

Course Syllabus

LS 170: Crime & Criminal Justice

Tuesday/Thursday 11am - 12:30pm
247 Cory Hall

Professor Nicole Lindahl-Ruiz

nicolelindahl@berkeley.edu

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 9:30 - 10:30am on Zoom (via the bCourse site). Please email me to schedule an appointment if you are otherwise unavailable during regular office hour times.

GSI Todd Neece

toddtneece@berkeley.edu

- Discussion Section 101: Monday 2:00 - 3:00pm Social Sciences Building, 185
- Discussion Section 102: Tuesday 10:00 - 11:00am Hearst Gym, 242

*Start dates: 9/9 (101) and 9/10 (102)

Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays by appointment. To request an appointment, please email Todd specifying your window(s) of availability and preference for meeting in person or via Zoom. Requests to meet on a day other than Wednesday or Friday will be accommodated to the extent possible.

Course Description

Welcome to LS 170: Crime & Criminal Justice! This course will provide an overview of the contemporary US criminal legal system (CLS) using the current debate surrounding the “progressive prosecutor” movement to motivate our inquiry. After grounding ourselves in the philosophical underpinnings of the CLS, we will examine its recent history and contemporary operation to understand how the role of the prosecutor has shifted in the era of mass incarceration. We will then familiarize ourselves with the puzzles and pitfalls of crime data, as well as the social scientific research on the root causes of crime, in order to thoughtfully and rigorously assess claims about crime rate causes, changes, and comparisons. The course will conclude with an exploration of contemporary reformist policies and abolitionist alternatives to the current system. When possible, we will ground our learning in existing data from the Bay Area.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand how district attorneys fit into the broader criminal legal system, the shifting dynamics that have led to their growth in power, and the motivations behind and critiques of the progressive prosecutor movement.
- Critically analyze common claims made in political, media, and academic discourse regarding crime data.
- Identify and evaluate the potential and limitations of an array of responses to crime, including alternatives to traditional criminal legal avenues.

Required Texts

There are no required textbooks for this course. Each course meeting has a required reading assignment indicated on the course schedule and available on the bCourse site.

Important Dates & Deadlines

- Add/Drop Deadline: September 18
- Midterm #1: Tuesday, October 8, 11-12:30*
- Grade Change Deadline: November 1
- Midterm #2: Tuesday, November 12, 11-12:30*
- Final Exam: Wednesday, December 18, 8-11am*

*All exams will be administered remotely.

Grading

Course Engagement		25%
In-class group work/written reflections	15%	
Section attendance	10%	
Midterm #1:		20%
Midterm #2:		25%
Cumulative Final Exam		30%

Evaluation Criteria

Final grades and exams will be assessed based on the following grade cutoffs:

A+ 97 | **A** 93 | **A-** 90 | **B+** 87 | **B** 83 | **B-** 80 | **C+** 77 | **C** 73 | **C-** 70 | **D** 60 | **F** <60

All assignments will be graded by your GSI. In-class written reflections will be evaluated on a P/NP basis. The NP grade will be awarded if your reflection is based on a wildly inaccurate interpretation of the material or is substantially incomplete. You will have the opportunity to revise any assignment that receives a NP to receive full credit.

Exams will be evaluated based on a simple, holistic rubric that will be available ahead of the exam date. The rubric will delineate the criteria and standards we will use to award the points required to earn each letter grade.

Grade Disputes: If you wish to appeal an exam grade, please email your GSI with a detailed explanation of why you think the grade should be different. Your GSI will consider your appeal and come to me with any questions.

Attendance/Course Engagement

Course engagement refers to the extent and quality of your participation in class activities, including your completion of in-class writing assignments, regular attendance at discussion sections, active engagement with readings, attendance in office hours, and general demonstration that you are maintaining a thoughtful relationship with the course content. If you need to miss class, please email both me and your GSI to let us know when you will be absent. If you miss a class in which we conduct a short writing assignment, and you have communicated with us about your absence, we will establish a way for you to make up the credit.

Technology Policy

Please be mindful of your technology usage. Non-course related use of technology detracts from the class vibe, is distracting, and generally compromises the quality of our collective engagement. Laptops should only be used for notetaking and other course-related activities. Please, no cell phone use during class. Stow them inside your bag or otherwise out of sight. If you need an exception, please contact me privately.

Content Warning

In this class we will engage with materials that (at times) involve potentially disturbing subject matter, including reference to and descriptions of violence in myriad forms. I have chosen the materials carefully to avoid gratuitous content and with educational purposes in mind, and I intend to introduce the material thoughtfully and with consideration for its impact. That being said, please know that the material will touch on “all the things” - gender and racialized violence; sexual violence; state violence; and violence against children. Please consider this when deciding whether to proceed in this class.

