

**Plantation, Prison, and Ghetto  
in the United States**

Session A, June 7 – July 9

**Meeting Times:** TTh 1.00-4.15

This seminar surveys three spatial forms—the plantation, the prison, and the ghetto—that have served as foundations for the American project. Aligned with colonialism and domination, these spaces have sustained white supremacy in the United States and have defied attempts that would see them dismantled. This course considers, both theoretically and historically, how the production of space and the production of racial difference have been articulated together in the US.

The course is premised in an assumption that these spaces do not comprise a historical sequence. In other words, it is not necessarily the case that, for example, the plantation “evolves” into the ghetto, or that the ghetto “evolves” into the prison. Rather, their history is messy, overlapping, and repetitive. As what Katherine McKittrick calls “racial geographies,” they persist across time. We will consider the structures and logics of captivity and profit that have reproduced “blackness” (and “whiteness”) from the eighteenth century to the present day in what is now called the United States. We will also spend time studying the abolitionist movements that have fought the ongoing legacy of these carceral spaces and are seeking—right now—to reckon with their history.

**SCHEDULE**

**Historical Foundations**

Tu. 6/8

James Baldwin, “Letter to My Nephew”

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (excerpts)

**Plantations**

Th. 6/10

Frederick Douglass, “A General Survey of the Slave Plantation” (1855)

Stephanie Smallwood, “Turning African Captives into Atlantic Commodities” from  
*Saltwater Slavery*

Walter Johnson, Introduction, Chap. 1 & Chap 8 from *River of Dark Dreams*

Matthew Desmond, “Capitalism” from *The 1619 Project*

Tu. 6/15

W. E. B. Du Bois, “Back Toward Slavery” from *Black Reconstruction*

Pete Daniel, “The Metamorphosis of Slavery, 1865-1900”

Saidiya Hartman, “The Burdened Individuality of Freedom” from *Scenes of Subjection*

Patrick Wolfe “Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race” (excerpt)

## **Ghettos**

Th. 6/17

Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures"

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (excerpts)

Tu. 6/22

Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (excerpts)

## **Prisons**

Th. 6/24

Angela Davis, "From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System"

George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* and *Blood in My Eye* (Excerpts)

Loic Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration"

Tony Platt, *Beyond These Walls*, Chaps. 1-3

Tu. 6/29

Ruth Wilson Gilmore on *Intercepted* podcast (part 1)

Shannon Speed, Ch 4 "Carceral Containments: Captivity in the Homeland Security" in *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State*

Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (Chaps. 1 & 2)

## **Abolition**

Th. 7/1

Mariame Kaba, *We Do This Til We Free Us*

Danielle Sered on *Democracy Now*

*8toAbolition.com*

*Whose Streets?*, dir. Sabaah Folleyan

Elizabeth Alexander, "The Trayvon Generation"

## **Symposium**

T. 7/6 & Th. 7/8

Readings TBD by students

*\*\*please note: readings and assignments may change\*\**

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

1) Do the reading and participate in our seminar discussions. Please note that there are NO unexcused absences during summer session. [20%]

2) Write a brief personal essay about your connection to this historical moment of political ferment and uprising. This might be an account of how the institutions of structural racism have impinged upon your life (an especially powerful and challenging option for the white folks in this class.) It might be an account of how this last month has shifted your perspective on the connections between past, present, and future. It might be an account of your time in the streets (or other forms of social action), or of your time *not* being in the streets. 3 pages. [15%]

3) Write a second installment: Interview your parents/elders about their experience of this moment and what it means to them. How do they understand what's happening now in the U.S.? How does this connect to their lived understandings of the past and hopes/fears about the future? 2 pages. [15%]

4) Write a final installment: Interview at least (1) local anti-racist activist / abolitionist. 1-2 pages. [15%]

5) Keep a commonplace book. It can be digital or analog (not as easy, but probably way more fun.) It's like a journal + a scrapbook + a response paper. In this commonplace book, I want you to include sentences or paragraphs from the readings, from news stories, or from our conversations in class. You can also include images you encounter or other conversations you have. Equally important, you will also record your experience with the social justice actions you'll undertake this month. (I'm going to shave 2 hours off our screen-time each week, and ask you instead to spend that time out in the real world, doing some kind of work that pushes for change on the issues we're studying.) In other words, you will be recording your thinking about *everything* you're encountering related to the themes of this class. Don't summarize, don't rely on fluff or padding: THINK THINGS THROUGH. This is an ongoing dialogue with yourself. No set number of pages, but it should be at least as long as a term paper by the end of the course. ~15+ pages. [35%]

## **PLAGIARISM**

All written work submitted in this course is expected to be your own, with any wording and/or idea taken from any other source fairly attributed. To use phrases and/or ideas from any other source as if they were your own, whether accidentally or deliberately, constitutes plagiarism. Submitting your own work for more than one course without permission of both instructors can also constitute plagiarism. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade. For a full discussion of plagiarism and explanations of how and when to cite, see the Writing Center's website: <http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>