

A

bolitionist Feminism

Spring 2022

Wednesdays 10:10-12pm

Instructor: Sarah Haley sh4210@columbia.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12pm via remote link or 615 Fayerweather Hall

Remote link: For initial classes and any necessary absences, Please use this [link](#). For virtual or in-person office hours please sign up [here](#)

Ruth Wilson Gilmore has recently described abolition as “life in rehearsal,” a provocation, and a demand that we scrutinize the relationships between captivity, violence, and feminist and queer forms of life-making; and these relationships will be the class’s core focus.

This seminar is a deep study of the feminist history, theory, and practice of criminal punishment abolition in the contemporary period. It centers criminalized people and explores key conceptual frameworks, political conundrums, practices, and genealogies of abolition especially in relation to Black and queer feminisms. We will discuss histories and future trajectories of abolitionist organizing . This class also explores the relationship between prison abolition and other movements for radical change and the tensions around abolition and carcerality that exist among feminists. Does abolitionist feminism have a cohesive set of political projects or philosophies? How does abolitionist feminism demand a transdisciplinary set of interpretive frameworks and tools and an approach to research that centers activism? How do expansive critiques of punishment, as a primary mode of state activity, shape feminist views on the state, institutions, and society more broadly? How might we understand feminist analyses of structural vs. individual harm?

Requirements

Attendance + Participation (20%):

This seminar will center on class engagement. Except for cases of illness or emergency you should attend each class session; more than one unexcused absence will negatively impact your participation grade. Please see Covid policies below for policies regarding illness. Your participation grade will be based upon your regular, thoughtful engagement with the readings. When reading in preparation for class discussion you will want to think about the following questions: 1) What is the main argument of each reading? 2) What is the relationship between the arguments within each week and between weeks? 3) What are the conditions of production for the source (context, audience/reader, intent of the writer, etc.) 4) What kind of evidence does the author use to support his or her argument? Are you convinced that the author supports her argument with sufficient evidence? 5) What are the historical, political, or cultural stakes for the questions she or he asks? 6) What additional questions does the reading raise? 6) What are key terms and how are they defined? 7) How does the author engage other scholars’ ideas/arguments? 8) How might the life or ideas of a particular author confound your

preexisting assumptions? 9) What has changed or remained the same over time, how, and why? 10) How do the readings connect or depart from one another?

Midterm Paper: An Abolitionist Feminist Life (25%): 5-7 pages

Drawing from a provided list of biographies, memoirs, interviews, or archival documents you will be asked to write a persuasive, thesis-driven, essay that explains the relationship between an aspect or arc of a criminalized person's experience and their feminist understandings of or organizing toward abolition. You may also request approval to focus on a person of your own choosing. Due March 10th at 5pm via electronic upload.

Queries: (20%): (250 words each)

You will be required to upload four short posts that pose two critical questions that the readings collectively generate. These are not meant to be factual questions, but rather questions that hinge upon the feminist/queer politics, theory, and practice of abolition, or the gendered contours of the carceral state. The task is to draw connections between at least two of the readings for the assigned week in order to develop your questions. The class will be divided into two groups and due dates will be assigned accordingly. Due by 5pm on Tuesdays.

Final Paper: Feminist Campaign or Manifesto (35%) 6-8 pages:

Your final paper requires you to craft a document that contributes to feminist struggles for abolition, and you have the option of submitting a final paper in the form of a campaign document or manifesto.

Campaign option: Create a campaign to advocate for either a specific abolitionist reform or broader abolitionist demand. Include a rationale that includes a thesis about the problem and solution, outline, and description. Your campaign should be relatively realistic but does not need to be limited by something that is immediately achievable and can also embrace imagination and center on creative practice. Campaigns are not made alone so this option requires that you work cooperatively in groups of 2-4 class members. You will each submit your own paper, but you can develop the ideas and format together, and the final document can include up to 1.5 pages of collectively written text.

