

Race, Crime and Criminal Justice

CCJS 370 - Fall 2025

Section 0101: Tues/Thurs – 11:00-12:15pm – LEF2166

Section 0201: Tues/Thurs – 12:30-1:45pm – TYD1118

University of Maryland, College Park

Professor: Dr. Brooklynn Hitchens (Dr. Hitchens)
Office: 2153 LeFrak Hall
Email: hitchens@umd.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays 2:00-3:00pm; and by appointment

Graduate TA: Sarah Silberman, M.S.
Office: 2150 LeFrak Hall
Email: ssilber2@umd.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 1:00-2:00pm; and by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course explores the enduring significance of racial and ethnic inequality in the study of crime and the criminal legal system in the United States. Through this course, we seek to understand why racial/ethnic minorities are overrepresented in US crime statistics and criminal justice institutions. Two dominant explanations exist: 1) racial/ethnic minorities simply commit more crimes (differential offending levels) and/or 2) the criminal justice system is designed to discriminate against racial/ethnic minorities (systematic bias against marginalized groups). We will examine scholarship that addresses these two perspectives and study in systematic detail: historical underpinnings of race and racism in crime; public perceptions of the relationship between race/ethnicity and crime; the distribution, type, and patterning of crime across whites and minorities; research geared to explain these associations; and how these statuses emerge in the criminal justice system. The ultimate goal is to provide students with a sophisticated understanding of the complex social, economic and political forces shaping the relationships between race/ethnicity, crime, and punishment in the US.

LEARNING GOALS

The course will further the following learning goals:

1. **Competence** in understanding the major theoretical perspectives through readings, lectures, discussions, and written work that address the major perspectives used to account for the sources and consequences of racial and ethnic inequality in crime and criminal justice processes. The central focus of the course is on increasing the multicultural understanding of crime and criminal justice within society based upon contemporary theoretical and empirical knowledge. In doing so, the course will address the major institutions that affect crime and that carry out the application of justice. It will also familiarize students with the major data sources and methods used in the field through reading and discussion of current research articles.

2. **Critical Thinking** will be advanced through reading, discussion, and written assignments designed to have students apply and critique perspectives and knowledge about the underlying sources and consequences of differential involvement in crime and in the application of justice within major institutions.

3. Advanced readings of scholarly articles will further the *scholarship* of students. In addition, all students will complete writing assignments which will demonstrate their level of mastery of course content.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Students are responsible for purchasing and reading the following three books.

1. Payne, Yasser, Brooklynn K. Hitchens, and Darryl L. Chambers. 2023. *Murder Town USA: Homicide, Structural Violence, and Activism in Wilmington*. Rutgers Press.
2. Rios, Victor. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: NYU Press.

There are additional readings found on the ELMS course website. **THESE READINGS ARE REQUIRED.**

- Students should download the readings as soon as possible. Waiting until the day before the test to download articles is strongly discouraged.
- Students are encouraged to put all of the readings in a three-ring binder for ease of access during and outside of class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Exams.

There are two exams—a midterm and a final. Exams will cover material from lectures, class discussions, videos, and readings. About 2/3 of each exam will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions and about 1/3 will consist of short answer questions. You are responsible for all assigned readings, even if they are not discussed in class. Exams are not cumulative. Exams are not curved. **Exams are worth 60% of your final grade.**

Exams are not returned to students; students who wish to review their exam should arrange to meet Dr. Hitchens in her office during office hours.

Make-up policy. See policy details under classroom business.

2. Critical Reflections Essays.

A primary goal of this course is to facilitate students' ability to articulate the relationships between race/ethnicity, class, crime, and punishment in the US. Throughout the semester, students are required to critically respond to the weekly assigned readings. Students must submit five (5) critical reflections by **11:59pm on the assigned due date**. There will be a total of 6 opportunities to submit reflection essays, but I will drop the lowest grade (***5 will be graded towards final grade***). No makeups for assessments will be given. **These assessments count towards 25% of your final grade.**

Criteria below:

You will write **3–5 page essays (double-spaced, typed)** that critically engage with the assigned readings for a specific timeframe (see the Course Outline for due dates).

Each essay must:

- **Discuss at least two assigned readings** (three is recommended).
- **Provide a brief overview** of the themes or arguments from that week's readings (e.g., "This week's readings explored...").
- **Go beyond summary**—the goal is critical analysis, not just describing what the authors said.

