

Plantation, Prison, and Ghetto in the United States

Session B, July 4 – August 5

Meeting Times: T Th 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

T 7/5

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “We Should Still Defund the Police”

Racial Capitalism & Prison Abolition (zine)

James Baldwin, “Letter to My Nephew”

Plantations

TH 7/7

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*

T 7/12

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 7/14

Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures”

Richard Rothstein, “Public Housing, Black Ghettos” & “Racial Zoning”

from *The Color of Law*

T 7/19 & TH 7/21

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*
or Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946)

Prisons

T 7/26

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

Loic Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration"

Tony Platt, Chaps. 1-3, *Beyond These Walls: Rethinking Crime and Punishment in the United States*

TH 7/28

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

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "The Prison Fix" and "What Is To Be Done?" from *Golden Gulag*

Brett Story, "The Prison in the City: Securitized Property in Bankrupt Detroit"

Jackie Wang, "Policing as Plunder: Notes on Municipal Finance and the Political Economy of Fees and Fines," from *Carceral Capitalism*

Abolition

T 8/2

Mariame Kaba, *We Do This Til We Free Us* (excerpts)

TH 8/4

Derecka Purnell *Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom* (excerpts)

please note: readings may change

ASSIGNMENTS

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

2) You'll be required to write a five-page response paper to our initial readings, due before the end of our second week of classes. This paper will be an occasion for you to begin to analyze the course's introductory histories and concepts. This paper will also include some critical analysis of your own position in relation to these institutions. [20%]

3) For 5 of our 10 classes, you must write a one-page log that includes your thoughts and reactions to the readings. You must submit at least one log during each week of the course. These logs must be submitted *the night before* the assigned texts are to be discussed in class. These are low-stakes writing assignments. They're an opportunity for you to structure your thinking in a slightly more formal way. You can also include your reactions to class discussion and draw connections to the other readings. I encourage you to use these as a springboard for participating in class discussions. [30%]

4) For your final (10 pages), you will address a literary or cultural text or a historical moment or movement, which you choose, as it pertains to our semester's readings and discussions about captivity and racialization. Your chosen text/topic might be historical, or it might be contemporary. It might veer toward the empirical or toward the cultural. This paper will be an opportunity for you to explore the semester's themes in a context that speaks to you. I am open to alternative/creative projects, though they must be as rigorous as any term paper you would write. We will talk more about it later in the course. [30%]

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>