

Race, Crime and Criminal Justice (CCJS 370:0201)

Mondays and Wednesdays 3:30 to 4:45 PM

TYD 2106

Spring 2026

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COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course provides an overview of how to understand the *overrepresentation* in US crime statistics and criminal legal system outcomes of racial/ethnic minorities – specifically Blacks, Latina/o/s, and American Indians. Two dominant explanations exist: 1) racial/ethnic minorities simply commit more crimes (differential offending levels) and/or 2) the criminal legal system is set up to discriminate against racial/ethnic minorities (systematic bias against marginalized groups). We will examine scholarship that addresses these two perspectives and study in varying detail: historical underpinnings of race and racism in crime and justice outcomes; public perceptions of the relationship among race/ethnicity and crime; structural racism; the distribution and patterning of crime across Whites and minorities; research geared to explain these associations; and how these statuses play out in the criminal legal 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. To that end, we allocate class time during our class sessions every other week (typically on Wednesdays) so that we can work on specific issues related to readings, the writing assignment, and/or class materials. Students will write a theory driven and empirically backed explanation of racially disproportionate incarceration rates between two states.

REQUIRED READINGS:

There are 31 readings found on ELMS under the readings module. These readings are noted by a *R#* along with author information in the course outline below. You should be able to answer questions from the document titled “questions for Readings” for all of these readings. Document (titled “Questions for Readings” found in “readings” module in ELMS. THESE 31 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

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Exams.

There are three exams. Tests will cover material from lectures, class discussions, handouts, videos, and readings. About 2/3 of each exam will consist of 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 curved. Exams are worth a total of 60 percent of your final grade.

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

See point #3 under classroom business for *make-up policy* for exams.

2. Writing Assignment.

Connecting Theory and Research to the Disproportionate Incarceration Rates by Race/Ethnicity. A primary goal of this course is to facilitate students' ability to understand and explain the relationships between race/ethnicity, crime, and punishment in the US. In this assignment, students will write up theoretically guided and empirically backed explanations to explain inequality in rates of incarceration between Whites and racial/ethnic minorities in the criminal legal system. Further information about this project will be provided in a detailed handout during the 2nd week. This assignment is due on Wednesday, April 29th at the beginning of class. This writing assignment is worth 30 percent of your final grade.

NOTE: It is your responsibility to make sure that you complete and turn in the assignment. *Assignments that are not turned in to me on time will be considered one day late. Late assignments will be penalized 5 percentage points for each 24 hour period that they are late.*

3. In-class/small group assessment.

To help students connect with each other and myself regarding class topics, materials and the writing assignment, we will have in-class/small group sessions (specified in the course schedule below). During these sessions (11 possible ones), we will work together in small groups. I want to provide a chance for flexibility so I will drop the lowest three assessment grades. In other words, only eight assessments count towards your final grade. These assessments count towards 10% of your final grade.

COURSE GRADE

Grades will be determined as follows:		Grades are based on the following scale:			
Exam 1	15 %	Grade	% of total points	Grade	% of total points
Exam 2	20 %	A+	100-97	C	76-73
Exam 3	25 %	A	96-93	C-	72-70
Writing Assignment	30 %	A-	92-90	D+	69-67
In-class/small group assessments	10%	B+	89-87	D	66-63
Total Grade	100%	B	86-83	D-	62-60
		B-	82-80	F	Below 60
		C+	79-77		

If earning a particular grade is important to you, please speak with me at the beginning of the semester so that I can offer some helpful suggestions for achieving your goal.

