics of criminal justice in relation to individual wrongdoing and social injustice.

The Limits of Blame is available through the HLS bookstore and on Amazon. All other readings will be posted on the course Canvas site. This course will take place through ZOOM.

Jan. 28 **Punishment and Fair Play**

Richard Dagger, *Playing Fair*, Ch. 6 (pp. 176-203)

Joseph Kisolo-Ssonko, “Race and the Responsibility to Abide by the Norms of Unchosen and Unjust Social Roles”

Feb. 11 **Assessing Retributive Theories of Punishment**

James Q. Whitman, “A Plea Against Retributivism”

Colin Dayan, *Law is a White Dog*, Ch. 3 (pp. 71-112)

Kelly, *The Limits of Blame*, Ch. 1 ([pp. 16-25]), Ch. 4 (pp. 100-121)

Feb. 25 **Prison Abolition and Transformative Justice**

Ruth Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition, *The Intercept*, June 10, 2020.

Amna Akbar, “An Abolitionist Horizon for (Police) Reform,” section III (pp. 1814-1837)

Maximo Langer, “Penal Abolitionism and Penal Minimalism,” sections II-IV (pp. 57-77).

Mar. 11 **Restorative Justice**

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Ch. 6.

Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*, Ch. 3 (pp. 91-128)

Albert Dzur, “Trench Democracy in Criminal Justice: An Interview with Lauren Abramson,” *The Boston Review*, Dec. 13, 2013

Nils Christie, “Conflicts as Property,” *The British Journal of Criminology* 17 (1): 1-15.

Colleen Murphy, “How Nations Heal”

Apr. 1 **Law Enforcement as Crime Control?**

Mark Kleiman, *When Brute Force Fails*, Chs. 5-6 (pp. 68-116).

Alex S. Vitale, “The Police are not Here to Protect You,” *The End of Policing*, Ch. 2.

Jonathan Simon, “Four Myths of the Punitive Society”

April 15 **The Limits of State Legitimacy**

Gary Watson, “A Moral Predicament in the Criminal Law”

Kelly, *The Limits of Blame*, Ch. 6

Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*, Ch. 9