

## **GEOG24: Understanding California's Prison Boom: A Critical Geographical Perspective**

(1 credit)

Tuesday, 1:30-2:30pm

Professor Desiree Fields

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Student consultation hours: Tuesday, 3:30-4:30, 555 McCone Hall

### **GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION**

Our course will meet in 575 McCone Hall. We should anticipate that some class sessions will be moved online due to...pick a crisis. I will be in communication with you if/when circumstances require remote instruction and arrange Zoom sessions as necessary.

Due to the size, format, and expectations of this course, we will rely primarily on Google tools rather than bCourses.

### **COURSE OVERVIEW**

Why did California's prison population increase by more than 500% from 1980 to 2000? What prompted the state's "prison boom" that resulted in 23 new prisons being built over the same time period? What does globalization have to do with all this? How can grassroots opposition challenge mass incarceration? Is prison even necessary at all? In this seminar we will engage with these questions (and more) through reading Ruth Wilson Gilmore's book *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Gilmore is a critical geographer who draws on Marxist and abolitionist thought to study how carceral geographies are made--and how they can be unmade. Our seminar will focus on reading and discussing "Golden Gulag" to provide an opportunity to develop critical thinking and analytic skills, build knowledge about California's political economy and the place of prisons in it, and consider the ever-present question about mass incarceration: "what is to be done?". This seminar is best suited to students with interests in geography, urban studies, critical political economy, ethnic studies, prison and police abolition. Students should understand that this seminar will involve challenging reading and discussion of challenging ideas. Students should expect to contribute to building a community to learn, question, produce knowledge, and lend support to peers

**You are required to obtain the primary text, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. You may purchase or rent the book, but it is also accessible for free [online through the UCB library system](#).**

### **COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND STRUCTURE**

This is a seminar course, perhaps the first time many of you will have taken this type of course. Seminars are intimate, discussed-based settings to focus on a particular theme in depth. They are very different from a lecture-style course in which the instructor delivers content students are meant to absorb and reproduce. Seminars are not about arriving at correct answers, but about exploring the material at hand and coming to understand our own perspectives and positions on that material through exchanging ideas with others. Meeting this goal depends on seminar participants engaging the course materials; in this case that means doing the reading. Our seminar meetings will be boring for all of us (including me!) if only some of you do the reading.

Seminars are the most productive when we take risks and step outside our comfort zone: so for those of you who are used to speaking up first, try stepping back and listening; for you shy types, step up and say

something. Questions to clarify understanding, building on something someone else said, vocalizing tacit assumptions, and introducing an alternative view are all valid ways of participating in seminar discussions.

The seminar is structured as follows: you are responsible for reading one chapter of *Golden Gulag* every other week, starting in week 4. Weeks not dedicated to a fishbowl discussion will be reserved for reflection on the previous week's ideas. It is a good idea to get a head start on reading as some chapters are long!

In weeks of the seminar focused on a specific chapter (every other week starting on 9/14), teams of approximately 4 students will facilitate a fishbowl discussion. This involves: 1) reading the chapter closely, guided by questions I will provide to you the week before and 2) discussing the questions amongst each other in the Thursday class session for approximately 20 minutes while the rest of the class listens, observes, and takes notes; and 3) responding to feedback and questions from the rest of the class. Each student is expected to co-facilitate one fishbowl. *While fishbowl discussions are anchored by teams, the whole class will participate in and evaluate the discussions.*

[Sign up for a fishbowl team here.](#)

[Discussion questions for fishbowl weeks to be posted here.](#)

## **GRADING**

This course is graded on a pass/no pass basis. Passing the class depends on your meaningful participation throughout the semester and in our week of reflection (R/R/R week). Participation involves facilitating a fishbowl discussion once (with a team); completing fishbowl evaluation and/or reflection sheets for the other class meetings; and contributing to seminar discussions in the ways discussed under course expectations (previous section).

