

Eric N. Seligman

New Building 9.63.31
524 West 59th Street
New York, NY 10019

(914)815-3837
eseligman@jjay.cuny.edu
www.jjay.cuny.edu/faculty/eric-seligman

EDUCATION

- 2022 M.A., Economics, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York
Thesis: From Labor-discipline to Labor-segmentation: U.S. Mass Incarceration as an Evolving Labor Market Institution
- 2016 Ed.M., Human Development and Psychology, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Concentration: College in Prison; Pedagogy
- 2011 B.Mus., Music and English, Northwestern University

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

- 2021- Adjunct Lecturer, City University of New York
[Economics](#), John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Labor Studies, School of Labor & Urban Studies
- 2022- Research Assistant, Economics, John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- 2022- Research Assistant, Sociology, Harvard University

COURSES

- John Jay | ECO 170 | Crime, Class, and Capitalism: the Economics of Justice ([syllabus](#))
Fall 2021 (3 sections), Spring 2022 (1 section), Fall 2022 (1 section at Otisville Correctional Facility, Prison-to-College Pipeline)
- John Jay | ECO 101 | Introduction to Economics and Global Capitalism
Spring 2022 (1 section)
- School of Labor & Urban Studies | LABR 669 | Labor & Incarceration
Spring 2022 (1 section), Spring 2023 (1 section, upcoming)
Course description: This graduate elective examines the political economy of modern mass incarceration in the U.S. with an emphasis on its labor dynamics. After an initial investigation into the economic origins of mass incarceration, the course will focus on a series of special topics including prison labor, post-release employment, and prison towns, with steady attention to the broader set of relationships between mass incarceration and the class structure of neoliberal capitalism. We will assess theories of mass incarceration as a prison-industrial complex, a neo-slavery, a punitive poverty-management alternative to welfare, a public jobs program for deindustrialized rural economies, and as a reordering of urban space for profitmaking. We will consider implications for anti-carceral and labor movements. The course's approach centers empirical analysis that is primarily guided by the theoretical foundations of Marxian criminology.

RESEARCH

- Working paper: "Prison Labor and Idleness in U.S. State Prisons, 1974-2016" with [Geert Dhondt](#), John Jay College
Abstract: Much has been made of the legality of forced prison labor in assessments of mass incarceration, but the amount and type of work done by prisoners since prison populations began to skyrocket in the 1970s is incompletely established. In this paper, we use the Bureau of Justice Statistics's Survey of Prison Inmates from 1974 to 2016 to track these facts of prison labor in the U.S. throughout the prison boom and into the modern era. We find that levels of idleness in prisons vis-à-vis labor

steadily grew such that at the time of the 2004 survey, the majority of prisoners did not work or were working up to ten hours per week, and by the 2016 survey, nearly 40% of prisoners did not work and a regression-estimated additional 25% were working up to ten hours per week. As for type of work, incarcerated workers primarily perform the nonmarket domestic chores required to reproduce prisons and prisoners rather than the production of goods and services for state correctional industries or private enterprise, the former consistently comprising about three times as many work assignments as the latter throughout the period in study. These findings suggest a modern incarceration that is characterized more by idleness than by compulsory labor. Additionally, they indicate a marked absence of private corporations among the determinants of the contours of modern prison labor, which is less a program of captive labor exploitation than that of a carceral workfare, or, work obligations to the state in exchange for the carceral welfare of prison room and board. ([Video of 25-minute presentation plus discussion](#))

Forthcoming: “Social-Penal Divergence in the U.S. and Western Europe, 1890-1940” for Harvard Sociology

As a Research Assistant for this department, I am authoring a paper with original data analysis that compares penal and social spending in the U.S. and Western European countries from 1890-1940. This will offer additional insight into the process of divergence in state approaches to poverty and unemployment, and therefore the roots of modern American carceral exceptionalism, by examining the period between the closure of the U.S. frontier and World War II. This work makes use of an original data set hosted by the department. I have also offered data analysis in R to related work on comparative racial disparities in incarceration.

Forthcoming: “How Mass Incarceration Blocks Progress Towards Economic Justice” for [Prison Policy Initiative](#)

This freelanced article, to be published on their website in the coming months, synthesizes some of the sociological literature that treats mass incarceration as a labor market institution. It makes the case that it is in the economic justice advocate’s interest to challenge mass incarceration, as it directly impedes their work.

