PSYC GU4612: Frontiers of Justice  
4 Credits - Spring 2023  
Class Location: 200B Schermerhorn

Instructor:  
Prof. Ayanna Sorett, Esq., ams2578@columbia.edu  
Office Hours: 6-7pm Thursday 758 Schermerhorn Extension or by appointment

Teaching Assistant (TA):  
Erika Carreon, Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, erika.carreon@columbia.edu

Prerequisites: An introductory course in psychology, sociology, African American studies, Human rights, or political science is recommended but not required. Permission of instructor required.

Course Description: Frontiers of Justice is designed to encourage students and equip them with the skills to become active and effective “Change Agents” within their academic institutions and larger communities. Focusing on the challenges facing NYC residents, this course aims to raise political and social awareness and engagement and strengthen ties between Columbia University, disadvantaged communities, and New York City government agencies and community organizations. Through sharing ideas about how to make structural and systemic change in ways that integrate science, law, politics, history, narrative and community engagement, the course is intended to support students in working to break down racial and ethnic barriers and toward a more fair and just society.

The collaborative learning environment of this course will empower a diverse group of students to share ideas and experiences, while introducing their voices into city-wide conversations that address poverty, trauma, racial inequality, the environment, and other community challenges. In this courageous space, students and community leaders will be encouraged to discuss community conflicts openly and honestly, working collaboratively to develop effective solutions.

The emphasis throughout the course will be on what kinds of empirical questions can be asked about poverty, trauma, racial inequality, and other challenges to a just society in relation to New York City-- and how experimental, observational, and historical research as well as narrative approaches can be designed to address these questions. Together, we will explore what kinds of data can be collected and how they can be analyzed and how scientific research can inform policy changes and bring about meaningful societal change.

Frontiers of Justice is structured around three forms of change:

1. **Personal change**: Through course materials and in-class discussions, students will reflect on their identities, their relation to privilege, and their access to resources. As a capstone to this section, students will write a 3-5-page paper describing how they have used what they’ve learned to identify an aspect of themselves they would like to improve and describing the specific work and steps they undertook to achieve this personal change.

2. **Community change**: This module will introduce students to critical advocacy and intervention methods that can be used to effect structural and system change to
transform disadvantaged neighborhoods in NYC and beyond. This module will culminate in a 3-5-page data-informed paper in which students will describe the work they have done personally to support specific community change in NYC and beyond. Where possible students will be connected with community organizations and government agencies to gain insights into how communities develop their own solutions.

3. **Social change**: Throughout the semester, students will work in small groups and consult with lawyers and policymakers and other guest speakers with relevant expertise to develop policy proposals to improve adverse social conditions, particularly those affecting the lives of vulnerable youth. This work will culminate in an 8-page legislative or policy proposal from the group plus a 2-page personal reflection.

**Learning Objectives:** Through this course, we will learn to:

- Reflect on our own identities and privilege and use this critical reflection to achieve positive personal change.
- Describe research, advocacy, and intervention methods used to effect structural and systemic change, particularly as it relates to disadvantaged communities in New York City and engage in community change.
- Apply critical thinking skills to evaluate individual research findings, paying particular attention to the merits and limitations of different research methodologies and approaches.
- Analyze and synthesize research findings, legal precedent, history and the expertise and experiences of change agents in communities to design a policy proposal to address poverty, trauma, racial inequality or other community challenges.

**Course Expectations and Grading:**

1. **Class preparation and participation:** The assigned readings, which will be selected from the list below, are designed to expand your knowledge of the field and to hone your critical thinking skills. Strong preparation and participation will enable us to have high-level, thought-provoking discussion. We rely on each other to actively and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions. To ensure that everyone is accountable for thoroughly engaging with the material during class discussions, your active participation in these discussions will contribute to your final grade. For some people participating regularly in class discussions can be difficult. Those students who might be concerned about their ability to contribute to class discussions should see me. Generally speaking, effective class preparation and participation could include:

   - Asking insightful or clarifying questions.
   - Connecting each week's reading to other reading we’ve done in the course or reading you’ve done on your own or in other classes, with your engagement in the community and current affairs, and by drawing parallels and/or contrasts among findings.
   - Actively listening to fellow classmates and responding to their ideas.
   - Offering thoughtful critiques of the research methodology and providing suggestions for how it might be improved.
• Bringing in outside sources—potentially from the news media, your own experience, or other sources—that shed light on these questions.
• Be mindful to keep your contributions brief so that everyone gets a chance to contribute.

2. Weekly response paper: To help prepare for discussions, you will be asked to turn in a weekly 300 minimum word response paper that engages with the assignments for that week, e.g., offering personal reflection, comparing and contrasting viewpoints, synthesizing evidence presented in the readings and other multimedia assignments. Discussion posts will be due on Fridays at 11:59pm. I expect you to keep up with current affairs, especially, with what is going on in the NYC and broader community. There will be a number of exercises related to the weekly readings and preparation for discussions.

