

WMNST 608 Body Politics

Spring 2021

Women's Studies

San Diego State University

Instructor Contact Information

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Office Hours: Fridays 10 am – 12 pm, other appointments available on Wednesdays and Fridays.

General Course Information

Scheduled Class Days/Time: Wednesdays, 4-6:40 pm

This is a virtual class.

What is this class about?

According to feminist and queer theory, the human body is not just personal – it is also a site where power is asserted. Body politics is an exploration of the social and political meanings that have been attached to human bodies, and the kinds of power that these differences make possible. Body politics shifts us from assuming that human differences are biological to understanding them as socially constructed – and seeks out the motivations for and effects of social constructions like sex/gender, race, sexual deviance, disability, and madness. Scholars of body politics ask questions like: Why was the idea of biological sex created? What is the meaning attached to having a penis or a vagina? What are the economic motivations for and effects of the legal construction of racial categories? Why was the notion of heterosexuality invented in the nineteenth century? How did some people who were considered “ugly” come to be disabled in the early twentieth century?

There are dozens of ways to enter the conversation about body politics. This version of the class will focus on the role of the carceral state or “prison industrial complex” in controlling bodies in the U.S., particularly bodies multiply oppressed by race, sex/gender, and ideologies of sexual deviance. The “carceral state” is a way of linking together policing and the prison industrial complex with other forms of detention, including disability institutions. Policing, prisons, and other institutions of confinement have been key technologies for defining difference and for regulating populations that threaten the social order. We will also examine how queer people, feminists, and disability activists have forged solidarity across prison/institution walls; imagined abolition, transformative justice, and disability justice; and created spaces of bodily autonomy and freedom even within the “belly of the beast.” Given the recent uprisings for Black Lives Matter, to “Defund the Police,” and for abolition -- discussion of the body politics of the carceral state is especially urgent.

Catalog description: Historical exploration illuminates contemporary and past constructions of female, male, and transgendered sexualities. Facilitates ability to critique “innate” vs. culturally constructed behaviors and identities. Key institutions that control and define the body explored: labor, race, economics, law, and medicine.

What will you learn?

By the end of this this course you will be able to:

- Articulate a **social construction theory** of human difference; describe some of the strategies through which difference has been constructed, including **criminalization** and **pathologization**; and for what purpose difference has been constructed. Identify biological theories of difference, and evaluate the consequences of **biological determinism** and **biological essentialism**.
- Define **carceral state** and **prison industrial complex**. Using the concepts and theories of **Black feminism, queer theory, and critical disability studies**, analyze the carceral state and the prison industrial complex in the U.S.
- Ground your analysis in the historical treatment of Black women, Black queer people, queer and trans people of color, and disabled people in the U.S. Identify how **policing, punishment and confinement** have constructed **gender and sexual deviance**, and have justified taking away **bodily autonomy**.
- Compare **carceral feminism** with **abolition feminism**. Compare carceral LGBT organizing with queer abolition. Identify the principles of **transformative justice**, and begin to imagine how to move toward abolitionist feminist and queer futures.

What will you read?

Required Books:

1. *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, by **Angela Y. Davis**, 2003, ISBN: 9781583225813
2. *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*, by **Sarah Haley**, 2016, ISBN: 9781469627595
3. *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*, by **Andrea J. Ritchie**, 2017, ISBN: 9780807088982
4. *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, edited by **Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith**, 2015, ISBN: 9781849350709

We will also read the introductions and one chapter of each of these three books. These are unfortunately not available as eBooks through the library, but I will make pdf copies available. If you would like to have the whole book, they are available for sale at the SDSU bookstore.

5. *Decarcerating Disability: Desinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*, by **Liat Ben-Moshe**, 2020, ISBN: 9781517904432
6. *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing and the Feminist Fight to End Violence*, by **Emily Thuma**, 2019, ISBN: 9780252084126

7. *Fugitive Life: The Queer Politics of the Prison State*, by **Stephen Dillon**, 2018, ISBN: 9780822370826

Other Required Readings

There are **4 other required readings** listed in the syllabus that will be available on the course Canvas page as pdf documents.