Your task is to:

- Make **critical judgments** about the principles, arguments, and processes in the readings.
- Examine **how race and racial inequality relate to the week's topic** (e.g., mass shootings, drug use, human trafficking).
- Consider: Do the findings support or challenge ideas about **differential offending** and/or **differential treatment**?
- **Compare, critique, or challenge** the literature and analysis presented.

Questions for each reflection are posted on **Canvas**, and sample essays are available on **ELMS**.

Important: A reflection paper is **not just a summary**. It should show your understanding and critical thinking.

Format:

In addition, reflection papers should be written in **APA style**; and in **third person language** (not first-person language). Reflection papers need to open up with a paragraph that describes the importance and focus of the argument; as well as the specific readings identified for your critical review. Reflection essays should conclude with a paragraph summarizing the arguments you advance. The top-right hand corner of essays should include in **single-spaced format: Full Name, CCJS370, and Critical Reflection Essay #**. Once again, all papers are required to be written in **third person** (not first-person language). No **“me,” “my,” and “I” statements should be included.**

3. In-Class/Small Group Assessments.

To help students connect with each other and myself on class topics and content, we will have several in-class/small group discussions throughout the semester. There will be a total of 10, but I will drop the two lowest grades (***8 will be graded towards final grade***). No makeups for assessments will be given, and they must be turned in as a group at the conclusion of class. **These assessments count towards 15% of your final grade.**

4. Ad Hoc Extra Credit Opportunities.

Throughout the semester, I will post upcoming on-campus lectures or webinars related to race and crime via ELMS. These (and only these) events can be attended for extra credit. Students must attend the lecture/webinar, snap a selfie/screenshot, and submit a short reaction assignment (details to follow). Submissions are due no later than **72 hours (3 days)** post event.

COURSE GRADE

Grades will be determined as follows:		Grades are based on following scale:			
Exam 1 (Midterm)	30%	Grade	% of total	Grade	% of total
Exam 2 (Final)	30%	A+	100-97	C+	79-77
Critical Reflection Essays (5)	25%	A	96-93	C	76-73
Group Assessments (8)	15%	A-	92-90	C-	72-70
Total	100%	B+	89-87	D+	69-67
<i>Note: Course Grades are rounded at the professor's discretion</i>		B	86-83	D	66-63
		B-	82-80	D-	62-60
				F	Below 60

FINAL GRADES

Your final grade is based on the total points you earn during the semester. If you believe there is a calculation or entry error, contact me and I will review it. Requests to change your grade for any other reason (e.g., extra points, rounding up, extra credit, or redoing assignments) will not be considered. It is unethical to request or grant special accommodations that are not available to all students. **If a specific grade is important to you, please talk with me early in the semester so I can help you plan for success.**

KEYS TO SUCCESS IN THIS CLASS:

1. **Attend every class.** Missing class is the fastest way to fall behind. Treat attendance like a job—be on time and pay attention.
2. **Review slides and your notes together.** Slides on ELMS are helpful, but they do not include everything from lecture.
3. **Take clear, detailed notes.** Poor or incomplete notes often lead to poor performance. If you miss class, get notes from a classmate—I do not provide lecture notes. Typing your notes after class can help reinforce learning.
4. **Ask questions.** If something is unclear, ask during class, before class, or in office hours.
5. **Use office hours.** Meet with me early to discuss lectures, readings, or assignments. Don't wait until the last minute.
6. **Take notes on the readings.** Pay special attention to the questions I raise in class and during discussion.

CLASSROOM BUSINESS

ATTENDANCE: Regular attendance to class is highly encouraged by Dr. Hitchens, as it is a key way to do well in the course. During class, I go over slides that provide key ideas, themes, and research that connect with your weekly readings. It is very hard to pass this class without regular attendance.

ELMS: I will be using ELMS to post materials related to our course such as the syllabus, readings, grades, and handouts. Go to <http://elms.umd.edu> and log in with your Directory ID (logon ID) and password to use this feature. I will send announcements via ELMS too.

UMD COURSE RELATED POLICIES WEBSITE: It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit <http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html> for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS: This course addresses complex and sometimes sensitive issues. You are expected to approach all material and discussions with **openness and critical thinking**. You do not need to agree with every reading or viewpoint, but you must engage respectfully and thoughtfully. Productive discussions happen when everyone feels comfortable sharing ideas, so listening and responding to different perspectives is essential for a meaningful learning experience.

EMAIL: You may email me or the teaching assistant with questions or concerns. **Before emailing**, check the syllabus, ELMS, and class announcements to see if the answer is already available.

