

Cultural Politics of Prison Towns
ANT 233/REL 230/AAS 200/GSW 233/PSC 225

Fall 2021
Mon 2:00-4:40

Prof. Kristin Doughty.
kristin.doughty@rochester.edu
Office hours: Wed 11:30am-1pm and by appt

Prof Joshua Dubler
joshua.dubler@rochester.edu
Office hours: Wed 10:30-12:00 and by appt

Catherine Ramsey cramsey5@u.rochester.edu
(240) 764-9999 ; office hrs Tues 12-1:30

Lila Balistrieri, lbalistr@u.rochester.edu
412-894-6020 and office hours by appointment

.CULTURAL POLITICS OF PRISON TOWNS

Course Description

Rochester sits in one of the world's most explicitly carceral landscapes, with more than a dozen state prisons within a 90 min drive. This co-taught course is an ethnography lab. Now funded with a grant from the National Science Foundation, this fall's course launches the fourth year of a collaborative ethnographic research project designed to examine how the presence of prisons in towns around Rochester reflects and shapes the political, economic, and cultural lives of those who live in the region. Students will be introduced to methods and practices of ethnography and conduct firsthand research on the cultural politics of our region's prison towns. Through assigned reading, students will learn about the history, sociology, and cultural logics of Rochester and the wider region, and of mass incarceration. What does the presence of a prison do and mean for a person living near one?

Course Requirements and Grades

Attendance and Class Participation (1/3 of final grade)

We expect to see you in class each week. You are entitled to one unexcused absence per semester, without explanation or apology. Any more than that, however, and we should be in touch. Please come to class prepared to discuss the assigned material, ready to share out about your research, with questions for us and the class.

Weekly Research and Writing Assignments (1/3 of final grade)

You will have weekly writing assignments that, in the beginning of the semester engage with classroom readings, and for the remainder of the semester, will be rooted in specific research tasks. You will find more information on the weekly assignments below.

Final Research Project (1/3 of final grade)

- The work we do in this course takes place in the classroom, in the field, and in our shared webspace accessible at <https://f21.prisonstowns.digitalscholar.rochester.edu/>
- This is where you will turn in your fieldnotes and other data you gather (photos, audio files, archival documents, etc), add tags/code to your fieldnotes, be able to access past students' materials, and give and receive comments on the work. We will provide more information.
- This website is shared only among members of the class and requires password access. All material accessed and uploaded to this site should be considered confidential to this research project, and neither access nor materials should be shared outside our classroom, particularly in ways that identify individuals. This material is governed by the human subjects ethics of confidentiality and privacy at the heart of this research. That is: treat these fieldnotes and written work with the respect you want others to bring to your work.

Course themes and research groups

This is the fourth time we've taught this class. From the project's inception we have divided students into research groups. The first two years, those groups were place specific, and we fielded groups based in Albion, Alden, Attica, Auburn, Batavia, Elmira, Mt. Morris, and Rochester. In year three, as a Covid-era adaptation, we switched to research groups unified by theme. Our themes were Covid, "Flight map" (i.e. the movement of bodies in and out of prisons), Politics, and Religion. The adaptation worked, and so this year we are once again going to group researchers by theme. This year's themes are Criminalization, Decarceration, Land, and Love. By the end of September each of you will have selected to join one of those groups. In the process of your weekly research visits, you will soon want to zero in on a specific location to geographically ground your selected theme. Themes will be unspooled at length in the second and third weeks of class, but here is a primer on each:

Criminalization: The dominant carceral discourse tends to focus on deviant, punishable individuals, so called "criminals," who are deemed responsible for the problem of "crime." As a corrective, abolitionists speak rather of "criminalization;" that is, the legal and extra-legal processes by which certain sectors of the population are marked as problems and subjected to state-sponsored surveillance, control, and premature death. As a primary symptom that serves reproduce the conditions of carceral capitalism, systemic criminalization takes place in poor urban communities of color, in rural white communities, and among other communities. For the purposes of this research project, we will concern ourselves especially with the criminalization of patients and others by UR's Department of Public Safety.

Decarceration: We are living in a moment of decarceration

Course Schedule

- 8/30 Introduction
[Attica](#) (1973) and [The Prison in 12 Landscapes](#) (2016) (excerpts)
- 9/6 No class, Labor Day
Recommended: Watch the above films in their entirety
- 9/10 EVENT: "Attica, 50 Years Later" Hawkins Carlson, 5:00-6:30
- 9/13 Criminalization and decarceration
Burton, "To Protect and Serve Whiteness"
Story, "Rural Extractions"
Pearson, "Work without Labor, Life in the Surround of a Rural Prison Town"

Readings: Selection of 2019 and 2020 student social drama fieldnotes

- 11/1 Research assignment 5: Document analysis
Readings : TBD
- 11/8 Research assignment 6: Semi structured interview
Readings:TBD
- 11/15 Research assignment 7: Researcher's Choice
Readings TBD:
- 11/22 Research assignment 8: Researcher's Choice
Readings TBD
- 11/29 Final Project workshop
Research assignment: Makeup / extra trip if needed
- 12/6 Final project workshop

NOTE: Syllabus assignments are subject to amendment, particularly in response to emergent events. Please pay attention to notifications in class and to announcements on Blackboard.

Prison Studies Bibliography (abridged)

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New Press, 2010).
- Benforado, Adam. *Unfair: The New Science of Criminal Injustice* (Crown, 2015).
- Berger, Dan. *Captive Nation : Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (UNC, 2016)
- Burton, Orisamni. "[Diluting Radical History: Blood in the Water and the Politics of Erasure.](#)" *Abolition Journal*, (2017)
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi Coates. "[The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration.](#)" *The Atlantic* (2015).
- Conover, Ted. *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* (Vintage, 2001).
- Davis, Angela.

(Harvard UP, 2016).

James, Joy. *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)slave Narratives And Contemporary Prison Writings* (SUNY UP, 2005).

Kaba, Mariamme. *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (Haymarket, 2021)

Kohler-Hausmann, Julilly. "The Attila the Hun Law": New York's Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Making of a Punitive State."

Haley, Sarah, *NYC Memo File 1667041 (ASTJ) of the OT of 08/20/2013* . C.1 (g) MCID