Manifesto Option: Create an extended political demand or theory for feminist abolition. This manifesto can focus on the wrongs of the past or present and/or the possibilities for the future. It needs a perspective and argument, and should be engaged with relevant scholarship and primary sources, creative, and energetic. It can be in the form of a traditional paper or zine.

You will receive detailed instructions about the final paper during the course of the class. Due May 9th at 5pm via electronic upload.

BEST PRACTICES

Gender References: In class discussions and in reference to each other we will use the pronoun they as default while learning and respecting each participant's stated chosen pronouns. All references to women and girls in this class will include cis and trans people by default unless one's assigned identity at birth is relevant to their positions of marginalization, assimilation, or violation.

Representation/Language: While policing and imprisonment is inherently violent and usually constituted by racial violence, this class will avoid the circulation of graphic images and video of people experiencing violence by police, guards, or other authorities. We will not use terms such as "inmate," "offender," "juvenile," "perpetrator" or other demeaning terms to reference criminalized or imprisoned people. Questions about this policy are encouraged.

Health: Although attendance and engaged participation in this class is mandatory, under current pandemic conditions, we can only have meaningful engagement with a commitment to collective health and safety. You are discouraged from attending class if you have symptoms of respiratory illness. Ample accommodations will be made for any illness-related absences. You will not be penalized for failing to attend class due to illness. Depending on the circumstances, you will either be excused from the work of that class session, or you will be provided with fair (and simple) options for replacing any written work that you cannot submit due to illness. This is not just a matter of courtesy or convenience. Our compliance with this policy ensures fairness to both the class member who is ill and equity toward all members of the class including those who may be disproportionately impacted by health vulnerabilities. Although not required, you are encouraged to use KN95 or KF94 masks in class when at all possible. Surgical masks are also preferable to cloth. Please ask for assistance to procure these masks if needed. I may make additional safety requests as conditions develop. Please also see the University's Covid Policies and protocols: <https://covid19.columbia.edu>.

Communication: I am available during office hours to discuss questions regarding the readings and related course topics as well as assignments. Please use email sparingly, only when necessary to answer brief questions not covered on the syllabus and which cannot wait until office hours or class meetings. I will return emails as soon as possible. Disability Accommodations: In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with Disability Services (DS). More information on the DS registration process is available online at www.health.columbia.edu/ods. Faculty must be notified of registered students' accommodations before exam or other accommodations will be provided. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability are invited to contact Disability Services for a confidential discussion at (212) 854-2388 (Voice/TTY) or by email at disability@columbia.edu.

Academic Honesty: While the sharing of ideas is a hallmark of knowledge production and encouraged in this class, plagiarism (even if inadvertent) is a serious breach of academic integrity and often compounds other inequities in the scholarly arena. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own; such citation must be clear, consistent, and thorough. The Columbia Center for New Media, Teaching, and Learning defines plagiarism and its consequences at Columbia University: ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/compass/discipline_humanities/documenting.html#plagiarism. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about academic honesty and citation before submitting your work. Format, citation, and preparation guidelines for papers will be distributed prior to the due date for the first response paper.

In-Class Electronics: The use of computers and tablets in class is permitted solely for the purpose of note taking or reading assigned course materials. Download assigned materials prior to class. Sounds and Wi-Fi should be disabled on all electronic devices. Cell phones may not be used in class at any time.

This syllabus may be updated as needed during the term

Required Books (Available at Book Culture)

The Abolitionist Papers, Haymarket Press

Mariame Kaba. *We Do This 'Till We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. (2021)

Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica Meiners, and Beth Richie. *Abolition. Feminism. Now*. (2022)

Emily Thuma. *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019.

Class Schedule

Required books are available at Book Culture (bc) or widely from online booksellers. All other readings are linked or uploaded on the course website (cw).