What does the professor expect of you?

1. **Read the assigned material prior to live class.**
2. **Check your university e-mail regularly.** Any changes to reading assignments, instructions for completing assignments, and any other announcements will be sent via e-mail.
3. **Regularly attend and participate in class.** Class discussion will be spent comprehending the arguments made in assigned material, analyzing and evaluating the material, and synthesizing and integrating ideas across assigned readings. *If you have an emergency or serious extenuating circumstance that requires you to miss more than 1 class period, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss your situation.*
4. **Participate respectfully during class time.** We join the virtual classroom from a variety of situations and from different life experiences. Because most of class instruction will be completed on your own time, I ask that you make every attempt to join our Wednesday live session each week, and that you minimize as many distractions as can during the live session. You are encouraged to have your video camera on for the entire live session. During these discussions, you will be asked to abide by some community agreements that we will create together during the first live session.
5. **Complete all assignments to the best of your ability and on time.** You are responsible for keeping track of when assignments are due. Late policy: I am somewhat flexible about accepting your weekly assignments 1-2 days late. Beyond this, you are better served focusing on the next week's assignment, or you will continue to fall behind. *If you have an extreme and unavoidable reason preventing you from turning in your assignments on time, please come speak with me.* No late work will be accepted beyond Thursday, May 13, including the final project, due to the quick turnaround in grading time.

How will you know you are learning?

Abolition Notebook – 40 points (complete 10 for 4 points each)

You will write a weekly reflection, due by class time each week. There are 13 total, you only need to complete 10. You will write a weekly reflection connecting the weekly readings to the “carceral logics” you observe in your daily life, especially as it relates to bodies and body differences. By “carceral logics” I mean practices of surveillance, punishment, discipline, and incarceration that are used by the state to control populations, AND which also filter down into other aspects of our life including how we treat/punish ourselves, how we related to one another, and how institutions act/react. The intention of this assignment is to make connections between the material of the class and our daily lives, so you must engage with at least one of the assigned readings for that week in

your entry. It can be as creative or as conventional as you would like. Potential areas to observe include but are not limited to:

- The university
- Schooling
- Work
- Intimate relationships
- Family relationships
- Relationship to self
- Medicine and mental health treatment
- Activism and organizing groups
- Cultural productions, such as television and films
- Social media

Your “notebook” will be kept as running Google Doc that you can share permissions with me by posting the URL into Canvas each week that you complete it (I’ll show you what I mean on Day 1). Each week’s reflection should be no more than 2 pages double spaced. (Credit to Leila Whitley for this assignment.)

Presentation and Discussion Facilitation – 25 points

We will take turns presenting each week and facilitating some of the conversation afterward. If you would like to partner up to do this, you may. For your presentation you should create some kind of visual aid, such as a slideshow or handout. Please submit your visual aid to me by Tuesday by noon, the day before you present for feedback. The components of your presentation:

1. A short introduction to an organization or group that identifies as abolitionist or engaged in transformative justice. See list of potential organizations on Canvas. After you select a group, visit their web site/social media and report back to us:
 - a. What kind of work does this group do?
 - b. What kinds of strategies for social change are they engaged in?
 - c. What is one “success” this organization has had?
2. Provide a brief summary of the main arguments in the readings for this week.
3. Identify the evidence the author(s) uses to build their argument (historical/archival, cultural/interpretive, interviews/social scientific, etc.)
4. Identify 2-5 key words, especially words that the author has invented, and describe your understanding of the key words.
5. Make a connection between these readings and something that we read or discussed earlier in the class
6. Prepare 2-3 discussion questions for the class that will help us to deepen our understanding and/or apply the knowledge.
 - a. Options: free write and partner share; small group break out rooms; large group discussion. If you would like to use breakout rooms for paired or small group discussions, please let me know in advance.
 - b. You do not necessarily have to present your material in this order. For example, if you have a pedagogical reason to have us do a free write before you dive into your summary/overview, then by all means experiment with the order.

