

ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE?
Mindich Program Engaged Scholarship Course
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With 1.8 million Americans currently locked behind bars, the United States imprisons its citizens at a higher rate than any other country in the world. But calls to reimagine our country's carceral system are on the rise. Black Lives Matter and other movements are asking urgent questions: why are Black Americans imprisoned five times more than white ones? Should there be for-profit prisons? What crimes merit confinement? What is the purpose of prisons? And do we even need them? In this course, we will grapple with these questions by examining a variety of scholarly perspectives on the United States prison system. We will begin by analyzing the arguments for prison abolition versus reform in [Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* \(2003\)](#). To situate ourselves within a broad debate over the history of mass incarceration in the United States, we will then compare recent scholarship on the subject by [Michelle Alexander](#), [James Forman Jr.](#), and [Elizabeth Hinton](#). We will also read first-hand accounts of prisons in [Reginald Dwayne Betts's memoir and poetry](#). Over the course of the semester, we will receive visits from prison abolitionists, civil rights attorneys, and formerly incarcerated people, who will help us understand the movement to end mass incarceration in the United States.