Citation in [“Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers” \(2022\)](#) by the American Civil Liberties Union

The ACLU cites my independent data analysis on the share of corrections budgets spent on prison labor wages. [Citation 142](#).

In planning: a paper with Hannah Archambault, California State University-Fresno, examining work refusal and labor discipline in U.S. state prisons using the Bureau of Justice Statistics’s Survey of Prison Inmates.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

American Economic Association & Allied Social Science Associations. January, 2023 (upcoming). “Critical Perspectives on Care and Carceral Systems” with Anastasia Wilson, Hannah Archambault, Samantha Sterba, and Geert Dhondt. Union for Radical Political Economics, paper session organized by Anastasia Wilson.

American Society of Criminology. Atlanta, GA. November 19th, 2022. [“Prison Labor, Religiosity and other Moral Considerations in Corrections”](#) with Geert Dhondt. Jails & Prisons paper session.

American Economic Association & Allied Social Science Associations. Boston, MA. January 8th, 2022. [“Modern Prison Labor: Scale, Content, and Wages”](#) with Geert Dhondt, Andrew Keefe, Adaner Usmani, Hannah Archambault, Anastasia Wilson. Union for Radical Political Economics, paper session organized by Geert Dhondt and Eric Seligman.

American Society of Criminology. Chicago, IL. November 19th, 2021. [“Challenges to Sanctions, Prisons, and the Carceral State”](#) with Geert Dhondt. Critical Criminology and Abolition paper session.

Harvard Kennedy School, Criminal Legal Contact and the Labor Market. Cambridge, MA. March 26th, 2021. “Prison Labor in U.S. State Prisons, 1974-2016: New Slavery or Enforced Idleness?” with Geert Dhondt. [\(25-minute video\)](#)

Abolition Criminology Conference, Save The Kids. Salt Lake City, Utah. February 19th, 2021. “Prison Labor in U.S. State Prisons, 1974-2016: New Slavery or Enforced Idleness?” with Geert Dhondt.

DATA ANALYSIS

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SELECTED NON-ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Prison Policy Initiative, remote, August 2022 - present

Freelance Writer, mass incarceration and economic justice

American Friends Service Committee, remote, June - August 2021

Freelance Researcher, prison labor

John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity (formerly the Prisoner Reentry Institute), New York, NY, March 2019 - November 2020

Program Coordinator, Prison-to-College Pipeline: arrange with New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and City University of New York personnel to offer John Jay College courses at Otisville Correctional Facility; coordinate the administration of Second Chance Pell; author [publications](#); improve statewide coordination of college-in-prison programs; maintain program data and organize it for presentation; design and teach college skills course for newly enrolled incarcerated students; organize with the New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison to protect the well-being of incarcerated people during the Covid-19 pandemic, eg. fund and distribute 43,000 masks throughout New York prisons

Dorot Fellow, Israel-Palestine, August 2017 - May 2018

Legal strategy and communications for the founding of a legal non-profit that aims to protect the human rights of Palestinians through corporate accountability litigation; lead researcher on the Association for Civil Rights in Israel's Transgender Incarceration Policy project

The Petey Greene Program, Cambridge, MA, June 2016 - August 2017

Regional Manager, Massachusetts and Rhode Island: recruit, train, and coordinate over a hundred volunteer tutors and teaching assistants in education programs in prisons and jails; build new partnerships with universities and prisons; manage staff and interns; plan research; serve as a college-level Teaching Assistant in government, history, and literature courses at Massachusetts and Rhode Island prisons; advocate for education access in and after prison; create forums for written and in-person dialogue between people incarcerated in Massachusetts and state legislators on the topic of state-level criminal justice reform

El Sistema-Inspired Programs, Cincinnati, OH & Philadelphia, PA, July 2013 - June 2015

Teaching artist in applied music theory, restorative justice program developer for free daily K-12 orchestra programs

Cliff Notez, Ilya Vidrin, Guster, Oompa, Zamin, Mel Hsu, Baby Cleo, films, 2010 - present

Composer, performer, arranger, producer: held artist residencies at venues including the New Museum in Manhattan; toured throughout the United States; opened for artists including Talib Kweli, Ja Rule, and Gym Class Heroes; orchestrated for the Boston Symphony Orchestra; performed at venues including Chicago's Millennium Park and House of Blues Boston; played festivals including Chicago World Music Festival, Milwaukee Summerfest, and Inner City Muslim Action Network's Taking It To The Streets; film scores appeared at multiple festivals; appeared regularly on NPR's Chicago WBEZ and Milwaukee Radio