Week 1 **January 19th** **Overview**

Week 2 **January 26th** **Foundations**

Angela Y. Davis “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” *The Black Scholar* (1971): 2-15. [Link](#)

Kelly Carter Jackson “Dare you Meet a Woman”: Black Women, Abolitionism, and Protective Violence, 1850–1859, *Slavery & Abolition* (2021): 269-292. [Link](#)

Sarah Haley *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* Chapter Five: 195-249. (cw)

Saidiya Hartman *Scenes of Subjection* “The Burdened Individuality of Freedom” (1997): 115-124. [Link](#)

Week 3 February 2nd Foundations

W.E.B. Du Bois *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, Chapter IV "The General Strike," 1935 [2012]: 49-75. [Link](#)

Thavolia Glymph "Du Bois's Black Reconstruction and Slave Women's War for Freedom," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (2013): 489-505. [Link](#)

Katherine McKittrick "Plantation Futures" *Small Axe* (2013): 1-15. [Link](#)

Angela Y. Davis *Abolition Democracy* excerpt (cw).

Selections from *Aperture* "Prison Nation" (February 2018) [Link](#)

Week 4 February 9th Genealogies

Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth Richie *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (2021) (bc).

Week 5 February 16th Carceral Feminism

Elizabeth Bernstein "The Sexual Politics of the 'New Abolitionism': *Differences* (2007): 128-151. [Link](#)

Nicolas Carrier + Justin Piché "Blind Spots of Abolitionist Thought in Academia" *Champs Pénal* [click the English text option unless you read French] [Link](#)

Lisa Gotell "Reassessing the Place of Criminal Law Reform in the Struggle Against Sexual Violence: A Critique of the Critique of Carceral Feminism." 2015. (cw)

Beth Richie *Arrested Justice* (2012): Chapter 3: 65-99. [Link](#)

Rose Braz "Kindler, Gentler, Gender Responsive Cages: Prison Expansion is not Prison Reform. *Women, Girls, & Criminal Justice* (2006): 87-91. (cw)

Andrew Dilts "How Does it Feel to Be(come) a Problem? Active Intolerance and the Abolitionist Killjoy" *Theory and Event* (2021): 637-643 [Link](#)

Week 6 February 23rd Racial Capitalism & The State

Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore “Restating the Obvious” in *Indefensible Spaces* (2007): 141-162 (cw).

Ruth Wilson Gilmore “Globalisation and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to post Keynesian Militarism” *Race and Class* (1998/1999): 171-188. [Link](#)

Grace Hong “Existentially Surplus: Women of Color Feminism and the New Crises of Capitalism” *GLQ* (2011): 87-106. [Link](#)

Melissa Burch “Captive Afterlives in the Age of Mass Conviction” *History and Anthropology* (2019): 515-520. [Link](#)

Week 7 March 2nd Social/Reproduction

Julilly Kohler-Hausmann “Guns and Butter: The Welfare State, the Carceral State, and the Politics of Exclusion in the Postwar United States,” *Journal of American History* (2015): 87-99. [Link](#)

Priya Kandaswamy “Chapter 1: Welfare Reform and the Afterlife of Slavery” *Domestic Contradictions: Race and gendered Citizenship from Reconstruction to Welfare Reform* (2021): 1-28 (cw)

Annie Lowery “Her Only Crime Was Helping Her Kids” *The Atlantic* [Link](#)

Colby Lenz + Alisa Bierria “Battering Court Syndrome: A Structural Critique of Failure to Protect” *The Politicization of Safety: Critical Perspective on Domestic Violence* (2019): 91-118. (cw)

Seminar #1 with **Romarilyn Ralston**.

Week 8 March 9th Policing

Andrea Ritchie *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (2017): Chapter 2, pp. 58-82. (cw)

Fabiola Cineas + Rachel Herzing “What the public is getting right — and wrong — about police abolition” *Vox* October 30, 2020 [Link](#)

Marisol Lebron “Policing Coraje in the Colony: Toward a Decolonial Feminist Politics of Rage in Puerto Rico” *Signs* (2021): 801-826. [Link](#)

LaShawn Harris “Beyond the Shooting: Eleanor Gray Bumpurs, Identity Erasure, and Family Activism against Police Violence” *Souls* (2018): 86-109. [Link](#)

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw + Andrea Ritchie, *Say Her Name Report* (cw).

