

SOWK4990

Creating New Anchors: An Introduction to Prison-Industrial Complex Abolition

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Grace Lee Boggs said we must “transform ourselves to transform the world,” and this course is rooted in this belief. Prison-industrial complex (PIC) abolition is a philosophy, a daily practice, and an organizing strategy. It requires us to examine our default frameworks (built by white supremacy and racial capitalism) for relating to one another, and to create entirely new ways of being with and caring for one another.

My aim is to co-create a space with all of you where we can think collectively and speak boldly about how, as the writer, performer, and activist Morgan Bassichis states, “The very systems we are working to dismantle live inside of us.” It’s easier to look outward and critique an institution/system than it is to look inward and be honest about—and work to disassemble—the dangerous carceral logics embedded in our own thinking. It’s imperative that we look inward and engage in this work together.

This course will not and cannot cover everything related to PIC abolition, which is a framework and set of clear-eyed political commitments that have been theorized, refined, and practiced for over a century. The aims of this 10-week adventure are to:

- Provide you with the core tenets of PIC abolition;
- Identify and interrogate our own punitive mind-sets that help sustain the legal punishment system, and lay the foundation for entirely new ways of thinking;
- Consider the ways that PIC abolition aligns with the values/ethics of the social work profession and strategize about what an abolitionist practice could and should look like; and
- Ask bigger, better questions—ones that move us toward a new default reaction to addressing harm.

PRE-COURSE PREPARATION

Letter of Accommodations

If you want to request accommodations for disabilities or medical conditions, the information is available on the [Disability Services Program website](#). If you have additional questions, contact the Disability Services Program (DSP); 303-871-3241, dsp@du.edu; you may also review the Handbook for Students with Disabilities in the Quick Links section of the website. Please note that academic accommodations cannot be applied retroactively, so it is important for you to register with DSP as soon as possible if you think you may need accommodations at some point while at GSSW.

***The blurb above is official university policy. Please know that in this course (and all courses that I teach), it's not necessary for you to have requested "official" accommodations for me to honor your needs. If you're comfortable doing so, you're always welcome to share—at any point during the quarter—the accommodations that you need to thrive in our learning community, and I will do all I can to meet those needs.*

My Class Policies

I bring my abolitionist politic not only to the content of this course, but to the policies that shape our learning environment. As we engage in these 10 weeks together, the main policy I have is for us to communicate with one another, as best we can, in a timely way. Our lives and cares go far beyond the classroom, and the current landscape is making times particularly difficult for many of us.

You will never receive point deductions, or be punished in any other way, for missing class or submitting an assignment after its official due date. All I ask is that as we move through the quarter, you communicate with me (in advance, if possible) and let me know when you can't attend class, need more time on an assignment, etc. Please also know that you are not required to share the reason(s) why classes/assignments were missed. Receiving empathy and support is not contingent upon your sharing personal information. My main interest as facilitator for our collective learning experience is to build relationships with all of you and learn how I can best assist you as you move through this course. The moral of the story is: I'm all ears, and I'm here for you.

As for Zoom, do you. There is absolutely no dress code, no video code, no code for anything, really. All I ask is that if you've got significant background noise going on during class, you mute yourself so that it doesn't distract the group.

How to Schedule a Meeting

I'll be setting aside the 45 minutes before class, and the hour after class for student meetings.

To schedule a meeting, please use my Calendly account, which can be accessed here:

