

POLI 203: Race, Innocence, and the Decline of the Death Penalty

SECTION 601

SPRING 2020

Teaching Assistant: Isaac Mehlhaff

Time and Location: Wednesday 12:20-1:10 PM; 517 Hamilton Hall

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Office Hours: Monday 9:00-10:00 AM, Wednesday 3:30-5:30 PM, or by appointment;
301 Hamilton Hall

Overview and Objectives

Welcome to our recitation section for POLI 203: Race, Innocence, and the Decline of the Death Penalty. As we will quickly learn, the rapidly changing nature of and public opinion toward capital punishment in the United States makes this an exciting and important time to study this unique institution. In this course, we will critically analyze the history of the death penalty, how it is prescribed, and how it affects modern American jurisprudence. To that end, this section will:

- complement course lectures
- engage participants in active learning, dialogue, and discussion
- clarify and elaborate on material from lectures and readings
- draw connections between different concepts and ideas
- address questions about course material

How to Be Successful in Recitation

Attendance (33% of section grade)

Recitation sections are dedicated time for us to speak with and learn from each other. In order for this to happen, we must be present and arrive on time to our section meeting. If necessary, you may miss one section meeting with no impact to your attendance grade. If you need to miss additional meetings due to documented circumstances beyond your control (such as an illness, family emergency, or religious observance), please speak with me **in advance** and we will work together to find a solution.

Participation (33% of section grade)

Simply being present in section is helpful, but little to no learning can happen without active participation. This participation can take many forms, including but not limited to: speaking and listening to others during class discussion, raising questions for classmates to consider, engaging in small-group dialogue when appropriate, or completing brief in-class writing assignments. Aim for both quality and quantity in your participation; show us how you are thinking critically about readings and course material so we can learn from your perspective.

Discussion Questions (33% of section grade)

To facilitate our discussion, check for comprehension, and ensure that as many perspectives can be heard as possible, each student will make one post per week to our Sakai Forum. These posts should be completed *before Monday lecture*. Ideally, these posts would include an analytical discussion question for us to talk about in recitation, but I also welcome your own reactions to the reading or questions regarding material you do not fully understand or would like clarification on.

Communication

Communication with Me

I am always happy to meet with you during my scheduled office hours or outside those hours if they do not work with your schedule. If I need to change my office hours for any reason, I will give you sufficient notice and offer additional hours to make up for that lost time. I am also easy to reach via email; I try to tend to emails as quickly as possible, but please allow up to 24 hours for a response. I am here to facilitate your learning but, at the end of the day, you are the only one who can be responsible for your education. Be proactive and let me know how I can assist you.

Communication with Other Students

Learning is a collaborative endeavor, and we all bring unique backgrounds and experiences to the course material. Given the subject matter of the course, it is inevitable that we will discuss ideas on which we do not all agree. These diverse perspectives enrich our discussions and provide valuable insight, so please share them if you feel comfortable. While I will never ask anyone to share any opinions they do not want to, I do expect us to engage with other students' ideas in a respectful manner; treat your classmates how you want to be treated. On a similar note, your classmates are a valuable resource. While you should always produce your own work, I encourage you to form study groups and otherwise learn from each other by engaging the material outside class.

Electronics

The purpose of our recitation sections is to engage deeply with the material and with each other's interpretations of the material, both of which require active listening and thoughtful response. Electronic devices (laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc.) will therefore not be needed. To avoid distracting yourself or your classmates, please keep these devices turned off and/or put away. If there are times when we need technology, I will alert you ahead of time.

Academic Honesty

I expect all work you do in this course to be your own. The UNC Honor Code applies to all coursework, and your name on each of the assignments confirms your respect of Honor Code rules. Your full observance of the Honor Code is required; ignorance is not a valid excuse. If you are unfamiliar with the Honor Code, please see <http://honor.unc.edu>. As a general rule of thumb, if you have to ask yourself whether or not you should cite something, that is typically an indication that it should indeed be cited. **Please see me** if you have any questions regarding this policy. It is **always** better to ask permission than forgiveness.

Student Accessibility

If you have a documented disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Accessibility Resources & Service. For more information, call (919) 962-8300, email accessibility@unc.edu or visit <https://ars.unc.edu>. Please speak with me as soon as possible if you require any accommodations to be successful in this course. If you do not have a documented disability, other useful services, including the Writing Center and the Learning Center, are available to all students. Visit <http://learningcenter.unc.edu> and <https://writingcenter.unc.edu> to learn more.

Finally, I care deeply about the mental health of my students and colleagues. While education should be an enriching experience, I recognize that it often causes distress and that this distress may unexpectedly strike even the most well-composed among us. While I am neither trained nor equipped to guide you through your personal struggles should they arise, I encourage you to alert me if circumstances out of your control hinder your ability to be successful in this course. I will make any necessary arrangements within the confines of Department and University policy. Call (919) 966-3658, email caps@unc.edu, or visit <https://caps.unc.edu> for more information and to seek professional assistance.

Course Readings

Our section has three required textbooks:

- Frank R. Baumgartner, Marty Davidson, Kaneesha R. Johnson, Arvind Krishnamurthy, and Colin P. Wilson. *Deadly Justice: A Statistical Portrait of the Death Penalty*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Benjamin Rachlin. *Ghost of the Innocent Man: A True Story of Trial and Redemption*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2017.

- James S. Liebman, Shawn Crowley, Andrew Markquart, Lauren Rosenberg, Lauren White, Daniel Zharkovsky. *The Wrong Carlos: Anatomy of a Wrongful Execution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

See the [course website](#) for the schedule of assigned readings, additional readings (on select weeks), and paper due dates. Note that our recitation book, *The Wrong Carlos*, will not appear on the lecture syllabus. The reading schedule below is meant as a suggested guide to ensure you will finish the book in time to write a well-reasoned paper, make substantial contributions to the class presentation, and be able to comment on the book in recitation. Strict adherence to this reading schedule is **not required**.

Chapters	Date to be Completed
Preface, Prologue, Chapters 1-5	Week 4 (January 27)
Chapters 6-9	Week 5 (February 3)
Chapters 10-12	Week 6 (February 10)
Chapters 13-14	Week 7 (February 17)
Chapters 15-16	Week 8 (February 24)
Chapter 17, Epilogue	Week 9 (March 2)