Final Paper/Project – 35 points (30 for paper, 5 for proposal)

Your final creation in this class will be one of the following choices. You should submit a proposal – such as an abstract or paragraph description – for your project/paper by February 17.

- **Creating popular/political education materials** – How would you convey what you have learned in this class to those outside of it? You could create a web site, a zine, a podcast, an op-ed for a newspaper, a YouTube channel, a Twitter account, artistic materials, or more. If you would like to use a digital format, I encourage you to reach out to Dr. Pam Lach at the Digital Humanities Center for help – but be sure to reach out several weeks ahead of the deadline. The amount of time put into this is expected to be equivalent to the other options. Please include a 2-3 page written reflection on your creation.
- **Action project** – Conceptualize, organize and carry out an action that works toward solidarity with policed or incarcerated people, abolition, and/or transformation justice. This could include some combination of but is not limited to:
 - fundraising for a bailout fund;
 - hosting a documentary film screening series for your friends;
 - signing up to send letters to people in prison;
 - volunteering for a campaign; or
 - committing to participating in weekly phone/email zaps and social media blasts for a campaign.

The amount of time put into this is expected to be equivalent to the other options. Please include a 2-3 page written reflection on your creation.

- **Literature review** – See information about how a literature review differs from other kinds of papers before undertaking this option. Especially consider if the content of class is relevant to your thesis. Your review should use some of the course readings, 2-3 additional readings.
- **Conference paper** – Write a conference paper that analyzes original material and makes an original argument which is connected to the topics and themes of the class. By original material, I mean that a conference paper is not just a literature review, but there is some kind of original interpretation. I encourage you to choose a specific conference to write for, and to gear your abstract and paper specifically to that conference. A conference paper is generally 8-10 pages double spaced.
- **Chapter or section of thesis** – You are welcome to use this assignment as a way to write part of your thesis, especially if it is related to the themes of the class. However, you should not submit anything that has already been submitted to another class for credit. No less than 10 pages, no more than 20 pages.
- **Write a syllabus for a women’s studies course or design a unit for an introductory women’s studies class** related to the topics and themes of the class – Designing a unit means: selecting readings or other material to assign, and designing 2 hours of class material, such as a lecture and/or activity where students explore the content. (Credit to Amira Jarmakani for ideas for this final assignment.)

Overall grades will be based on the following points earned:

A = (94-100); A- = (90-93)
 B+ = (87-89); B = (83-86); B- = (80-82)
 C+ = (77-79); C = (73-76); C- = (70-72)
 D+ = (67-69); D = (60-66)
 F = (\leq 59)

Note: At any point in the course, you can estimate your grade by adding up the points you have earned and compare that to the remaining points available.

Other important things to know

Students are responsible for being familiar with the university wide policies found at: https://arweb.sdsu.edu/es/catalog/GC1617/143_UniPolicies.pdf.

Content warning

A course on Body Politics, especially one centering women and queer people of color, necessarily requires us to encounter texts discussing sexual violence and state-sponsored violence. Please reach out for support from me or the following resources if you are experiencing distress due to this content.

- Campus-based Counseling and Psychological Services, M-F 8 am – 4 pm: 619-594-5220
- San Diego Access & Crisis Phone Line available 24/7: 1-888- 724-7240
- San Diego Access & Crisis Chat Line available M-F 4-10 pm: <https://svcrplv.uhc.com/sdchat/>

Disability and Access Information

I invite all students to communicate their other access needs with me. If you have a campus accommodation letter, it would be helpful to get a copy as soon as possible.