https://calendly.com/dr_sarantakos/15min

COURSE CALENDAR

Session	Session Theme	Preparation for Class Session	Learning Products Due
1	Building our learning community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Sanderson (2017) • Read Morningstar (2017) • Read Dorado (2018) • Listen to "Two Sides of Justice" narratives (11:51 total) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment #1: Personal reflection (due the day before class #1 at 5 pm MST)
2	Hyper-criminalization & hyper-incarceration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Kilgore, Chapters 1 & 2 (2015) • Read Lamble (2015) • Read Rodriguez (2018) • Watch "Mariame Kaba Offers a People's History of Prisons in the U.S." (29:40) <p>Additional Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Muhammad (2015) • Watch "Counting Crime" (1:54:11) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
3	Breakdown of the PIC & PIC abolition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Kilgore, Chapter 3 (2015) • Read Levasseur (2005) • Read Aptheker (1971) • Read Herzing (2016) • Watch "The Shifting Concept of the PIC" (3:50) <p>Additional Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Gossett (2015) • Listen to MAKC interview with Ray Luc Levasseur (2:07:06) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment #2: The Ubiquity of the PIC (due week 3 at the start of class)
4	Abolition & social work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Richie & Martensen (2019) • Read Rogue (2020) • Read Sato (2020) • Read Roberts (2020) • Read Bailey et al (2020) • Watch "Defund Police" (3:59) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
5	Mutual aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Spade (2020) • Read Cosby (2018) • Watch "Shit's Totally Fucked" (7:54) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

Session	Session Theme	Preparation for Class Session	Learning Products Due
6	Reformist/non-reformist reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Davis (2003) • Read Schenwar & Law (2020) • Read Akbar (2020) • Watch “Closing Rikers” and “No New Jails Rally” (5:35 total) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment #3: Personal Reflection (due week 6 at the start of class)
7	Restorative & transformative justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Gilbert (2018) • Read Hayes & Kaba (2018) • Read maree brown (2020) • Read Kaba (2021) • Watch “Mutual Aid Justice” (26:47) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
8	Getting good at the small stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Mingus (2019) • Read Mingus (2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
9	Self-directed political education	<p>Find articles, videos, zines, etc. that help you gain a deeper understanding of PIC abolition</p> <p>Explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walia (2021) • Ben-Moshe (2020) • The Red Nation (2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
10	Endings & new beginnings	<p>We’ll use this last session to discuss our journey together, your mutual aid projects, lingering thoughts, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Hayes (2020) • Listen to “Rant” by Diane di Prima 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment #4: Mutual Aid Project (due week 10 at the start of class)

GRADING

The grading in this course includes the following assessment points which are assessed with the grading classification table.

Assignments	Total Points	Percentage of Final Grade
Personal Reflection #1	25	25%
The Ubiquity of the PIC	25	25%
Personal Reflection #2	25	25%
Mutual Aid Project	25	25%

The following table illustrates the grading classifications by grade, range, and grade point. An incomplete (I) may be issued per the policy outlined in the MSW Student Handbook.

Grade	Range	Grade Point
A	94-100	4.0
A-	91-93	3.7
B+	88-90	3.3
B	84-87	3.0
B-	81-83	2.7
C+	78-80	2.3
C	74-77	2.0
C-	71-73	1.7
F	0-70	0.0

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment #1: Personal Reflection

Point Allocation: 25 points total, 25% of Total Grade

Due Date: The day before our first class at 5:00 PM (MST)

Purpose

Prior to our first meeting, I'd like you to submit a short piece that reflects on the readings for day one. I'm looking for no more than one page single-spaced. I'd like you to write freely about aspects of the readings that moved you, troubled you, required deeper thought, etc. I'd also like you to include some thoughts around your present relationship with PIC abolition—your experience, curiosity, excitement, confusion surrounding it, etc.

Please post this reflection on Canvas by 5 PM (MST), the day before our first class. Doing so will give me time to read them prior to our first meeting.

Assignment #2: The Ubiquity of the PIC

Point Allocation: 25 points total, 25% of Total Grade

Due Date: Week three at the start of class

Purpose

For this assignment, I'd like you to spend time thinking about the seemingly innocuous ways that the PIC shows up in our daily lives. Some examples are playgrounds with "sheriff departments" and "jails," television shows and movies centered on the legal punishment

system and/or exceptional cases, true crime podcasts, prisoner Halloween costumes, board games centered on warfare and colonization—the examples are endless, really. Once you think through some examples that show up in your personal life, I'd like you to choose one and write a short reflection (no more than 3 pages single-spaced) on that manifestation.

