

Race, Innocence, and the End of the Death Penalty
POLI 203 Section 608
Thursday 3:30 – 4:20
Graham Memorial Rm 0038

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Office Hours	Wednesday 2:30 – 4:00 and Friday 10:10 – 11:40
Office Hours Sign-up	https://calendly.com/crcase/office-hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class is about a surprising political development that is happening right around us: The death penalty seems to be disappearing. A large majority of Americans has traditionally supported the death penalty in the abstract. But across the country since the mid-1990s, the numbers of death sentences and executions have been declining. Admissions to death row have also slowed to a trickle, compared to previous decades. North Carolina has sentenced no more than 3 individuals to death in any single year since 2010, and has not carried out an execution since 2006. The 2009 Racial Justice Act allowed condemned individuals to present statistical evidence that racial bias may have affected their sentencing. In a 2015 US Supreme Court decision, Justice Stephen Breyer called for a “full briefing” on the constitutionality of the death penalty nationwide. President Trump jump-started federal executions and added several pro-death penalty justices, so Justice Breyer’s call for a briefing might not lead to the result he would prefer. On the other hand, President Biden has vowed to end the federal death penalty, and states have continued to move away from the punishment, imposing very few sentences and carrying out even fewer executions. Several states have recently abolished the death penalty, including long-time users Virginia and Illinois. These are the trends we’ll explore this semester.

EXPECTATIONS

The purpose of the recitation is to complement course lectures through active learning, dialogue, and discussion. The goal is to improve your understanding by clarifying and elaborating on material presented in the lectures and readings. The beginning of each class will typically be devoted to questions about material covered in the week’s lectures. The majority of the recitation will be class discussion of assigned readings and/or an activity that allows students to explore the main lecture concepts in new ways, and draw connections between previously presented ideas.

You are responsible for reading the assigned readings before class, completing any short assignments, and being prepared to discuss the readings. It is highly encouraged to come to recitation with specific questions or things you found important from the readings. In addition, a large component of this class is the evening speaker series. We will also spend some time debriefing and discussing the speaker series on weeks where the events takes place.

We will frequently engage in group discussions about course content that you and your classmates may have strong opinions about. Our aim in this course and recitation section is not to discuss the merits of our beliefs. Rather, we will focus on discussing how theories, concepts, and empirical evidence apply from an analytical perspective. I encourage you to engage with viewpoints that differ from your own. I require that you do so in a respectful and productive way. An open environment will allow us to approach the ideas presented in the course as analytical, critical thinkers so that we can form, challenge, and develop theories and evidence about the issues we discuss.

Technology Policy

In recitation, our aim is to engage deeply with the subject matter as well as with each other. This means that we must actively listen to each other and formulate thoughtful responses. As a result, electronic devices (e.g. laptops, tablets, and cell phones) will not be needed, so you should keep them muted or turned off to avoid distracting yourself or your classmates. To come prepared for class, you may either bring a printed copy of the readings, notes on the readings, or both. With that being said, there may be occasional times that we will want to use available electronic devices to reference online resources during in-class activities, but I will let you know when it is appropriate to do so.

Mask Policy

As noted in the University's updated community standards, face masks are still required in all campus buildings. All students, therefore, are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community — your classmates and me — as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, I will ask you to leave and I will submit a report to the Office of Student Conduct. Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception. For additional information on the University's mask policy, see carolinatogether.unc.edu.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

As listed in the lecture syllabus, 10% of your overall grade will come from recitation. You are expected to arrive on time to recitation. You will be given a five-minute grace period for lateness. Otherwise, you will be considered absent. If you must miss class for an excused reason (an official university activity, a religious holiday, a verifiable illness, etc.), please contact me in advance of your absence.

You are required to follow the University's community standards as it relates to monitoring your own symptoms. Per the community standards, "Each time prior to coming to cam-

pus, all members of the Carolina community should self-assess whether you are experiencing any symptoms using the COVID-19 symptom list (<https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/symptom-monitoring/>) on the Carolina Together website. If you have any of these symptoms, you should stay home. You should not enter any campus building, attend any class or report to work.” If you exhibit any of the symptoms on the Covid-19 symptom list, please contact Campus Health immediately. Experiencing symptoms of Covid-19 will count as an excused absence so long as you provide documentation of contact with Campus Health.

