

Race, Ethnicity, and Justice

CRIM 4315.001 Spring 2026

Instructor information

Instructor	Email	Office location & hours
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General information

Description

This course rigorously examines the ways in which race and ethnicity shape patterns of crime, victimization, and criminal justice system responses in the United States. Students analyze how structural inequality, historical forces, and social context produce differential risks for criminal justice involvement and generate unequal outcomes across racial and ethnic groups. Particular emphasis is placed on policing, courts, sentencing, incarceration, and community supervision, with focused attention on minority communities and the disproportionate application of law, policy, and punishment. The course integrates empirical research, theoretical frameworks, and contemporary case studies to critically assess systemic disparities within the criminal justice system and their broader social consequences.

Prerequisite: *CRIM 3302 or CRIM 3303*

Format: (3–0)

Course Expectations

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of major theoretical perspectives on race, ethnicity, crime, and the criminal justice system.
2. Critically engage with criminological scholarship through the sustained reading and analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books.
3. Apply and evaluate theoretical and empirical perspectives through critical analysis of readings, films, class discussions, and written assignments, with particular attention to the sources and consequences of differential involvement in crime and unequal applications of justice.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Required Materials

Required Texts

- Barak, G., Leighton, P., & Cotton, A. (2018). *Class, Race, Gender, & Crime: The Social Realities of Justice in America* 5th Ed). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN-13: 978-1442268852
- Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, New York. The New Press. ISBN-13: 978-1620971932
- Hobbs, J. (2014). *The short and tragic life of Robert Peace: A brilliant young man who left Newark for the Ivy League*. Scribner. ISBN 13: 9781476731919

Course Requirements

Participation and Engagement (200 Points)

Participation is a required component of this course and accounts for 200 points of your final grade. Students are expected to actively engage in weekly discussions by contributing thoughtful, consistent, and substantive commentary that reflects careful completion of the assigned readings and course materials. This course utilizes a *Socratic teaching methodology*, meaning students will be regularly prompted to explain, defend, and refine their perspectives through dialogue. Participation is not based on speaking frequently alone. Instead, it reflects the quality of engagement, including asking meaningful questions, responding respectfully to classmates, and demonstrating evidence-based reasoning grounded in course content. Because participation is based on ongoing involvement throughout the semester, these points **cannot be made up, negotiated, or awarded retroactively** at the end of the term under any circumstances. Consistent engagement is essential to achieving course learning outcomes and maintaining academic fairness.

Analyzing Media Coverage of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class, and Crime (50 Points)

In this assignment, you will examine how major news media outlets frame crime, criminality, and justice, and how that framing may reflect or reproduce bias related to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. You are required to watch both *Fox News and CNN* for a minimum of **two** separate days. During this observation period, you must monitor all crime related coverage and document the following:

1. The number of crime stories presented, categorized by type of crime (for example, violent crime versus property crime).
2. If identifiable, the race, ethnicity, and social class of the offender(s).
3. If identifiable, the race, ethnicity, and social class of the victim(s).

After documenting the crime coverage, you will write an analytical paper assessing whether the reporting contained biased, discriminatory, or stereotypical implications toward any racial group, ethnic group, gender group, or social class. You must also evaluate whether the crime coverage you observed appears to accurately reflect the realities of crime occurring in society, and you must defend your position using course concepts and supporting evidence.

Your analysis should include the following elements:

- A clear description of how each media outlet reported crime during your observation period.
- A discussion of any patterns in crime coverage, including what types of cases were emphasized and how individuals or communities were portrayed.
- The specific dates during which you monitored Fox News and CNN crime coverage.
- Application of key concepts from course readings, including the textbook, and relevant criminological research.

Formatting Requirements

- Length: 2 to 4 pages (excluding cover page and references)
- Format: APA style
- Sources: Minimum of three credible academic or professional references, including your textbook and other assigned course materials

Due Date: March 4, 2026 by 11:59 PM on eLearning.

Book Presentation: The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace (100 Points)

Students will complete a graded presentation based on *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace*. The purpose of this assignment is to connect the life of Rob Peace to course themes related to race, ethnicity, social class, structural inequality, neighborhood context, and criminal justice involvement. Students are expected to demonstrate careful reading of the text and apply criminological concepts to explain how opportunity, constraint, and social environment shaped Rob Peace's life trajectory.

This assignment may be completed individually or in a group of no more than two students. Presentations must be no longer than 10 minutes. Students must move beyond summary and provide analysis grounded in the book and course content.

Students must choose one option below.

