

LAW 7224: Criminal Just, Race and Media

We live in a world exploded with media messages. Through blogs, likes and tweets, to newspapers and commercial TV, we are constantly defining and redefining our predispositions and social structures, including those affecting race relations. Among the constant stream of information, the discussion on crime in society remains central. We also live in a world rife with racial inequalities. Of these, the criminal justice system stands as a stark reminder for the work still ahead for a more just and equal society. Alas, media consumers tend to detach media representations of crime and race from the reality of crime and incarceration, without giving appropriate thought to the influence of media portrayals on the socio-legal structure. This course is intended to provoke critical thinking on the interdependence between media representations of racial groups in the criminal context and persistent inequalities in criminal justice system. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the course will expose students to theoretical and empirical studies from mass communication, psychology, economics, political science, and law, to provide tools to develop a critical eye towards what we hear, read and see about crime in the media. The class will unfold in two parallel tracks, using the U.S. as an illustrative case study of the relationship between the media and the criminal justice system. First, surveying the evolution of media representations of minority groups in the media. The course will take a comparative approach, discussing various racial and ethnic groups and how they are portrayed by the media. Second, exploring the development of penal policies in the U.S. and incarceration rates have skyrocketed over the years, disparately, affecting minority groups. Ties between both these processes will be analyzed, with an eye towards policy-oriented solutions to be promoted by civil society in combatting racial schemas in both the media and the criminal justice systems.

Credits: 2.0