

English 421 / Sociology 470:
Prison, Emancipation, and the Rhetoric of Liberty

Spring 2021

English Department

INSTRUCTOR	Dr. Leonard Nalencz
CLASS MEETING DAY AND TIMES	TR 2:30-3:55
CLASS LOCATION	FH
OFFICE LOCATION	Founders Hall/ The Academy 321
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OFFICE HOURS	Monday 4-6pm, Wednesday 4-6pm, or by appointment.

PURPOSE of the SYLLABUS:

Please note that I do not modify the syllabus over the course of the semester! Due dates for assignments and readings **will not change**, even if there are snow days or other unexpected changes to the College schedule.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Liberty! is the eternal human cry. From ancient Greece to contemporary Washington, DC, humans long (and fight) for freedom. However, there are freedoms *from* and freedoms *to*, and the expansion of freedom for one individual may mean the limitation of freedom for another. This course will survey philosophers, poets, sociologists, and activists from Aristotle and Boethius to Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander, and consider their arguments about and visions of liberty. We will read writers who suffered imprisonment, writers who consider literal and figurative forms of incarceration, and some more general theorists of liberty. These ideas are

always relevant, but with many forms of democracy in the balance in this country today, they are urgently important for us to reflect on. (3 credits)

PREREQUISITES, CO-REQUISITES, and CROSS-LISTING:

English 110 and 120.

TEXTS AND OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:

There are **FOUR required** books and two recommended books for this course; they are available on Akademos. You can buy used books, but no E-books are allowed in class.

- 1) Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: 2010. ISBN: 978-1-59558-643-8
- 2) Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press, 2003. ISBN: 978-1-58322-581-3
- 3) H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Writing in 20th Century America*, 1998. ISBN: 978-0-14-027305-2
- 4) Freya and Helmuth James Von Moltke: *Last Letters: The Prison Correspondence 1944-1945*, ed. Dorothea Von Moltke. NYRB: 2019. ISBN: 978-1-68137-381-2

Optional:

- 1) Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* ISBN: 9-780140-442083
- 2) Nelson Mandela, *Prison Letters*. ISBN: 978-1-63149-596-0

COURSE OBJECTIVES and ASSESSMENT of STUDENT LEARNING

Familiarity and competence in reading in historical context is paramount, and the ability to read in a literary tradition is also desired.

DLO=Department Learning Outcome:

1. Demonstrate basic knowledge of literature and philosophy in historical context.
2. Develop a critical vocabulary enabling participation in literary and sociological discourse.
3. Identify and apply major theories of philosophical interpretation.
4. Write a clear and convincing analysis of at least one primary text.
5. Engage in research using both print and electronic sources.
6. Produce a persuasively argued paper with bibliography that incorporates primary and secondary sources.

GRADING POLICIES:

Grading is based on the quality of written assignments, quizzes (announced or unannounced), exams, a class presentation, and the frequency and quality of participation in class. (Attendance—or rather excessive absence from class—can also have an effect on your final grade.)

This is a breakdown of those areas:

Midterm Exam	15%
Class participation	25%
Essay	20%
Class presentation	15%
Final exam	25%

Course Schedule:

All reading assignments on the syllabus must be completed before the class period for which they are listed. Class participation will

account for one quarter of your final course grade; obviously no meaningful insight into a given text can be shared if you are not thoroughly prepared.

Class date	Reading due
1/26	Introduction to course; Adam Gopnik, “The Caging of America” (Canvas); <i>King Lear</i> (excerpt on Canvas)
1/28	Franz Kafka, “In the Penal Colony” (Canvas)
2/2	Boethius, <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> (35-75) (Canvas)
2/4	Boethius, <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> (76-116) (Canvas)
2/9	Boethius, <i>Consolation of Philosophy</i> (116-169) (Canvas)
2/11	Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> Chapter 1 (Canvas)
2/16	Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> Chapter 2 (Canvas)
2/18	Nelson Mandela, <i>Letters from Prison</i> (Canvas)
2/23	Von Moltke, Last Letters: Prison Correspondence (p. 5-53)
2/25	Von Moltke, Last Letters: Prison Correspondence (162-207)
3/2	Von Moltke, Last Letters: Prison Correspondence, (298-345)
3/4	Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail”. (Canvas)
3/9	Plantation Prison (Franklin 21-34); Chester Himes (Franklin 119-129); George Jackson (Franklin 155-166); Etheridge Knight (Franklin 230-233)
3/11	Midterm
3/16	Wellness Day—no class
3/18	Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> Introduction—Chapter 1
3/23	Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> Chapter 2
3/25	Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> Chapter 3
3/30	Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> Chapter 4
4/6	Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i> Chapter 5-6 Essay due!
4/8	Angela Y. Davis, <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> (Chapter 1-3)
4/13	Angela Y. Davis, <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> (Chapter 4-6)
4/15	Malcolm X (Franklin 147-155); Assata Shakur (Franklin 200-214); Kathy Boudin (Franklin 329-334)

4/20	Iceberg Slim (Franklin 166-178); Jerome Washington (Franklin 318-329); Mumia Abu Jamal (350-357); Jimmy Santiago Baca (Franklin, p. 252-256, 357-365)
4/22	Presentations.
4/27	Presentations.
4/29	Presentations.