We have 12 scheduled meetings this semester, and your attendance grade is based on the assumption that you have attended 10 out of 12. To encourage you to take care of yourself – and those of us who will be sharing a classroom with you – I will allow you to miss up to two classes without question (hence your grade being based on attending 10 out of 12 recitations). If you miss more than two classes without an a documented excuse, however, each recorded unexcused absence will lead to about a letter 10 percentage point deduction in your attendance and participation grade.

The remaining portion of your recitation grade will come from participation in section. Beyond showing up, active participation in recitation is vital for success – both for the class as a whole and for your development as a student. Class participation can take many different forms such as speaking and listening to others during small and large group discussions, raising questions for classmates to consider, or completing occasional brief assignments either before or during class. I will communicate well in advance about these assignments. They will primarily serve the purpose of fostering discussion related to the week’s readings. I expect both quality and quantity with respect to class participation – your participation should illustrate that you are thinking critically about topics we cover and the assigned readings. I also reserve the right to give short, unannounced quizzes or writing exercises that will be factored into your participation grade should the collective participation of the section be faltering.

COMMUNICATION

I am very happy to meet with students outside of class time. Whether it be to discuss concerns about the course, questions about the material, or simply to engage further with the topic, please feel free to come to office hours. I will be holding office hours jointly in-person and over Zoom so that you can attend whichever way you prefer. Please be advised, just as with attending class in person, you must wear a mask when attending office hours in person. I am asking that you sign up for a 15 minute time slot here: <https://calendly.com/crcase/office-hours>. You are always more than welcome to show up to my office hours in person without a meeting, although students with an appointment (either Zoom or in person) will take priority. If you would like to attend office hours using Zoom, you must sign up for an appointment – I cannot guarantee I will see your email during my office hours.

If you are unable to meet during my office hours, which are listed at the top of this syllabus, please email me to set up a time to talk. Office hours are an important resource that should be utilized to improve understanding of materials or ask more personalized questions. Office

hours before an exam will be held at regular times and, unless noted by me, no additional office hours will be held – so plan accordingly. Prior to writing assignment due dates, I will be available during office hours to read over paper outlines or talk through ideas and provide feedback. Please do not bring completed papers and, be advised, office hours before paper deadlines may be busy.

Outside of office hours, e-mail is the easiest way to contact me. Please include “Poli 203” in the subject line of the e-mail. I will typically respond to email within 48 hours. If you have extensive questions that require a longer conversation, please come to my office hours. I will frequently send emails through Sakai relating to the course material, upcoming assignments or activities, and general reminders. I expect that you are checking your UNC email regularly to stay on top of these updates.

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

UNC facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability, or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs, and activities. Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. For more information visit <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Visit their website <https://caps.unc.edu/> or their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

TITLE IX RESOURCES

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty — including cheating, plagiarism, or any instance of taking credit for work that is not your own — will not be tolerated in this course. Any cases of academic dishonesty will be prosecuted to the fullest extent allowable under UNC guidelines, which can be found here: honor.unc.edu.

REQUIRED READINGS

Jan 13	Syllabus Day <ul style="list-style-type: none">• N/A
Jan 20	Introduction, <i>Gregg v. Georgia</i> , and the Modern Day Death Penalty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i> Ch 1 and 2
Jan 27	Who Commits Homicide? Who is victimized? Who gets executed? For which crimes? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 3 and 4• Discuss Chris Turner Speech
Feb 3	Which Crimes? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 5 and 6
Feb 10	Sentences, Appeals, and Time to Execution <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 7 and 8• Discuss Jerome Morgan Speech
Feb 17	More on Torture <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 9 and 10
Feb 24	Stays, Delays, and Mental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 11 and 12
Mar 3	Public Opinion and Cost <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 13 and 14• Discuss Kristine Bunch Speech
Mar 10	Deterrence, Evolving Standards and Declining Use <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 15 and 16• Discuss Kristine Bunch Speech
Mar 17	No recitation – Spring Break <ul style="list-style-type: none">• N/A
Mar 24	Does the Death Penalty Meet the Goals of <i>Gregg</i> or Fail Test of <i>Furman</i> ? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deadly Justice</i>, Ch 17• Discuss Gary Griffin and Ken Rose Speech

Mar 31	Current Legal Arguments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA • Discuss Dontae Sharpe, Ronnie Long, and attorneys Theresa Newman and Jamie Lau Speech
Apr 7	No recitation – MPSA Conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Apr 15	No recitation – Wellness Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Apr 22	The Racial Justice Act and the future of the death penalty in North Carolina <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA