

HIS 301.02
Prison Memoir & History Research

Satisfies: ESI

Mon/Wed 5:00pm - 6:20pm

Professor Robert Chase

In his book, *Prison Writing in Twentieth Century America*, Bruce Franklin aptly observed that the 1960s and 1970s represented the moment when “the political activist [was] thrust into prison, and the common criminal thrust into political activism.” The distinction between these two groups tends to dissolve as the definition of “crime,” from both sides of the law, becomes increasingly political. By analyzing personal narratives and political memoirs written by incarcerated authors from all over the globe, we will analyze prison narratives as a rich primary source that offers astute reflections on politics, race, class, gender, sexuality, and inequality, both within prison and in the free world beyond the prison. These prison narratives are about more than prison life. We will encounter incarcerated authors as intellectuals in their own right who offered trenchant observations on society’s power arrangements and inequalities. As a research and writing-intensive course, the prison memoir will serve as a primary historical source on which students will write a research paper using the tools of history and the professional methodologies of historians.