Option A: **Visual Presentation** (5 Themes)

Select **five themes** from the list below and create a visual presentation that illustrates each theme using images, headlines, or other relevant visual materials. For each theme, you must briefly explain (1) how the theme is reflected in the book and (2) how it connects to course concepts related to race, class, inequality, and justice.

Acceptable visuals include photographs, media headlines, screenshots, or other course relevant imagery.

Themes (select five)

Structural inequality; educational opportunity; neighborhood disadvantage; family influence; peer networks; loyalty and obligation; masculinity and identity; violence exposure; policing and surveillance; social mobility; strain and pressure; risk taking; informal economies; criminal justice contact; limited opportunity structures; code switching; hope and constraint

Option B: **Infographic Presentation**

Create an infographic style presentation that summarizes key moments and social forces shaping Rob Peace's life. Your infographic should highlight major themes such as race, class, neighborhood context, education, social mobility, and contact with the criminal justice system. During the presentation, you must explain the infographic and connect its content to course concepts and the book.

Discussion Post (25 Points)

Students will complete **six** graded Discussion Post worth 25 points. Each student will be provided a specific prompt related to the current course section. Prompts are designed to deepen comprehension of course concepts and to strengthen students' ability to apply criminological theory and evidence to real world issues.

Students must respond directly to their assigned prompt using course materials, including assigned readings, lecture content, and any required media. In addition, students are required to incorporate independent research by locating and referencing credible academic, professional, or empirical sources beyond the textbook. Discussion posts must demonstrate critical thinking, strong course engagement, and evidence-based reasoning.

Requirements

1. Address all components of the assigned prompt.
2. Apply relevant course concepts and terminology accurately.

3. Integrate required course readings and materials.
4. Include outside research using credible sources.
5. Support all claims with evidence and proper citations.
6. Posts must be written in a professional academic tone.

Expectations

Discussion posts should move beyond opinion and summary. Students must provide an analytical response that demonstrates understanding of the topic, connects evidence to argument, and shows thoughtful engagement with criminological scholarship.

Homework Pass Policy

Even with strong planning and organization, unexpected circumstances can interfere with coursework. For this reason, this course includes a *Homework Pass* policy. Each student will receive **one** Homework Pass at the beginning of the semester. The Homework Pass may be used **one time only** and may be applied to one of the following options:

1. Discussion Board (worth 25 points)

OR

2. Two in class activities (worth 10 points each, total 20 points)

When a Homework Pass is applied, the student will receive **full credit** for the selected assignment(s) with no penalty and no make-up requirement.

To use a Homework Pass, the student must **email the instructor** and clearly indicate the assignment(s) to which the pass should be applied. Homework Pass requests must be submitted no later than one week after the missed assignment deadline. No additional Homework Passes will be issued under any circumstances.

Attendance Policy

The University of Texas at Dallas does not require instructors to take attendance. However, attendance is a strong predictor of academic success, and students are strongly encouraged to attend all class meetings. Students are responsible for all course content, announcements, and material covered in class, regardless of attendance. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain notes, materials, and updates. It is strongly recommended that you establish a reliable class contact for sharing notes when necessary.

Although attendance is not required by UT Dallas, the United States Department of Education requires the University to document when Federal Student Aid recipients begin attendance in a course. As part of the grading process, faculty report attendance activity when assigning a final grade of "F." Specifically, instructors report the "last date of attendance", based on evidence such as exam participation, submission of an assignment, participation in a course presentation or project, or engagement through the online course platform.

Attendance

At The University of Texas at Dallas, instructors are not required to take attendance. However, attendance is a strong predictor of student success, and students are strongly encouraged to attend all class meetings. Each faculty member is responsible for establishing course specific policies regarding attendance and participation. Students are responsible for all material covered in class, including lectures, in class discussions, announcements, and any changes to course expectations. If you miss class, you are still responsible for obtaining notes and staying current with all course content. Students are encouraged to build peer connections in the course and identify at least one classmate who can share notes when necessary.

Although UT Dallas does not require instructors to take attendance, the United States Department of Education requires the University to maintain a process to document when Federal Student Aid recipients begin attendance in a course. As part of the final grading process, faculty report attendance activity for students receiving a final grade of F. Specifically, instructors report the last date of attendance using evidence such as exam participation, submission of an assignment, participation in a class project or presentation, or online engagement through the course platform.

Grading

Students are expected to monitor their academic performance throughout the semester and seek guidance when needed. Grades will be posted on UT Dallas eLearning after assignments, presentations, and examinations have been evaluated. Students are responsible for regularly checking eLearning to track their progress and ensure that all submissions have been recorded accurately.

Grading Criteria

A total of **500 points** may be earned throughout the course. Students are strongly encouraged to keep an independent record of their grades and submission history.

Note: Final grades will not be curved. Grades will not be negotiated or altered at the end of the semester.

Final Grade Scale

Final course grades are determined by converting total points earned into a letter grade according to the following scale:

Grade - Point Range

A+ 485 to 500

A 465 to 484

A- 450 to 464

B+ 435 to 449

B 415 to 434

B- 400 to 414

C+ 385 to 399

C 365 to 384

C- 350 to 364

D+ 335 to 349

D 315 to 334

D- 300 to 314

F 299 or less

Extra Credit

Extra credit opportunities are not guaranteed. However, this course includes one optional extra credit opportunity worth 10 points, with details provided elsewhere in the syllabus.

If additional extra credit opportunities become available during the semester, the instructor will announce them through UT Dallas eLearning. Announcements will be sent to students through the University email system, so students are responsible for checking their official UT Dallas email regularly.

Class Participation

Students are expected to engage actively throughout the semester. Participation includes contributing meaningfully to class discussions, completing in class activities, and attending guest lectures when scheduled.

Attendance is not mandatory in this course. However, participation may be assessed during select class sessions. Attendance may be recorded at random, and participation points may be awarded on those days based on engagement and involvement.

Artificial Intelligence Policy (Strict Prohibition)

The use of Artificial Intelligence tools to generate, write, rewrite, paraphrase, summarize, or produce any portion of your academic work for this course is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, Grammarly AI, QuillBot, and any other automated writing or paraphrasing tool. All submissions in this course must reflect your original thinking and writing. Any assignment, discussion post, reflection, critical summary, quiz response, exam response, or written submission that includes AI generated content will be treated as academic misconduct.

If AI use is suspected or confirmed, the consequence is as follows:

The student will receive an automatic zero on the assignment. No revision, resubmission, late submission, or alternate assignment will be permitted. The instructor reserves the right to require additional verification of authorship, including (but not limited to) an in-person explanation of submitted work, documentation of outlines and drafts, or an oral follow up assessment. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes AI generated work. Claiming ignorance of AI tools or accidental use is not an acceptable justification.

This policy is enforced to protect academic integrity and ensure fairness to all students.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Reading	Exercises
Week 1 1/19 & 1/21	Introduction & Course Expectations	Read syllabus	<i>Introduction Discussion Post Due by 1/26 at 11:59p.m</i>
Week 2 1/26 & 1/28	What is race and ethnicity? What social class? How is gender related to crime?	Chapter 1 (Barak)	N/A
Week 3 2/2 & 2/4	How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do?	N/A	Last week to Drop Course
Week 4 2/9 & 2/11	Film & Discussion: 13 th (Movie – 1 hour 40 mins)	Chapter 2 (Barak)	<i>Discussion Board #2 Due by 2/16 at 11:59 p.m.</i>

Week	Topic	Reading	Exercises
	https://youtu.be/krfcq5pF8u8?si=9cESxrI7zN_rZR3O		
Week 5 2/16 & 2/18	Criminology & the Study of Class, Race, Gender, and Crime	N/A	N/A
Week 6 2/23 & 2/25	Understanding Class & Economic Privilege	Chapter 3 (Barak)	Discussion Board #3 Due By 3/4 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 7 3/2 & 3/4	No Class -ACJS Conference	N/A	Analyzing Media Coverage of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class, and Crime Assignment Due 3/4 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 8 3/9 & 3/11	Film & Discussion: How to Make Money Selling Drugs (1 hour 30 mins.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bByANuB33kg	N/A	Discussion Board #4 Due by 3/20 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 9 3/16 & 3/18	No Class Spring Break!!		
Week 10 3/23 & 3/25	The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness	Chapter 1-3 (Alexander)	
Week 11 3/30 & 4/1	Understanding Gender & Male Privilege	Chapter 5 (Barak)	Discussion Board #5 Due by 4/6 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 12 4/6 & 4/8	Lawmaking and the Administration of Criminal Law	Chapter 8 (Barak)	N/A
Week 13 4/13 & 4/15	Guest Lecture Dr. Arthur Vasquez	Read Rob Peace Book	Discussion Board #6 Due by 4/20 at 11:59 p.m.
Week 14 4/20 & 4/22	Guest Lecture Dr. Kate Wilds	Read Rob Peace Book	Begin working on final paper
Week 15 4/27 & 4/29	Visuals Presentations	N/A	Ensure final Paper is complete
Week 16 5/4 & 5/6	Rob Peace Final Paper Due by 5/11 at 11:59 p.m.		

Note: Timelines contained in the syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.