All emails must:

- Include “**CCJS 370**” or “**Race, Crime, and Criminal Justice**” in the subject line.
- Use a professional greeting (e.g., “Hello Dr. Hitchens”) and closing.

We aim to respond within **24–48 hours**.

DEMEANOR: When class begins, I expect your full attention and respectful participation. Please avoid disruptive behaviors, including:

- Private conversations during class
- Sleeping or putting your head down
- Using cell phones, texting, or browsing online
- Listening to music or reading unrelated materials
- Leaving early or stepping out without permission
- Making discourteous remarks

Let’s maintain a learning environment where everyone can focus and engage.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TOOLS: This course requires you to complete various assignments that assess your understanding and application of the course content. You are expected to **do your own work and cite any sources** you use properly. **You are not allowed to use any artificial intelligence (AI) tools**, such as chatbots, text generators, paraphrasers, summarizers, or solvers, to complete any part of your assignments. Any attempt to use these tools will be considered **academic misconduct** and will be dealt with according to the university’s academic integrity policy. Students are expected to complete all work **independently** and without the assistance of AI-generated content. If you have any questions about what constitutes acceptable use of AI tools, please consult with the instructor *before* submitting your work.

MAKEUP EXAM POLICY: Students are encouraged to never miss an exam. In the event a student must miss an exam, makeup exams will only be given in cases of excused absences. Excused absences include: religious observances, mandatory military obligation, illness of the student or illness of an immediate family member, required participation in university activities, death in the immediate family, and required court appearances. Official documentation is required. Exams are considered to be Major Scheduled Graded Events and therefore the University medical excuse policy which allows one student signed honor statement attesting to illness **does not apply** to them. I will not accept a Health Center honor statement to verify an illness. If you go to the Health Center and a doctor will not write you a note, you will need to get a copy of your medical record from them to verify your illness. By law, you are entitled to get a copy of this and it is your responsibility to do so.

You must notify me **before missing an exam**—by email or in person—for a makeup to be considered. If an emergency occurs on exam day, email me immediately, even from your phone. If you know in advance about an approved absence, you are expected to take the exam early. All make-up exams must be completed within two weeks and may differ in format from the original. Failure to follow these policies will result in a zero.

DISABILITY SUPPORT: I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Accessibility and Disability Service (ADS) and who provide me with a University of Maryland ADS Accommodation Documentation plan. I am not able to accommodate students who are not registered with ADS or who do not provide me with documentation. ADS students who require additional time for exams are expected to take the exam during the same time period as the rest of the class and must plan their time so they complete the exam before the open window closes.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES: If you are unable to take the any exams during the allotted exam period due to a religious observance, you will need to discuss this with me at the beginning of the semester.

COURSE OUTLINE

Below is the course outline; note that it is subject to modification. All non-book readings are available on ELMS.

Class Schedule of Topics and Readings	
WEEK 1	TUESDAY (Sept 2) Topic: Introduction to Course -Syllabus
	THURSDAY (Sept 4) Topic: Classic Overview of Race and Crime in America See Zoom Recording of Lecture + Assignment; No In-Person Class Today -Readings: (1) Conceptualizing Race and Ethnicity in Studies of Crime and Criminal Justice (Zatz and Rodriguez); (2) Race, Crime, and the Disproportionality Debate and On the Racial Disproportionality of United States' Prison Populations (Blumstein) DUE: Group Assignment #1 (due via ELMS by Fri Sept 5 at 11:59 PM)
WEEK 2	TUESDAY (Sept 9) Topic: Historical Roots of Race and Racism in Crime, Pt. 1 <i>Chattel Slavery + Jim Crow</i> -Readings: (1) The Spawn of Slavery: The Convict-Lease System in the South (Dubois); (2) History's Strange Fruit (Russell-Brown)
	THURSDAY (Sept 11) Topic: Historical Roots of Race and Racism in Crime, Pt. 2 <i>Creation of the Ghetto and Hyperghetto</i> -Readings: (1) From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'Race Question' in the US (Wacquant); (2) Anti-racism in Criminology: An Oxymoron or the way Forward? (Palmer et al); (3) The Iconic Ghetto (Anderson) DUE: Group Assignment #2
WEEK 3	TUESDAY (Sept 16) Topic: Key Theoretical Connections Between Race, Class and Crime, Pt. 1 See Zoom Recording of Lecture + Assignment; No In-Person Class Today -Readings: (1) Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality (Sampson and Wilson); (2) Theory of African American Offending Chp. 1 (Unnever and Gabbidon);
	THURSDAY (Sept 18) Topic: Key Theoretical Connections Between Race, Class and Crime, Pt. 2 - Readings: (1) Theory of African American Offending Chp. 4 (Unnever and Gabbidon); (2) Racial Threat and Crime Control (Smith)
WEEK 4	TUESDAY (Sept 23) Topic: Debating Race and Crime – Straw Men, False Equivalencies, and Ad Hominems (Logical Fallacies) -Readings:

	<p>(1) Logical Fallacies: How They Undermine Critical Thinking and How to Avoid Them (Friedman and Koppelman)</p> <p>DUE: Critical Reflection Essay #1 (Weeks 1-4.1)</p> <p>DUE: Group Assignment #3</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Sept 25) Topic: Victims and Offenders: Who are They? <u>-Readings:</u> (1) Victims and Offenders: Myths and Realities About Crime (Walker et al.) (2) Racial and Ethnic Patterns in Criminality and Victimization (Like-Haislip)</p> <p>Distribute Exam Review Sheet</p>
WEEK 5	<p>TUESDAY (Sept 30) Topic: Race and Crime in the Media: If it Bleeds, it Leads <u>-Readings:</u> (1) “‘Action News’ & the Rise of Anti-Black Local ‘Crime’ Reporting” with Layla Jones (<i>Citations Needed</i> Podcast); Saved on ELMS and available online at: https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/live-interview-action-news-the-rise-of-anti-black/id1258545975?i=1000566517326; (2) Asian Americans’ Reporting of Violent Crime Victimization to the Police (Kim and Sun)</p> <p>DUE: Group Assignment #4</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Oct 2) Topic: New Jim Code: Race, Crime, and Technology <u>Readings:</u> (1) <u>Race after Technology</u>, Introduction-The New Jim Code (Benjamin) (2) <u>Race after Technology</u>, Engineered Inequity: Are Robots Racist? (Benjamin) (3) Racial Bias in AI: Unpacking the Consequences in Criminal Justice Systems (IRIS Sustainable Development)</p> <p>***Exam Review***</p>
WEEK 6	<p>TUESDAY (Oct 7)</p> <p>***Exam 1 (Midterm)***</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Oct 9) Topic: Whiteness and Racial Violence <u>-Readings:</u> (1) The Dog Walker, the Birdwatcher and Racial Violence: The Manifest Need to Punish Racial Hoaxes (Russell-Brown); (2) The White Space (Anderson); (3) White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States (McDermott and Samson)</p> <p>DUE: Group Assignment #5</p>
WEEK 7	<p>TUESDAY (Oct 14) NO CLASS – Fall Break</p> <p>DUE: Critical Reflection Essay #2 (Weeks 4.2-7.1)</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Oct 16) Topic: Race, Domestic Terrorism and Mass Shootings</p>

	<p><i>-Readings:</i></p> <p>(1) White Means Never Having to Say You're Sorry: The Racial Project in Explaining Mass Shootings (Mingus and Zopf);</p> <p>(2) “If I Can't Have You Girls, I Will Destroy You”: Hegemonic Masculinity, Aggrieved Entitlement, and the Isla Vista Killings (Singh)</p>
WEEK 8	<p>TUESDAY (Oct 21) Topic: Race and Missing Women: Politics of Deservingness <i>-Readings:</i> (1) Missing White Woman Syndrome: An Empirical Analysis of Race and Gender Disparities in Online News Coverage of Missing Persons (Sommers); (2) “Newsworthy” Victims? Exploring Differences in Canadian Local Press Coverage of Missing/Murdered Aboriginal and White Women (Gilchrist)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DUE: Group Assignment #6</p> <p>THURSDAY (Oct 23) Topic: Race and Crime in Suburban America, Pt. 1 <i>Readings:</i> (1) Crime and Safety in Suburbia (Singer and Drakulich); (2) Broken Windows in the Cul-de-sac? Race/ethnicity and Quality-of-life Policing in the Changing Suburbs (Beck)</p>
WEEK 9	<p>TUESDAY (Oct 28) Topic: Race and Crime in Suburban America, Pt. 2 <i>Readings:</i> (1) The Code of the Suburb and Drug Dealing (Jacques and Wright); (2) The War on Drugs That Wasn't: Wasted Whiteness, “Dirty Doctors,” and Race in Media Coverage of Prescription Opioid Misuse (Netherland and Hansen) (3) Pathways To Drug Dealing in The Middle and Upper Classes: Early Marginalization, Relative Disadvantage and Countercultural Opposition (Berger et al)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DUE: Group Assignment #7 DUE: Critical Reflection Essay #3 (Weeks 7.2-9.1)</p> <p>THURSDAY (Oct 30) Topic: Urban Gun Violence, Pt. 1 <i>Causes, Correlates, & Consequences</i> <i>-Readings:</i> (1) The Long Reach of Violence: A Broader Perspective on Data, Theory, and Evidence on the Prevalence and Consequences of Exposure to Violence (Sharkey); (2) “Murder Town USA”: Reframing Gun Violence and Resilience in a Small City (Payne et al); (3) <u>Bleeding Out</u>, Chp. 1 (Abt)</p>
WEEK 10	<p>TUESDAY (Nov 4) Topic: Urban Gun Violence, Pt. 2 <i>Causes, Correlates, & Consequences</i> <i>-Readings:</i> (1) <u>Bleeding Out</u>, Chps. 2, 3, and 6 (Abt); (2) The Politics of Murder and Revenge (Duck)</p> <p>THURSDAY (Nov 6) Topic: Street Violence in the Era of Social Media <i>-Readings:</i> (1) “When Twitter Fingers Turn to Trigger Fingers: A Qualitative Study of Social Media-</p>

	<p>Related Gang Violence” (Patton et al) (2) “Code of the Tweet: Urban Gang Violence in the Social Media Age” (Stuart)</p> <p>DUE: Critical Reflection Essay #4 (Weeks 9.2-10.2)</p>
WEEK 11	<p>TUESDAY (Nov 11) Topic: Latinos, Immigration and Crime, Pt. 1 <u>-Readings:</u> (1) An Examination of First- and Second-Generation Immigrant Offending Trajectories (Bersani); (2) “American Tales of Heroes and Villains”: Donald Trump’s Framing of Latinos During COVID-19 Times (Viladrich)</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Nov 13) NO CLASS – ASC Conference (Washington DC)</p>
WEEK 12	<p>TUESDAY (Nov 18) Topic: Latinos, Immigration and Crime, Pt. 2 (1) Racializing Crimmigration: Structural Racism, Colorblindness, and the Institutional Production of Immigrant Criminality (Armenta); (2) The Wages of Latinidad: How Immigration Enforcement Mitigates Anti-Black Assimilation (Robertson and Roman)</p> <p>DUE: Group Assignment #8</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Nov 20) Topic: Race and Policing: Urban Youth of Color, Pt. 1 <u>-Readings:</u> (1) <u>Punished</u>: Part 1 [Hypercriminalization] pgs. 1-96 (Rios)</p> <p>DUE: Group Assignment #9</p>
WEEK 13	<p>TUESDAY (Nov 25) NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break</p> <p>DUE: Critical Reflection Essay #5 (Weeks 11.1-13.1) Distribute Exam Review Sheet</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Nov 27) NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break</p>
WEEK 14	<p>TUESDAY (Dec 2) Topic: Race and Policing: Urban Youth of Color, Pt. 2 <u>-Readings:</u> 1) <u>Punished</u>: Part 2 [Consequences] pgs. 97-156 (Rios)</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Dec 4) Topic: Race and Policing: Differential Treatment <u>-Readings:</u> (1) The Saints and the Roughnecks (Chambliss); (2) The Context for Legal Cynicism: Urban Young Women’s Experiences with Policing in Low-Income, High-Crime Neighborhoods (Hitchens); (3) Differential Racialization and Police Interactions among Young Adults of Asian Descent (Baluran)</p> <p>DUE: Group Assignment #10</p>

WEEK 15	<p>TUESDAY (Dec 9) Topic: Race and Mass Incarceration: Legacy of Inequality <u>-Readings:</u> (1) Engaged Pedagogy in the Criminology Classroom: A Visual Essay (Ellis et al); (2) The Mass Criminalization of Black Americans: A Historical Overview (Hinton and Cook)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">***Final Exam Review***</p>
	<p>THURSDAY (Dec 11) Topic: Race and Mass Incarceration: Collateral Consequences <u>-Readings:</u> (1) Mark of a Criminal Record (Pager); (2) Ban the Box, Criminal Records, and Statistical Discrimination: A Field Experiment (Agan and Starr)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DUE: Critical Reflection Essay #6 (Weeks 13.2-15.2) Last Day of Class</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">***Final Exam/Exam 2*** Section 0101 [11:00am Class]: Monday, December 15 from 10:30am – 12:30pm Section 0201 [12:30pm Class]: Friday, December 19 from 4:00pm – 6:00pm</p>