If you think that you could benefit from an accommodation, even if you do not yet have a learning disability or psychiatric diagnosis, or if you are experiencing a new or temporary disability caused by injury, please contact the Student Ability Success Center and they will go through the process with you. Visit: http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/sds/services-overview.aspx. Voice: (619) 594-6473.

Academic honesty

I encourage students to study together and to talk about their ideas for the exams together. However, any work that you turn in **must be in your own words**. In order to be give credit to the ideas of others, any phrase, sentence or paragraph that is an exact copy of what somebody else wrote (or said) should be attributed to the author (or speaker) by name and include a page number. In addition, any idea from an author or theorist that you use in your work, even if it is not a direct quote, should also be attributed to that author by name. To present someone else's words as your own is considered plagiarism, whether you intended to steal their work or not.

Students who are found to be plagiarizing, whether intentionally or not, will be subject to penalty. This can include: receiving a zero on the assignment or exam, receiving a failing grade in the course overall, or being referred to student conduct.

Sexualized Violence and Reporting Requirements

All employees are required to report incidences of sexual assault and sexual harassment to the campus Dean of Students office. That means that professors and other employees who become aware of sexual assault or harassment must contact the Title IX office. HOWEVER, it would be YOUR choice to pursue any action beyond the initial report. You do not have to talk to the university at any point, even if a report is made about you. Anyone who would prefer to talk to someone confidentially about sexual assault or harassment can contact:

- Counseling & Psychological Services (see above)

- Campus-based Sexual Violence Advocate & Educator, [Calpulli Center](#), 2nd Floor, [\(619\) 594-0210](#)
- Center for Community Solutions (CCS), 24-Hour Hotline: [\(888\) 385-4657](#) (Bilingual)

Course Schedule

Subject to change with fair notice – through announcement posted on Canvas.

Week/ Date of live session	Readings	Live session	Deadlines and due dates
1 Jan 20		<p><i>Welcome</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Overview of the class • Discussion agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase, rent, or borrow assigned books for the class • Sign up for presentation weeks
2 Jan 27	<p><i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> by Angela Y. Davis (entire book)</p> <p>Short video lectures by Angela Y. Davis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Marxist political economy" • "Imprisonment and capitalism" 	<p><i>Key concepts and frameworks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of the prison and prison reform • Prison industrial complex • The panopticon and carceral logics • Prison economy and neoliberalism • Race and gender analysis • Punishment continuum • Carceral feminism • Prison abolition • Restorative justice, transformative justice 	Notebook entry 1 – due by class time on Weds
3 Feb 3	<i>Invisible No More</i> by Andrea Ritchie – Introduction, chapters 1-3	<i>Histories and strategies of policing in the U.S.</i>	Notebook entry 2 – due by class time on Weds
4 Feb 10	<i>Invisible No More</i> – chs 5-8 Watch:	<p><i>Policing Black women, policing sexual deviance</i></p> <p>What difference does a gender and queer analysis make?</p>	Notebook entry 3 – due by class time on Weds

Week/ Date of live session	Readings	Live session	Deadlines and due dates
	<i>Out in the Night: The Criminalization of Race, Gender Identity and Sexuality</i>		
5 Feb 17	<p>“Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body” by Siobhan Somerville (pdf on Canvas)</p> <p>Watch: <i>Race: The Power of Illusion, episode 2</i></p> <p><i>Captive Genders</i> edited by Eric Stanley and Nat Smith – Introduction plus the “Out of Time” section except for “Building an Abolitionist...” (we’ll read that later)</p>	<p><i>The Stakes of Social Construction</i> Define biological essentialism, biological determinism and set the stakes for social construction theories</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal for final project/paper due • Notebook entry 4 – due by class time on Weds
6 Feb 24	<p>From <i>Captive Genders</i>, edited by Eric Stanley and Nat Smith – Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Regulatory Sites: Management, Confinement, and HIV/AIDS” • “From a Native Trans Daughter” • “How to Make Prisons Disappear” • “Out of Compliance” • “No One Enters Like Them” 	<p><i>Punishing gender and sexual deviance</i> The carceral state - a queer and trans issue</p> <p>*Class will end at 5:30 pm today – you are invited to attend a virtual panel “Free Them All: Medical and Mental Health Neglect in Detention” from 6-7:30 pm that I am hosting through the Free Them All San Diego coalition</p>	<p>Notebook entry 5 – due by class time on Weds</p>
7 March 3	<p><i>No Mercy Here</i> by Sarah Haley – Introduction and ch. 1</p>	<p><i>“Carceral Constructions of Black Female Deviance”</i> Understanding the Black Codes and the convict lease system to address representations of Black</p>	<p>Notebook entry 6 – due by class time on Weds</p>

