



SOCI 2760 – DISCIPLINE & PUNISHMENT

Professor: Michael Gibson-Light
Email: Michael.Gibson-Light@du.edu

Course Description

Sociology is the “study of society” that examines and questions patterns of social behavior. Criminology is the study of behavior deemed “criminal,” its changing definitions, its causes, and responses to it. In this course, we will explore sociological and criminological concepts and theories central to understanding contemporary systems of discipline and punishment in response to crime. We will move beyond common-sense understandings of these topics. The goal is to “remake” students’ views of punitive systems so that they may learn to critically evaluate institutions of punishment, the various forms that punishment adopts, the theories underlying it, its impacts on communities and broader society, and its lasting implications for individuals. We know that mass incarceration exists, but what are the ideas, agendas, and social processes underlying it (and other forms of punishment)? Students will learn to use sociological and criminological theory to evaluate these elements of the social world to gain a better understanding of our social world and the lives of those within it.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

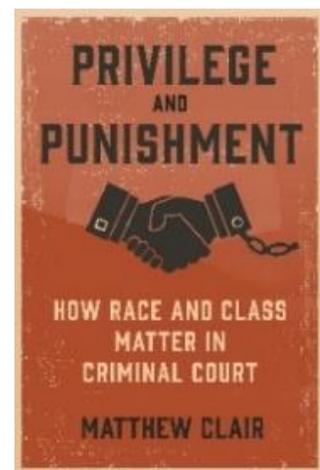
This course is intended to introduce several central principles, concepts, and perspectives used as “tools” in the study of discipline and punishment. Students will develop a social scientific approach to understanding these phenomena and will be encouraged to reconsider and challenge widely held beliefs that they may hold or which they may encounter. The primary objective of the course is for students to expand their perspectives to think sociologically and critically about this largely taken-for-granted aspect of social life in the modern world, and to demonstrate this knowledge. These objectives will be met through course materials, writing, and in-class discussion.

Students will teach and learn from each other in the classroom and are expected to be actively engaged. *Students are asked to remain both open to new material and perspectives on the topics covered, as well as to ask questions regarding the course material or objectives.*

Required Text & Materials

There is one required book for this class: *Privilege and Punishment* by Matthew Clair (2020, Princeton University Press).

Any materials *not* from this text will be available through the Canvas course page. Some required videos are available through the streaming service *Kanopy*. Accounts are free for students ([register here](#)).



READING LIST: THEMES, MATERIALS, & ASSIGNMENTS

Course Introduction & Defining Punishment

Form groups: 🖐️ Students will form groups of five. Each group will identify a shared interest. These should be broad topics that are relevant to the course (e.g., prison labor, local jails, immigration detention, juvenile detention, fines and fees, probation and parole, etc.). Group members *and* selected topics will stay the same throughout the quarter. Today, discuss the following questions and submit your written response at the end of this class period: *What is punishment? What things count as punishment? (It is okay to provide multiple definitions...)*

Reading: 📖 Garland, 1993. *Punishment & Modern Society*, chapter 1

Reflection: ❓ *How does David Garland define punishment? How does this differ from how you defined punishment at the start of this course? What are the benefits and limitations of Garland's view? In other words, what does it encourage us to view as punishment that we otherwise might not have? And/or what does it exclude that we otherwise might have included?*

Building a Theoretical Toolkit: Solidarity & Morals

Reading: 📖 Emile Durkheim, 1893. *The Division of Labor in Society*, excerpt

Reading: 📖 Burkhardt and Connor, 2016. "Durkheim, Punishment, and Prison Privatization" [focus on pages 84-87]

Discussion: 🖐️ *How is the "conscience collective" reflected in or reinforced by punishment related to your chosen topic? What specific social "morals" or "values" are implicated? How does punishment related to your topic reflect who is "in" or "out" of dominant social groups?*

Video: 🎬 "[Untouchable](#)" (in-class) [**Warning:** This film addresses issues relating to sexual violence. Please contact me with any concerns about watching.]