KEYS TO PERFORMING WELL IN THIS CLASS:

1. Attend *all class meetings*. The surest way to perform poorly in this class is to miss days. Think of attending class like a job; be there on time and pay attention.
2. Review *PowerPoint slides*. Be sure to compare your notes from class with the PowerPoint slides available on ELMS. Students will not obtain all the information they need to do well in the class if they only read the slides.
3. Take *detailed notes*. A common theme for students who perform poorly in this course is to have poor notes. Another common theme is that students do not understand their own notes – this means that students do not understand the material during lecture and thus have almost no chance of correctly answering questions covering that material. Taking notes is not easy, so be prepared to work. A helpful suggestion is to type up your notes after each class.
4. Ask *questions*. At times I may speak too fast, the material may be complicated, you may miss a line of argument, etc. But I cannot clarify unless I am made aware that something needs to be clarified. Times to ask questions are during class sessions and office hours.
5. Take *advantage of my help*. Discussing lecture, reading and class materials and especially the writing assignment with me during my office hours can really help students. The key here, however, is to take advantage of this opportunity early.
6. Take *notes on the readings*. Be sure to answer questions from the document titled “questions for Readings” for all of these readings. Document (titled “Questions for Readings” found in “readings” module in ELMS.

CLASSROOM BUSINESS

1. ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance to class is highly encouraged by Dr. Vélez as it is a key way to do well in the course. Class sessions are designed with activities that connect with your weekly readings, lecture slides and writing assignment.

2. 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 <https://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.

3. MAKEUP EXAM POLICY/EXCUSED ABSENCES

All students can miss one exam. No documentation is necessary. It is the responsibility of the student to make this exam up; ideally within two weeks of the initially scheduled exam. I will follow UMD's policy on excused absences when determining the eligibility to make up the other exam. All scheduled makeup exams must be taken by the last day of class. You are responsible for scheduling the makeup exams with Dr. Vélez.

4. ELMS

I use ELMS to post materials related to our course such as the syllabus, readings, PPT slides, 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. **Grades listed on ELMS are raw scores (percentages) and have not been weighted to calculate your final grade. Please do not rely on the Assignments or Total column to determine your final grade.** Graduating seniors are graded on the same scale as all other students.

5. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Students will be allowed to use their personal computers to take class notes. If a student is found to be using personal technology devices in any way that is not related to taking class notes, the student will lose the privilege of using any personal technology device for the duration of the semester. **I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand. Research is mounting on the benefits of taking notes by hand than typing them on a computer for effective learning.** All cell phones need to be silent when class begins. NO EXCEPTIONS!

Below is the course outline; note that it is subject to modification. All non-book readings are available on ELMS and denoted by *R#*

WEEK 1 (1/26-1/30) Monday Introduction to the Course; hand out syllabus (Read: <i>R1</i> . Hinton and Cook, "The Mass Criminalization of Black Americans..."; <i>R2</i> . Du Bois, "The Negro Criminal")	Wednesday Key <i>theoretical</i> connections for understanding race, crime and legal system outcomes (Differential offending and/or differential treatment)
WEEK 2 (2/2-2/6) Monday Definitions of Race, Ethnicity and Crime (Read: <i>R3</i> . Zopf, "A different kind of brown..."; <i>R4</i> . Lee and Bean, "Beyond Black and White..."; <i>R5</i> . Stults and Swagar, "Racial and Ethnic Threat...")	Wednesday GO OVER WRITING ASSIGNMENT HANDOUT IN CLASS (Assessment #1)
WEEK 3 (2/9-2/13) Monday Methodological Issues in the Study of Ethnoracial inequality and Crime (Read: <i>R6</i> . McNulty, "Assessing the Race-Violence..."; <i>R7</i> . Hindelang, "Race and Criminal Involvement"; <i>R8</i> . Xie and Baumer, "Neighborhood immigrant concentration and violent crime reporting to the police...")	Wednesday Discussion Day (Assessment #2)
WEEK 4 (2/16-20) Monday <u>No class due to Dr. Vélez attending a professional meeting</u>	Wednesday Perceptions of the Race-Crime link (Read: <i>R9</i> . Quillian and Pager, "Black Neighbors, Higher Crime?"; <i>R10</i> . Brunson, "Police Don't Like Black People...")