Accommodations, Adjustments, and Flexibility

It is our goal to make this class as inclusive and accommodating to all students as possible. If you need disability-related accommodations, please email or arrange to meet with your GSI during the first week of class to discuss your requirements. If circumstances arise during the course of the semester that require adjustments or

flexibility with course requirements, please email both myself and your GSI with your request. You can learn more about how and when it is appropriate to make a request for accommodations, adjustments, and flexibility [at this webpage](#) from the UCB Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost.

Academic Integrity & Misconduct

UC Berkeley's Honor Code states "As a member of the UC Berkeley community, I act with honesty, integrity, and respect for others." The University defines academic misconduct as "any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community" (UC Berkeley Code of Student Conduct). Incidents of misconduct will be handled in accordance with the policies and procedures prescribed by the Center for Student Conduct (CSC). You are expected to uphold the honor code commitment to academic integrity and ethics.

We expect all assignments for this class to be originally composed. If you are struggling to understand or keep up with the readings and assignments, please communicate these challenges early and honestly to your instructors. We are here to help you and we want you to learn and succeed!

COURSE CALENDAR

Introduction: Foundations of the Criminal Legal System & The Rise of Mass Incarceration

Thursday, Aug 29: Course Introduction

- The Power to Punish

Tuesday, Sept 3: Historical and Philosophical Foundations of the CLS

- Purposes of Punishment
- Criminal Justice Flowchart
- Overview of the US "System"

Reading due:

[Frase, Richard S. 2005. "Punishment Purposes." *Stanford Law Review* 58\(1\): 67–84.](#)

Thursday, Sept. 5: The Rise of Mass Incarceration

- Scope and Scale of Imprisonment & Community Supervision
- Racial impact by the Numbers
- Sentencing Policy: The Rise of Mandatory Minimums
- Power Shift from Judges to Prosecutors

- Plea Bargaining

Reading due:

[Zimring, Franklin E. "Penal policy and penal legislation in recent American experience." *Stan. L. Rev.* 58 \(2005\): 323.](#)

Tuesday, Sept. 10: The Progressive Prosecutor Movement

- **Guest lecture: Chesa Boudin**
- Role and Responsibilities of the Prosecutor
- Origins of the Movement
- Current Pushback

Reading due:

[Davis, Angela J. "Reimagining prosecution: A growing progressive movement." *UCLA Crim. Just. L. Rev.* 3 \(2019\): 1.](#)

Part I: The Puzzles & Pitfalls of Crime Data: What We Do and Don't Know about Crime

Thursday, Sept 12: Evaluating Crime Rate Data-Based Claims

- Strengths and weaknesses of data sources
- Crime rate claims by type/geography/over time
- Correlation does not equal causation!

Reading due:

Zimring, Franklin E. *The great American crime decline*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2006, pp. 1-24 (excerpt available on the bCourse site)

Tuesday, Sept 17: Demographic Predictors: Questioning Common Assumptions

- The Sociological Imagination
- Sex, Age, Race, Class

Reading due:

[Blumstein, Alfred, and Richard Rosenfeld. "Explaining recent trends in US homicide rates." *J. Crim. L. & Criminology* 88 \(1997\): 1175.](#)

Thursday, Sept 19: Deterrence: Swift & Certain Wins the Race?

- General vs. Specific
- Under What Conditions Does Deterrence Prevent Crime?

Reading due:

National Institute of Justice "Five Things About Deterrence," US Department of Justice, 2016. (See report on bCourse site)

Tuesday, Sept. 24: Rehabilitation - Nothing Works?

- From “Golden Age” to “Tough on Crime”
- From Individualized Treatment to Risk Assessment
- Case Study: Prison Higher Education
- Promising New Findings: Neuroplasticity

Reading due:

[Cullen, Francis T. "Rehabilitation: Beyond Nothing works." *Crime and justice* 42.1 \(2013\): 299-376.](#)

Thursday, Sept 26: Retribution/Incapacitation - Is the CLS Criminogenic?

