

Contemporary Issues in Civil Rights: Mass Incarceration
Spring 2019
Professor Placido Gomez

Welcome to Contemporary Issues in Civil Rights: Mass Incarceration. The assignments for the first several weeks follow.

This course grew out of my experience practicing criminal law, briefly with the Albuquerque District Attorney, and more extensively as a criminal defense attorney, mostly with the Criminal Defense Clinic at St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas. My years as a law professor teaching Evidence, Criminal Procedure and Trial Advocacy have influenced this course. Finally, I have borrowed ideas and words from courses offered at Columbia Law School by Professors Brett Dignam and Jeffrey A. Fagan, Harvard Law School by Professor Dehlia Umunna, and Yale Law School by Professor Miriam Gohara.

I have designed this course to encourage you to think critically about contemporary punishment practices, and the serious social and economic consequences of the reality we call mass incarceration. More than 6 million Americans are in jail, prison, or on probation or parole in the United States. Although compared to the rest of the world, the United States incarcerates people at a rate out of proportion with its population, the system of isolating people, including political dissidents, in prison is worldwide. It is also big business. In the United States, the yearly cost of incarceration is over \$60 billion a year.

The course will address many issues. What factors have led to the current situation of mass incarceration? What have been the effects of mass incarceration on individuals, families, communities? What are the social costs to communities, particularly minority communities, from which many of the incarcerated come?

Student /projects/presentations will be an important component of the course. I want to encourage students, individually or as a group, to do something that will effect mass incarceration. I have several ideas for projects/presentations, but the more creative and more impactful concepts will come from you.

Each student will submit periodic reflection papers and, at the end of the semester, an eight to twelve page paper regarding some aspect of mass incarceration. I will grade reflection papers quickly, considering organization, clarity, depth of thought, creativity, and cosmetics. I will grade the research paper with more deliberation, considering organization, clarity, depth of thought, creativity, research, including citation to authority, and cosmetics.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN CIVIL RIGHTS: MASS INCARCERATION CLASS OUTLINE

assignments

Week 1, January 9 THE LOCATION

read: G. Hirliman, THE HATE FACTORY: A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF THE 1980 RIOT AT
THE PENITENTIARY OF NEW MEXICO

submit reflection paper, maximum 500 words, commenting on some aspect of the book
by Tuesday, January 8 at 5 pm.

Week 2, January 16 OVERVIEW: MASS INCARCERATION

read: Michelle Alexander, THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF
COLORBLINDNESS

Week 3, January 23 A BRIEF HISTORY

read: Marc Mauer, RACE TO INCARCERATE