<p>WEEK 5 (2/23-2/27)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>EXAM 1</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Anomie/Strain</p> <p>(Read: <i>R11</i>. Reid and Stults, “Race, institutions, and American homicide...”; <i>R12</i>. De Coster and Thompson, “Race and general strain theory...”)</p> <p>(Assessment #3)</p>
<p>WEEK 6 (3/2-3/6)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Culture/Cultural Adaptations</p> <p>(Read: <i>R13</i>. Matsueda et al., “Race and Neighborhood Codes of Violence”; <i>R14</i>. Sampson and Bartusch. “Legal cynicism and (subcultural?)...”)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Culture/Cultural Adaptations</p> <p>Discussion Day</p> <p>(Assessment #4)</p>
<p>WEEK 7 (3/9-3/13)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Racial Structure and Segregation</p> <p>(Read: <i>R15</i>. Sampson and Wilson “Toward a Theory..”; <i>R16</i>. Krivo et al. “The U.S. Racial Structure and Ethno-Racial Inequality...”; <i>R17</i>. Lyons et al., “Inheriting the Grade...”)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Racial Structure and Segregation</p> <p>(Assessment #5)</p>
<p>WEEK 8 (3/13-3/17)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>SPRING BREAK</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>SPRING BREAK</p>
<p>WEEK 9 (3/23-3/27)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Latinos, Immigration and Crime</p> <p>(Read: <i>R18</i>. Immigration and Crime; <i>R19</i>. Bersani and Pittman, “Reassessing the Generational Disparity in Immigrant Offending...”)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Latinos, Immigration and Crime</p> <p>(Assessment #6)</p>

<p>WEEK 10 (3/30-4/3)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>American Indians, Crime and Punishment</p> <p>(Read: <i>R20</i>. Painter-Davis, “Structural Disadvantage and American Indian...; <i>R21</i>. Lantz and Ward, “Disproportionately Punished, Yet Still Neglected...”)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>EXAM 2</p>
<p>WEEK 11 (4/6-4/10)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Racial Violence & Intergroup Conflict</p> <p>(Read: <i>R22</i>. Lyons, “Community Disorganization and Racially Motivated Crime...”; <i>R23</i>. Ward, “Slow Violence...”)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>(Assessment #7)</p>
<p>WEEK 12 (4/13-4/17)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Explaining and Understanding Racial Inequality in the Criminal Legal System: Policing, Courts and Sentencing</p> <p>(Read: <i>R24</i>. Baluran “Differential Racialization and Police Interactions...”; <i>R25</i>. Rios, “Chapter on Hypercriminalization”)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Explaining and Understanding Racial Inequality in the Criminal Legal System</p> <p>(Assessment #8)</p>
<p>WEEK 13 (4/20-4/24)</p> <p>Monday</p> <p>Explaining and Understanding Racial Inequality in the Criminal Legal System: Courts and Sentencing</p> <p>(Read: <i>R26</i>. Johnson and King, “Facial profiling: race...”; <i>R27</i>. Redner-Vera and Wang, “Examining Cumulative Disadvantage against American Indian Defendants in Federal Courts...”)</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>In-Class Consultations for Writing Assignment</p> <p>(Assessment #9)</p>

WEEK 14 (4/27-5/1)**Monday**

Explaining and Understanding Ethnoracial Inequality in the Criminal Legal System: Mechanisms

(Read: *R28. Bridges and Steen, “Racial Disparities in Official Assessments”; R29. Hetey and Eberhardt, “The Numbers Don’t Speak for Themselves...”*)

Wednesday

Explaining and Understanding Ethnoracial Inequality in the Criminal Legal System: Mechanisms

(Assessment #10)

WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE**WEEK 15 (5/4-5/8)****Monday**

Alleviating Inequality in the Criminal Legal System via Interventions

(Read: *R30. Agan and Starr, “Ban the Box, Criminal Records..”; R31. National Academies, “Reform Efforts to Reduce Racial Inequality.”*)

Wednesday

Final thoughts on race, crime and justice

Last day

(Assessment #11)

Exam 3 (final)

Wednesday May 13th from 4 to 6 pm in our classroom