

THE PHILADELPHIA CENTER
SOCIAL JUSTICE
IDS 366

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers students an opportunity to critically examine a range of topics which may be defined within the broad category of “social justice”. Using the protections afforded by the Bill of Rights as a framework for discussion, a number of controversial issues will be covered including: the rights of the criminally accused, the death penalty, prison conditions, discrimination on the basis of race and sexual orientation, the right to bear arms, the right to privacy, freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

Throughout this course we will examine the specific liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution. We will examine these rights in an effort to achieve an improved and more sophisticated appreciation of our society’s commitment to civil liberties. We will discuss the protections included in the Bill of Rights in the context of current social justice issues and controversies. We will become aware of the highly complex nature of current social issues and develop the ability to engage in critical analysis of those issues from a multitude of perspectives including legal, social, historical, moral and religious perspectives. Students will further their reasoning skills and the ability to present cogent, persuasive arguments in support of their opinions and beliefs both orally and in writing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Develop a deeper understanding of the rights contained within the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution
- Explore contemporary social justice issues confronting American society
- Examine the ways in which the liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights directly correlate with current social justice controversies
- Exhibit the ability to think critically about contemporary social issues in an effort to challenge previously unexamined beliefs
- Examine the ways in which status and power affect justice and equality
- Develop the ability to civilly and constructively engage in dialogue with peers who share differing opinions and beliefs
- Increase writing and speaking skills

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings

The Bill of Rights: A User's Guide, 4th Edition, Linda Monk
The New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander
Social Justice Coursepack

Class Participation

All students are expected to be present at each class session and all experiential activities. Students will be expected to participate in lecture and seminar discussions on a weekly basis through asking questions and offering opinions and analysis on topics being discussed. In order to fully participate in classroom discussions, students will be required to carefully complete all reading and writing assignments prior to class. In addition to the weekly reading assignments students are expected to regularly read at least one major daily newspaper such as The Philadelphia Inquirer, The New York Times, The Washington Post, or regularly visit a news website such as cnn.com.

Assignments

- Short Papers: students will be required to complete a total of four (4) short papers throughout the semester on various topics as delineated on the course schedule. Papers should generally be 2-3 pages in length.
- Final Paper: students will complete a final paper on a social justice topic of their choosing. This paper should be 7-10 pages in length and will offer student the opportunity to research and analyze a topic of interest to them and relevant to our coursework. Additional instructions will be provided during the semester.
- Presentation/Discussion leading: Each student will have the opportunity to choose a topic from the syllabus from which to prepare a presentation/lead our discussion for the class on which that topic will be discussed.

Grading

Class Participation: 25%

Short Papers: 40% (each individual paper worth 10%)
Final Paper: 25%
Presentation: 10%

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Introductory Class

We will discuss the course objectives and requirements, the assignments and the syllabus. We will consider issues to be covered over the course of the semester and determine if there are any areas of particular interest not covered by the syllabus but relevant to our discussion. Each student will choose a topic from the syllabus on which to prepare a presentation.

WEEK 2: Criminal Justice System in Philadelphia

Discussion of the criminal court system in Philadelphia including what happens to a person from the time of arrest through trial and post-trial proceedings. Discussion of the rights of the accused, protected by the 5th and 6th Amendments.

Assignment: Read the 5th and 6th Amendments in text and selections in coursepack (“The Confessions of Innocent Men”). By September 23: attend a criminal proceeding and write a **short paper** focusing on your sense of justice in relation to the case (paper due on September 21st).

WEEK 3: Issues in Law Enforcement

The role of law enforcement in the criminal justice system; search and seizure issues; the exclusionary rule.

Guest Speaker: Nick Liermann, Assistant District Attorney, Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office

Assignment: Read 4th Amendment in text.

WEEK 4: Juvenile Justice

Discussion of the Juvenile Justice system including the process of trying and sentencing juveniles in adult court.

Assignment: Read selections in coursepack (“The History of Juvenile Justice” up to and including “Miller v. Alabama”). Prepare a **short paper** discussing your opinion as to whether juveniles should be charged for crimes in adult court and the basis for your support or opposition.

WEEK 5: The Death Penalty

We will discuss the pros and cons of the death penalty, deterrence, disparate racial impact, appellate procedure, rights of victims and moral and ethical dilemmas associated with the death penalty.

Assignment: Read 8th Amendment in text and selections in coursepack (“Roper v. Simmons” up to and including “The Human Side of Death Penalty Defense”).

WEEK 6: Life in Prison, Re-entry and Recidivism

We will discuss the realities of life inside prison as well as the process of leaving prison and returning to the community. We will engage in a discussion with Tyrone Werts, released from prison after serving 36 years of a life sentence.

Guest Speaker: Tyrone Werts

WEEK 7: Incarceration

Prison conditions, overcrowding, fairness of pre-trial detention and parole issues.

NOTE: This week's class will be held at **1 o'clock in the afternoon** to allow us to tour the Philadelphia County Prison and view lineups in Philadelphia criminal cases. Be sure to make arrangements with your internship to leave early on that day.

Assignment: Read selections in coursepack ("The Caging of America").

WEEK 8: The War on Drugs and the New Jim Crow

Discussion regarding the ways in which race, poverty and the War on Drugs impact the administration of justice. We will discuss the theories presented in Michelle Alexander's book, The New Jim Crow, as well as the collateral consequences of felony convictions.

Assignment: Read The New Jim Crow and selections in coursepack ("High Court" and "Jury Nullification"). Prepare a short paper (2-3 pages) detailing your reaction to Alexander's book.

WEEK 9: Justice and Public Policy

Affirmative Action and Voting Rights.

Assignment: Read 9th Amendment and 14th Amendments in text and selections in coursepack (selections on Affirmative Action and Voting Rights).

WEEK 10: The Right to Bear Arms and Gun Control

We will discuss issues relating to the historical and contemporary debates on the right to bear arms as well as gun control legislation.

Assignment: 2nd Amendments in text and selections in coursepack ("Battleground America").

WEEK 11: The Right to Privacy

Abortion rights and reproductive freedom;
The Right to Die

Assignment: Review the 9th and 14th Amendments in text and read selections in coursepack (“Lucky Girl” up to and including “Death in the Family”). View the documentary film “How to Die in Oregon” during the week prior to class.

WEEK 12: Freedom of Expression

We will discuss issues relating to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press.

Assignment: Read 1st Amendment (pages 61-90) in text and selections in coursepack (“Justices Rule for Protesters” up to and including “On the Next Docket”). Prepare a short paper (2-3 pages) on whether you believe “hate speech” should be protected under the first amendment.

WEEK 13: Freedom of Religion

Free exercise of religion and religion in public schools.

Assignment: Read 1st Amendment (pages 41-61) in text and remaining selections in coursepack (“Early Warning” and “Supreme Court Rejects Contraceptives”).

WEEK 14: Student Paper Presentation and Final Paper Due