Reflection: ❓ *What are the core ideas and concepts from the Durkheimian approach to punishment? How do these ideas and concepts help make sense of what we see in this film? In other words, how would a Durkheimian sociologist explain the things it depicts—especially regarding how morals influence how society views different groups and punishes different acts? Use specific examples from the film to discuss specific aspects of the Durkheimian approach.*

Building a Theoretical Toolkit: Surveillance & Discipline

Reading: 📖 Foucault, 1977. *Discipline and Punish*, excerpt

Reading: 📖 Gibson-Light, 2022. "Remote Control" [focus on pages 1-6]

Discussion: 🖐️ *How is "discipline" enacted through forms of punishment associated with your chosen topic? What forms of surveillance are involved? What other social institutions is your chosen topic directly or indirectly connected to, and how?*

Video: 🎬 "[The Prison in Twelve Landscapes](#)" (in-class)

Reflection: ❓ *What are the core ideas and concepts from the Foucaultian approach to punishment? How do these ideas and concepts help us make sense of what we see in this film? In other words, how would a Foucaultian sociologist explain the things it depicts—especially regarding how carceral forces extend beyond the inside of the prison itself. Use specific examples from the film to discuss specific aspects of the Foucaultian approach.*

Building a Theoretical Toolkit: Inequality & Labor Power

- Reading: 📖 Rusche, 1931. “Labor Market and Penal Sanction”
- Reading: 📖 Beckett and Francis, 2020. “The Origins of Mass Incarceration” [focus on pages 434-440]
- Reading: 📖 Robinson, 1983. *Black Marxism*, excerpt
- Discussion: 🗣️ *How are the hierarchies of our society reflected in your chosen topic? What class and racial inequalities are perpetuated by forms of punishment related to your topic? How do different groups rebel against these inequalities?*
- Video: 🎬 “[Whose Streets? An Unflinching Look at the Ferguson Uprising](#)” (in-class) [Warning: This film addresses issues relating to police violence and racialized violence. Please contact me with any concerns about watching.]
- Reflection: 🤔 *What are the core ideas and concepts from the Marxian approach to punishment? How do these ideas and concepts help us make sense of what we see in this film? In other words, how would a Marxian sociologist explain the things it depicts—especially regarding intersecting class and racial disparities in American punishment? Use specific examples from the film to discuss specific aspects of the Marxian approach.*

The Power of Privilege in Punishment

- Reading: 📖 Clair, 2020. *Privilege and Punishment*, chapter 1
- Discussion: 🗣️ *How is “social alienation” experienced by different people involved with your chosen topic? How might having connections to influential individuals or institutions (“social capital”) impact how different individuals navigate punishment related to your chosen topic?*
- Video: 🎬 “[The Vanishing Trial](#)” (in-class) [Warning: This film portrays courtroom and arrest experiences. Please contact me with any concerns about watching.]
- Reflection: 🤔 *How does Clair define or describe “disadvantage” and “privilege”? What are the roles of disadvantage and privilege in shaping the different “paths” that lead people into the courtroom? How do disadvantage and privilege influence individuals’ relationships with lawyers? How are these realities depicted in the film? Use specific examples from the text to discuss specific aspects of the film.*

Reforming, Restoring, and Transforming Justice

- Reading: 📖 Clair, 2020. *Privilege and Punishment*, chapters 2, 3, & 4 [2 groups each]
- Discussion: 🗣️ *What are the central ideas, concepts, and takeaways from the chapter of Privilege and Punishment that your group read for today? How might the processes that Matthew Clair describes also be applied to the systems of punishment associated with your chosen topic? In what ways do forms of privilege and/or disadvantage influence how justice, injustice, and punishment are experienced in this context?*
- Reading: 📖 Clair, 2020. *Privilege and Punishment*, conclusion
- Video: 🎬 “[How Restorative Justice Could End Mass Incarceration](#)” (in-class)
- Video: 🎬 “[To Fight Crime, Ask What People Need to Thrive](#)” (in-class)
- Reflection: 🤔 *How do courtroom proceedings and the relationships between legal actors and defendants influence race and class inequalities? What changes could be made to improve legal processes, according to Clair? How might alternative approaches to justice, such as restorative justice or transformative justice, impact punishment, justice, and equality in the United States?*