- Recidivism
- Collateral Consequences of Incarceration/Reentry Barriers
- Trauma of incarceration

Reading due:

Contreras, Randol. *The stickup kids: Race, drugs, violence, and the American dream*. Univ of California Press, 2013, pp. Xv-xix, 72-86 (excerpt available on the bCourse site)

Tuesday, Oct 1: Preliminary Assessments of Progressive Prosecution

- Pandemic Context
- Policies and Practice

Reading due:

[Petersen, Nick, Ojmarrh Mitchell, and Shi Yan. "Do progressive prosecutors increase crime? A quasi-experimental analysis of crime rates in the 100 largest counties, 2000–2020." *Criminology & Public Policy* 23.2 \(2024\): 459-490.](#)

And

Agan, Amanda, Jennifer L. Doleac, and Anna Harvey. "Prosecutorial reform and local crime rates." *Law & Economics Center at George Mason University Scalia Law School Research Paper Series* 22-011 (2021) (available on bCourse site)

Thursday, Oct 3: Midterm review

No reading due

Tuesday, Oct 8

Remote Midterm I - NO CLASS

No reading due

Part II: The Root Causes of Crime

Thursday, Oct 10: Neoliberalism & The Expansion of the Penal State

- Neoliberal Turn in U S Politics

- Expansion of Penal State under Neoliberalism

Reading due:

[Wacquant, Loïc. "Three steps to a historical anthropology of actually existing neoliberalism." *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 20.1 \(2012\): 66-79.](#)

Tuesday, Oct 15: Mass Incarceration in the Legacy of Slavery

- Slavery to Jim Crow to Mass Incarceration

Reading due:

WATCH: [The 13th](#) (beginning through minute 50:34).

Thursday, Oct 17: Spatial Segregation in Urban Neighborhoods

- Redlining & Racial Covenants
- "Slavery Didn't End; It Evolved"

Reading due:

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic*. May 21, 2014. (available on bCourses).

Tuesday, Oct 22: Neighborhoods & The Root Causes of Crime

- WATCH: **Book Talk by Alex Schafran:** *The Road to Resegregation*

Reading due:

Review the following reports/websites:

[Million Dollar Hoods](#)

[The California Reparations Report, Ch. 5 \(Housing Segregation\)](#)

Thursday, Oct 24: Policing Broadly Defined

- Surveillance, Labeling, & Criminalization
- Web of Policing in Family & Neighborhood Life

Reading due:

[Rios, Victor M. *Punished: Policing the lives of Black and Latino boys*. NYU Press, 2011. Preface & Ch. 4 \(pp. vii-xvi, 74-94\)](#)

Tuesday, Oct 29: Individual, Intergenerational & Collective Trauma

- Watch: [Burke-Harris TEDMED Talk](#)
- ACES & Violence/Incarceration

Reading due:

Harris, Nadine Burke. *The deepest well: Healing the long-term effects of childhood adversity*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018, Chs. 3 & 4 (pp. 27-55)

Thursday, Oct 31: Shame & Violence

- Violence as Symbolic Language

- Gendered Nature of Shame
- Shame & Domestic violence

Reading due:

Gilligan, M.D., James. *Violence: Reflections on a national epidemic*. Vintage Books, 1996, Chs. 4-5 (pp. 89-136)

Tuesday, Nov 5: Patterns in Lives Leading to Violence

- Structural and Individual Causes: Putting it All Together
- Patterns: Childhood Trauma; Forced Independence; Peer Orientation; Recklessness
- **Guest Speaker: Arnolando Ruiz, Jr.**

Reading due:

[Lindahl, Nicole Solomon. *Intimate Bonds: Dislocation, Survival, and Resistance in the Era of Neoliberal Punishment*. University of California, Berkeley, 2016. Introduction & Part I \(pp. V-ix, 1-34\)](#)

Thursday, Nov 7: Midterm review

No reading due

Tuesday, Nov 12:

Remote Midterm II

No reading due

Part III: Current Debates & Approaches

Thursday, Nov 14: Punishment vs. Accountability

- Restorative Justice as Diversion
- The Victims' Case against Mass Incarceration
- Accountability in Practice

Reading due:

Sered, Danielle. *Until we reckon: Violence, mass incarceration, and a road to repair*. The New Press, 2019, Ch. 3 (pp. 91-128)

Tuesday, Nov 19: Rehabilitation Revisited

- **Guest Speaker: Danny Murillo, Underground Scholars Initiative**

Reading due:

Larson, Doran. *Inside Knowledge: Incarcerated People on the Failures of the American Prison*. Ch. 3 (pp. 87-137)

Thursday, Nov 21: Beyond Progressive Prosecution

- Progressive Critiques of Progressive Prosecution
- What is Transformative Justice?
- Examples of Contemporary Practice

Reading due:

[Brown, Michelle. "Transformative justice and new abolition in the United States." *Justice alternatives*. Routledge, 2019.](#)

Tuesday, Nov 26: NO CLASS - HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Thursday, Nov 28: NO CLASS - HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Tuesday, Dec 3: Assessing the Current Political Moment

- **Guest Speaker: Watani Steiner**

No reading due

Thursday, Dec 5: LAST DAY OF CLASS :)

Course Review

No reading due

Remote Final Exam - Wednesday, December 18, 8-11AM