Week/ Date of live session	Readings	Live session	Deadlines and due dates
	Watch: <i>13th</i> (by Ava Duvernay) or <i>Slavery by Another Name</i>	women as “criminals” and “convicts”	
8 March 10	<i>No Mercy Here</i> by Sarah Haley – ch. 2	<i>“Convict Leasing, (Re)Production, and Gendered Racial Terror”</i> The PIC and racial and gendered capitalism	Notebook entry 7 – due by class time on Weds
9 March 17	<i>Decarcerating Disability</i> by Liat Ben-Moshe – Introduction and ch. 3	<i>Abolition and Disability Justice</i> Bread and Roses Speaker Series with Liat Ben-Moshe and Subini Annamma at 3 pm today – please attend and we will discuss afterward	Notebook entry 8 – due by class time on Weds
10 March 24	<i>No Mercy Here</i> by Sarah Haley – ch. 5 and conclusion Watch: <i>T’Ain’t Nobody’s Bizness: Queer Blues Divas of the 1920’s</i>	<i>“Sabotage and Black Radical Feminist Refusal”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural production as resistance, creating the abolitionist imaginary • Loopholes of retreat, fugitivity 	Notebook entry 9 – due by class time on Weds
March 31		No live session today – Cesar Chavez Day, campus closed	
11 April 7	<i>All Our Trials</i> by Emily Thuma - Introduction and ch. 1	<i>Carceral feminism v. abolition feminism</i>	Notebook entry 10 – due by class time on Weds
12 April 14	<i>Fugitive Life</i> by Stephen Dillon – Introduction and ch. 4 Watch: <i>Black Power Mixtape</i>	<i>Black radical thought and fugitivity</i>	Notebook entry 11 – due by class time on Weds
13 April 21	<i>Invisible No More</i> by Andrea Ritchie – chapters 9-10	<i>Transformative Justice and Abolition Feminism</i>	Notebook entry 12 – due by class time on Weds

Week/ Date of live session	Readings	Live session	Deadlines and due dates
	<p>“Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex” (2001) by Incite! And Critical Resistance</p> <p>“Toward Transformative Justice” by Generation Five (<i>content warning: this document comes out of a context of organizing against child sexual abuse</i>)</p> <p>Podcast: “Police Abolition” with Mariame Kaba, <i>Call Your Girlfriend</i></p>		
14 April 28	<p><i>Captive Genders</i> – “Building an Abolitionist Trans and Queer Movement with Everything We’ve Got,” “Maroon Abolitionists” and choose one other from the last section of the book</p>	<p><i>Disability Justice and Queer Abolition</i></p> <p>Bread and Roses Speaker Series with Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Alice Wong during our class today</p>	Notebook entry 13 – due by class time on Weds
15 May 5	<p>Introduction to <i>Cruising Utopia</i> by José Esteban Muñoz</p> <p>Film: <i>Criminal Queers</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer review of final projects • Last thoughts on disability justice and queer abolition 	Draft of final projects due
Finals Week		We will not meet during finals week – have summer	Final project due by Monday, May 10, 10 am