I will not take attendance and do not require you notify me that you will be absent. However, it will be challenging for me to pass anyone who submits fewer than 8 fishbowl evaluation and/or reflection sheets and/or fails to facilitate a fishbowl discussion.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Any test, paper, report or homework submitted under your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not been submitted for credit in another course. All words and ideas written by other people must be properly attributed: fully identified as to source and the extent of your use of their work. Cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct will result in a failing grade on the assignment, paper, quiz, or exam in question and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. See the policy here.

## **RESOURCES**

Being a student at Berkeley can be a highly rewarding experience, and there are different kinds of support to ensure this, whether through tutoring, advice on writing, support for the differently-abled, or services to help deal with pressures, stresses and personal difficulties that interrupt academic life. If you need help determining what kind of support you might need, email me, come to my student consultation hours, or speak to the Student Academic Advisor in Geography, Ambrosia Shapiro. We are here to help you learn and flourish in this environment, so if you are having difficulties, please feel free to reach out.

Some helpful resources include:

- [Disabled Students Program](#) provides a wide range of resources to ensure equal access to educational opportunities, including advising, diagnostics, note-taking services, and academic accommodations. Please bring any accommodation or scheduling requirements to the attention of the DSP office; once I have heard from them, I will do my best to accommodate you.
- [Student Learning Center](#) offers peer tutoring, writing support, and other academic resources.
- [Mental health services at University Health](#) offers short and long-term counseling services to assist students with a variety of concerns, including academic success, life management, career and life planning, and personal development.
- [Basic Needs Center](#) UCB office providing economic, [food](#), and housing support
- [CalFresh](#): state program providing money to buy groceries
- [Food Assistance Program](#): UCB support for students not eligible for CalFresh
- [PATH to Care Center](#) support for survivors and those who have experienced gendered violence, including sexual harassment, dating and intimate partner violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual exploitation.

## WEEKLY OUTLINE

### WEEK 1 (8/26): N/A

No class meeting in week 1, as instruction begins on Thursday and our class will meet on Tuesday.

### WEEK 2 (8/31) Introductions to each other

### WEEK 3 (9/7): Introduction to Ruth Wilson Gilmore

*This week we will acquaint ourselves with Ruth Wilson Gilmore (aka Ruthie) and her work.*

**Require reading:** [Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind.](#)

**Optional reading:** [Prisons and Class Warfare: An interview with Ruth Wilson Gilmore.](#)

### WEEK 4 (9/14): Introduction to Golden Gulag (Fishbowl)

*This week you are responsible for reading the prologue and Chapter 1 (Introduction) to Golden Gulag.*

### WEEK 5 (9/21): Reflection week

*This week we will reflect on themes, key ideas, concepts, and lingering questions from last week's fishbowl.*

### WEEK 6 (9/28): The California Political Economy (Fishbowl)

*This week you are responsible for Chapter 2 of Golden Gulag.*

### WEEK 7 (10/5): Reflection week

*This week we will reflect on themes, key ideas, concepts, and lingering questions from last week's fishbowl.*

### WEEK 8 (10/12): The Prison Fix

*This week you are responsible for Chapter 3 of Golden Gulag.*

### WEEK 9 (10/19): Reflection week

*This week we will reflect on themes, key ideas, concepts, and lingering questions from last week's fishbowl.*

**WEEK 10 (10/26): Crime, Croplands, and Capitalism**

*This week you are responsible for Chapter 4 of Golden Gulag.*

**WEEK 11 (11/2): Reflection week**

*This week we will reflect on themes, key ideas, concepts, and lingering questions from last week's fishbowl.*

**WEEK 12 (11/9): Mothers Reclaiming Our Children**

*This week you are responsible for Chapter 5 of Golden Gulag.*

**WEEK 13 (11/16): Reflection week**

*This week we will reflect on themes, key ideas, concepts, and lingering questions from last week's fishbowl.*

**WEEK OF GRATITUDE (no class meetings)**

**WEEK 14 (11/30): What is to be Done?**

*This week you are responsible for Chapter 6 and epilogue of Golden Gulag.*

**WEEK OF REFLECTION (12/7)**

*This week we will reflect on the course material and the seminar experience as a whole.*