Here are the prompts I'd like you to respond to in your reflection:

- (1) Describe the cultural item you chose, and how it glamorizes/normalizes the PIC.
 - a. What dominant, false messages does it help reinforce about the PIC? (E.g., the necessity of punishment; equating punishment with healing and justice; the virtuousness and/or necessity of police; the clear dichotomization of "guilt" and "innocence" and "good" and "bad" people)
- (2) What's your relationship been with this manifestation of the PIC?
 - a. How have you typically engaged with it? What type of presence has it had in your life?
 - b. Have you previously considered how it glamorizes/normalizes the PIC?
 - i. If so, how were you awakened to that understanding?
 - ii. If not, what helped bring you to this new understanding now?
- (3) Why is it important to think about how the PIC shows up in our daily lives, and upend our understandings of and relationships to this propaganda?
- (4) How, if at all, will your relationship to this cultural item change moving forward?
- (5) How might you share your recent reflections about this cultural item with people in your personal community?

Please post this reflection on Canvas by the start of week three's class time. When you submit this reflection, attach an image of the manifestation that you chose, a link to the podcast, etc. You can drop the image or link at the start or end of your write-up.

Assignment #3: Personal Reflection

Point Allocation: 25 points total, 25% of Total Grade

Due Date: Week six at the start of class

Purpose

For this reflection, I'd like you to write about how, if at all, your understanding of the PIC and PIC abolition has shifted over the past five weeks. I'm looking for no more than one page single-spaced.

Here are some prompts that can help guide your writing:

- (1) What's become clearer for you through the readings, class discussions, and perhaps conversations outside of class?
- (2) What's something you're still struggling with? (e.g., not caging people who've caused immense physical harm to others, the daily practice of abolition, etc.)

- (3) Which readings have you found to be particularly moving, troubling, illuminating, and/or clarifying?

Please post this reflection on Canvas by the start of week six's class time.

Assignment #4: Mutual Aid Project

Point Allocation: 25 points total, 25% of Total Grade

Due Date: Week 10 at the start of class

Purpose

For your final project, I'd like you to develop a mutual aid project that you can deliver at GSSW, in your Denver neighborhood, in your hometown, etc. You can do this in pairs, or in a small group (no more than 4 people). The core of your assignment is to create a 5-page, double-spaced description of your project. In addition to your 5-page description, I'd also like you to create at least one additional component to your project. This can be a zine for you to pass out to community members describing the issue that your project aims to support, a syllabus for your first teach-in, a flyer for a meeting or event related to the mutual aid effort, an infographic with information on why your mutual aid effort is needed... The options are endless. Be creative and have fun!

In the 5-page description, I'd like you to answer the following questions:

- (1) What issue are you targeting and why? Describe the need your project aims to serve and give me the scoop on the local context.
 - (e.g., If you're doing a community bail fund in your hometown, tell me about the incarceration rates in your district, the number of folx held pretrial, if you can find them, etc.)
- (2) How will you connect with the community members most impacted by the issue you hope address, and work in tandem with them to help provide the support they need?
 - (e.g., If you're interested in providing court support, maybe you connect with the local bail fund and meet with those organizers, and folx who were recently bonded out, to find out what they need to make it through their court cases)
- (3) What local/national groups are already doing this work, and how will you learn from their efforts and/or partner with them?
- (4) How are you going to engage in outreach and bring community members into the fold?
 - (e.g., Creating and posting flyers or zines, tabling particular events)
- (5) What internal, political education needs to occur amongst the community members interested in assisting in your mutual aid project? How will you facilitate their learning, and what will you do to continue this education for the group, and for yourself?
 - (e.g., Monthly teach-ins on a particular reading/topic)
- (6) What will be some complications/barriers to this work, and how will you work to overcome them?

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