3. Personal change paper: A 3-5-page paper using what you’ve learned to identify an aspect of yourself you would like to improve and describing the specific work and steps you will need to undertake to achieve this personal change. More details to be provided in class. DUE DATES: 1-page proposal Jan. 30; 3-5 page WRITE UP AND CLASS DISCUSSION Mar. 27.

4. Community change paper: A 3-5-page paper in which you create a plan for the work you can do personally to support specific community change in NYC. More details to be provided in class. DUE DATES: 1-page proposal Feb. 6; 3-5 page WRITE UP AND CLASS DISCUSSION Apr. 17.

5. Social change policy proposal: An 8-page legislative or policy proposal co-authored with your group, drawing on course materials, outside research, your areas of expertise, and completed in consultation with policy makers, lawyers, and other experts in the field. More details to be provided in class. DUE DATES: Initial discussion Jan. 23; Begin working in groups on social change project Mar. 6. PRESENTATIONS: May 1. FINAL PAPER: May 11 at 11:59pm.

% of Final grade
Class participation & preparation (including weekly responses) 25%
Personal change paper 20%
Community change paper 20%
Social policy proposal 35%

Course materials: Readings will comprise empirical papers, review papers, and articles from popular media sources. In addition to course readings, there will be assigned videos and/or podcasts. Pdfs of readings and links to podcasts/videos will be posted on Courseworks (Canvas).

Schedule: The schedule below details themes and key topics, along with assignments for each week. Required readings/assignments will be selected from these lists; other readings/assignments will be posted as supplemental but not required. This list remains subject to revision and guest speakers’ availability.
**WEEK 1 - Jan. 23: Course Overview and Introductions**

**Required**
- Course Syllabus and Assignment Descriptions
- Examples of Personal, Community, and Policy examples provided by Frontiers of Justice graduates
- Bronfenbrenner Exercise, due **Fri. Jan. 27 at 11:59pm**

**WEEK 2 - Jan. 30: What defines who we are, and what does justice look like to us? Is change possible?**

**Required**
- TED Talk: “What prosecutors and incarcerated people can learn from each other.” [https://www.ted.com/talks/jarrell_daniels_what_prosecutors_and_incarcerated_peop e_can_learn_from_each_other?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/jarrell_daniels_what_prosecutors_and_incarcerated_people_can_learn_from_each_other?language=en)
- Pamela Morris. Op-Ed: NYT March 25 2021. I don’t want another family to lose a child the way we did.
- TED TALK: Jermaine Archer “A Matter of Time.” Link to video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJeUqsFmBt0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJeUqsFmBt0)

**Supplemental**
- TED Talk: “Why your worst deeds don’t define you.” [https://www.ted.com/talks/shaka_senghor_why_your_worst_deeds_don_t_define_you](https://www.ted.com/talks/shaka_senghor_why_your_worst_deeds_don_t_define_you)

**Guest Speaker: Jarrell Daniels, Program Manager, Justice Ambassadors Youth Counsel, Center for Justice at Columbia University**

**Personal Change 1-page proposal due**

**WEEK 3 - Feb. 6: Privileged versus oppressed identities**

**Required**


Guest Speaker: Dr. Valerie Purdie-Greenaway, Dept. of Psychology, Columbia University

Community Change 1-page proposal due

WEEK 4 - Feb. 13: Why history matters: The legacies of slavery?

Required:

- Muhammad, K. G. (2010). Writing crime into race: Racial criminalization and the dawn of Jim Crow (pp. 35-88). In From the war on poverty to the war on crime: The making of mass incarceration in America. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.
- We Are Not Done With Abolition: The framers of the 13th Amendment did not intend to establish an empire of prison labor. By Eric Foner Dec. 15, 2020 NYT Op-ED
- “The gaps between White and Black America, in charts.” Link to article here: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/19/opinion/politics/opportunity -gaps-race-inequality.html

Supplemental:

- “What is privilege?” Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD5f8GuNuGQ
• “Latino civil rights timeline, 1903 to 2006.” Link to article: https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/latino-civil-rights-timeline-1903-to-2006
• “Native American history timeline.” Link to article: https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/native-american-timeline
• “Psychology still skew Western and affluent. Can it be fixed?” Link to article: https://undark.org/2020/01/20/psychology-bias-western/

Guest Speaker: Dr. Josef Sorett, Dean of Columbia College, Professor of Religion, and African American and African Diaspora Studies

WEEK 5 - Feb. 20: Personal change

Required
• NYT OPINION By Stefan R. Underhill, Jan. 23, 2016. Did the man I sentenced to 18 years deserve it?