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Honesty

Academic integrity should be reflected in all aspects of student work: examinations, responses, quizzes, and any other materials submitted in fulfillment of course requirements must be the student's own work. All types of academic fraud, the illicit giving and receiving of information on tests, submissions, and plagiarism are all forms of cheating. **Plagiarism is the passing off as your own someone else's words or ideas whether from an electronic or print source.** This copying may be done intentionally or unintentionally by incorrect documentation; it still constitutes plagiarism.

If students are unsure whether a specific course of action would constitute plagiarism or cheating, it is their responsibility to consult with their instructor in advance. It is also the students' responsibility to read the College's full plagiarism policy. The plagiarism policy can be found in hard copy in Humanities Hall and on line on the College's web site: www.mountsaintvincent.edu.

The College of Mount Saint Vincent is committed to helping students to uphold the ethical standards of academic integrity in all areas of study. The instructor has the right to use electronic devices to help prevent plagiarism.

Students who plagiarize will fail that particular assignment, have a required meeting with the Dean of Students, and bear a permanent mention on their college record.

Academic Support Services

The College of Mount Saint Vincent offers a range of academic support services which might be helpful to students in this course; these services are described at <http://www.mountsaintvincent.edu/385.htm>.

Attendance

Students are required to attend all classroom sessions. Students are expected to arrive on time; tardiness and student exits are distracting. Please do not leave during the class period. Use the rest room, get a drink, print out your paper, etc. before you get to class. It is your responsibility as a student to notify the instructor if you miss class and it is your responsibility to make up all work if you are absent.

If you are absent, I do **not** need need to see your doctor's note. When you are absent, you miss the material covered, and that experience cannot be duplicated. After **two absences**, you will lose 2 points from your final grade. (That means that if you have an 88, for example, it will go down to an 86.) **4 absences (two entire weeks of class) will constitute an automatic failure.**

3 latenesses = 1 absence.

For prolonged absences, the student must notify the Office of Academic Advisement.

Disabilities

Students who need special accommodations or services at the College of Mount Saint Vincent must provide the College up-to-date documentation verifying their specific diagnosed disability. These students should submit their documentation to verify eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Copies of the College's Policy on Students with Learning Disabilities are available in the Office of Admission, the Office of the Dean of the Undergraduate College, the Center for Academic Advising, and the Academic

Resource Center. In order for these accommodations to take effect, the student is advised to complete this process as soon as possible after admission to the College. In addition, students must sign an Authorized Release Form at the beginning of every semester that permits the College to disclose the student's special accommodations. All accommodations and services are provided by the Academic Resource Center. Provisions may include note taking or books on tape, testing in the Center, professional tutoring, and additional services as needed. For more information, please see <http://www.mountsaintvincent.edu/1311.htm>.

Additional policies

Online: You need to have your camera on for online class. There will be times when we turn cameras off to do a writing assignment on the discussion page, but you are required to have a working laptop with functioning camera and microphone. You can't take this class on a smartphone: you will need to contribute to discussion threads, and you will need access to a full keyboard and a full screen to do these assignments well. I understand that it can be difficult to fulfill these requirements, but I feel strongly that without a fully working laptop of your own, you cannot be considered to attend this class.

Bring your own book to every class! We will pay close attention to the texts, and you need to have your book and/or printouts from Canvas to participate. Please turn your phone off when you get to class and put it away, out of sight. No laptops, tablets, or E-readers are allowed (when we are in-seat). Use a notebook and a pen or pencil. Quizzes and exams cannot be made up.

Essay assignment:

Your essay should be approximately 1000 words. It must be typed, in 12-point Times New Roman font with one inch margins, and double-spaced. Include your name, course, and a title. The **assignment** is to take a theme about liberty and/or incarceration that we have discussed in class and apply it to sections of the assigned reading that we have not discussed in class (or that we have discussed only briefly in class). That is, show how you can apply the ideas from class on your own, to readings from the syllabus that help you develop your thematic understanding of the course topics.

Due on April 6! (on turnitin).

Class Presentations: Each student will be expected to do a 15-20 minute presentation at the end of the semester. The assignment is to take something that you learned this semester and apply it to a particular event or idea that we have not discussed during the semester. You might take the idea of liberty from Boethius and apply it to a contemporary movie or the lyrics to a song. You might look at the story of Nelson Mandela and consider how it resembles the story of Aung San Suu Kyi. The idea is for you to find something you are interested in outside of class and consider how the ideas from this class can inform and deepen your understanding of whatever you are interested in exploring.