Online Event: March 3rd, 3:30pm Survived & Punished, UCLA Center for the Study of Women: “Defending Self Defense”

Week 9 March 23rd Antiracism and Settler Colonialism

Robin Maynard + Leanne Betasamosake Simpson “Every Day We Must Get Up and Relearn the World: An Interview with Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *Interfere* (2021): 141-165. [Link](#)

Savannah Shange “Black Girl Ordinary: Flesh, Carcerality, and the Refusal of Ethnography.” *Transforming Anthropology* (2019): 3-21. [Link](#)

Stormy Ogden “Ex-Prisoner Pomo Woman Speaks Out” *Social Justice* (2004) 63-69. [Link](#)

Assata Shakur *Assata Speaks*, 1987. 16 pgs. (cw)

Iyko Day “Afro-Feminism Before Afropessimism: Meditations on Gender and Ontology” *Antiracism* (2021): 60-81 (cw)

Saidiya Hartman “Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors” *Souls* (2016): 166-173. [Link](#)

Recommended: “Abolition on Stolen Land” UCLA October 9, 2020 [Link](#)

Week 10 March 30 Carceral Gendering

Eric A. Stanley Dean Spade and Queer (In)Justice “Queering Prison Abolition Now” *American Quarterly* (2012): 115-127 [Link](#)

CeCe McDonald with Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley “‘Go Beyond Our Natural Selves’ The Prison Letters of CeCe McDonald” *TSQ* (2017): 246-265. [Link](#)

Dorothy Roberts *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families Punks, Bulldaggers, Welfare Queens* (excerpt TBD). (cw)

Chandra Bozelko “Sexual Violence in Women’s Prisons Reaches ‘Constitutional Proportions’ Will Lawmakers Step In? *Ms.* April 23, 2020. [Link](#)

Cathy Cohen “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ* (1997): 437-465. (cw)

Week 11 April 6 Carceral Archipelago

Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo “The Violence of Citizenship in the Making of Refugees: The United States and Central America” *Social Text* (2019): 1-21 [Link](#)

Liat Ben-Moshe *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition* (2020) Chapters 3-4: 111-161. [Link](#)

Erica R. Meiners *For the Children?: Protecting Innocence in a Carceral State* (2016): Chapter 2, “The Trouble with the Child in the Carceral State”: 15 pgs.

Erica R. Meiners “Never Innocent: Feminist Trouble with Sex Offender Registries and Protection in a Prison Nation” *Meridians* (2009): 31-62.

Maya Schenwar + Victoria Law “House Arrest is touted as Humane Punishment. It’s Not” *Medium*. (cw)

Week 12 April 13 Organizing

Emily Thuma *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (2019) Introduction to Chapter Three, pp. 1-123. (BC). Emily Thuma Class Visit.

Mariame Kaba *No Selves to Defend*. [Link](#)

The Fire Inside, selected issues (cw)

Week 13 April 20 Mutuality + Upheaval

Saidiya Hartman “The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2018): 465-490. [Link](#)

Dean Spade *Mutual Aid* (2021) Part 1: 11-34. (cw)

Xhercis Méndez “Beyond Nassar: A Transformative Justice and Decolonial Feminist Approach to Campus Sexual Assault,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* (2020): 82-104. [Link](#)

Stephen Dillon *Fugitive Life: The Queer Politics of the Prison State* (2018) “Only the Sun Will Bleach His Bones Quicker”: Desire, Police Terror, and the Affect of Queer Feminist Futures”: 119-142. [Link](#)

Week 14 April 27 Organizing

Mariame Kaba *We Do This Until We Free Us* (2021): I, IV, V, & VI: 1-28; 70-162. (BC)

Laura McTighe and Deon Haywood "Front Porch Revolution: Resilience Space, Demonic Grounds, and the Horizons of a Black Feminist Otherwise” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (2018): 25-52 [Link](#)

Seminar #2 with **Romarilyn Ralston**.

Query Assignment Schedule	
Group 1	Group 2
Week 3, Week 5, Week 7, Week 11	Week 4, Week 6, Week 10, 12