Guest Speaker: Dr. Angela Simms, Dept. of Sociology, Barnard College

WEEK 6 - Feb. 27: Mass incarceration and mass criminalization: Is change necessary and possible?

Required
● “We need to talk about injustice.” Link to video here: https://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice?language=en
● Spirit of Justice: Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander in Conversation: https://utsny.edu/spirit-justice-michelle-alexander-angela-davis/

**Supplemental**
● “13th” documentary on Netflix. See documentary here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8
● “National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction.” Link to database here: https://niccc.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org

**Guest Panel: Defense Attorney Xavier Donaldson, and Assistant District Attorney Shanda Strain**

**WEEK 7 - Mar. 6: Pipelines to and from prison; alternative forms of accountability**

**Required**
● TED TALK: “How we’re priming some kids for college and others for prison.” https://www.ted.com/talks/alice_goffman_how_we_re_priming_some_kids_for_college_and_others_for_prison?language=en

**Supplemental**
● TED TALK: “Why black girls are targeted for punishment at school -- and how to change that.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7F9XCdeOtw

**Guest Speaker:**

**Social Policy group proposal due**
WEEK 8 – Mar. 13: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

WEEK 9 - Mar. 20: Social movements for change

Required
● Sections from Alicia Garza, The purpose of power: We come together when we fall apart.
● “Systemic inequality: Displacement, exclusion, and segregation.”
● “Civil death: How millions of Americans lost the right to vote.”

Supplemental
Please visit www.blacklivesmatter.com; explore each of the tabs and get a feel for BLM’s history and current resources

Guest Speaker: K. Bain, Founder and Executive Director, Community Capacity Development

WEEK 10 - Mar. 27: What does justice look like? Informed policy development

Required
● TED TALK: Xiye Bastida “If you adults won't save the world, we will” Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWkIgCnUWvY

Supplemental

“The C.H.O.I.C.E.S. Connection.” Link to video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDPN50xiEEE


Guest Speaker: Keshia Sutton-James, Deputy Manhattan Borough President

Personal Change Paper Due

WEEK 11 - Apr. 3: Medical apartheid/ Health Justice

Required


“Black America has reason to question authorities“ Link to New Yorker article: https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/black-america-has-reason-to-question-authorities

Supplemental


“How we fail Black patients in pain.” Link to article here: https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/how-we-fail-black-patients-pain


● “The dark history of medical experimentation on Black Americans from colonial times to the present.” Link to NPR post-cast here: https://www.npr.org/transcripts/9105953


**Guest Speaker: Dr. Nicole Thomas-Sealey, Vice President of Clinical Care, Advantage Care**

**WEEK 12 - Apr. 10: Environmental vulnerability and community outcomes**

**Required**


**Supplemental**


---

**Guest Lecturer: Dr. Rainer Romero Canyas, Environmental Defense Fund**

**WEEK 13 - Apr. 17: Social Policy Proposal Prep**

**Community Change Paper Due**

**WEEK 14 - Apr. 24: Social Policy Proposal Prep**

**WEEK 15 - May 1: GROUP PRESENTATION OF POLICY PROPOSALS**

**Course Policies:**

**Fostering an Inclusive Classroom:** Our aim is to foster a learning environment that supports a diversity of perspectives and experiences and honors your identities. Please reach out to us with any concerns or suggestions you may have to better address your learning needs and to improve the effectiveness of this course. We look forward to working together to create a classroom community built on mutual respect and inclusivity.

Students who may require classroom/test accommodations should make an appointment with me before or during the first week of class. You should also contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Lerner Hall before the start of the course to register for these accommodations. The procedures for registering with ODS can be found at https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services or by calling (212) 854-2388.
**Promoting Wellness:** Many of us have periods in which our mental health and well-being suffer. Please take care of yourselves – and of each other. Please prioritize your mental health and wellbeing and know that there are many resources available to you both within our classroom community and throughout the university:
https://health.columbia.edu/content/counseling-and-psychological-services
http://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/nightline/
https://universitylife.columbia.edu/student-resources-directory#health
We are in this together. Please reach out for help if you need it, and, if you see others who are struggling, please make sure they know how to find the support they need.

**Ensuring Academic Integrity:** As members of this academic community, we are responsible for maintaining the highest level of personal and academic integrity, which includes presenting only our own work on assignments and exams. You can find detailed definitions and examples in Columbia University’s Academic Integrity site (https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/integrity). Any questions of academic integrity will be automatically referred to Columbia’s office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. The semester progresses very quickly, and there is a lot of material to learn. If you find yourself in a situation – e.g., starting an assignment too late – in which it seems like the best option may be to violate your academic integrity, please see me. Together, we can work out a solution. Plagiarism—whether intentional or inadvertent—is a serious violation of academic integrity. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism and/or how to properly cite sources, please come to me. I am more than happy to help.

*Syllabus is subject to change: Revisions will be posted on Courseworks*