

Prisons, Policing and Planning

Making the Connections Visible

Sheryl-Ann Simpson

IN AUGUST 2014, attention turned towards Ferguson, Missouri, as a Black teen was shot and killed by a police officer. This event, along with a killing in New York, sparked attention and protests across the US.

But the truth is police violence, and even killings, are the everyday in Black and Brown communities across the US. According to the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, drawing on data from the CDC, at least 4,531 people were killed by police between 1999 and 2011. Of those, 26% were Black, and 1.9% were Native, communities that make up 13% and 0.8% of the total population.

Yet the mainstream planning academy has been largely quiet in terms of recent events, and the larger issue of the relationship between policing, prisons and urban planning. The effects of contemporary security logistics aren't as obvious as in Haussmann's Paris, but they are the result of the so-called War on Terror and War on Drugs, along with processes that have internalized the border and resulted in the targeting of migrant and migrant-seeming people. These have reshaped our cities and regions with the tacit and active consent of planning.

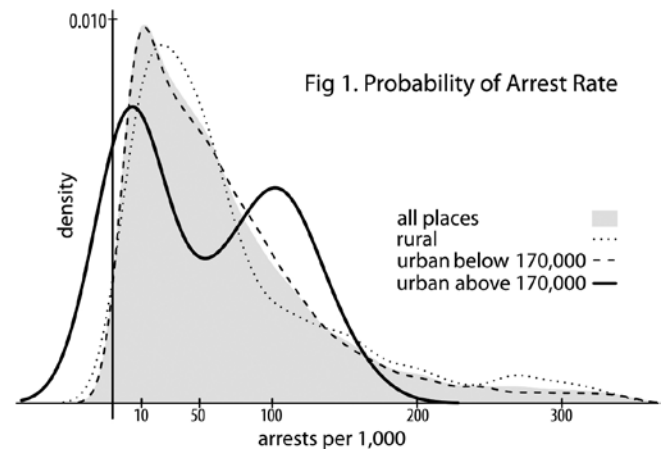
While contemporary impacts are less obvious, they can be made visible. Particularly in a moment when data, analysis and so-called design-thinking are totally on-trend within mainstream planning, not paying attention



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References, datasets and the code used to make some of the figures are available at wheretohere.com/ppmsp2015.

to these issues is nothing more or less than a choice. So along with the other articles in this issue I hope that this piece – some fairly quick back-of-the-napkin work – will help to start conversations, and spark new research and action around planning responses to the various disparities associated with the US police and prison systems.



Following the Data

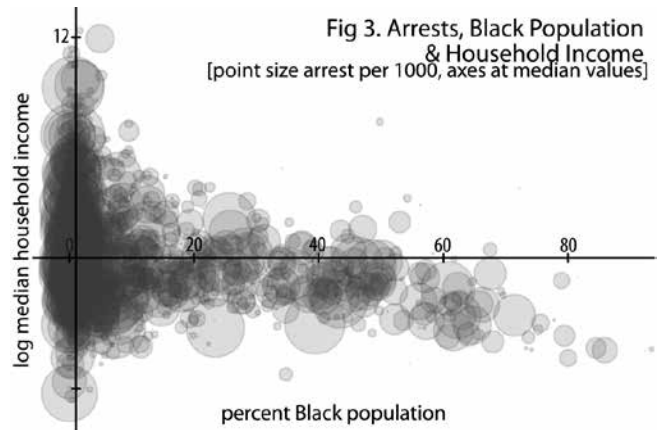
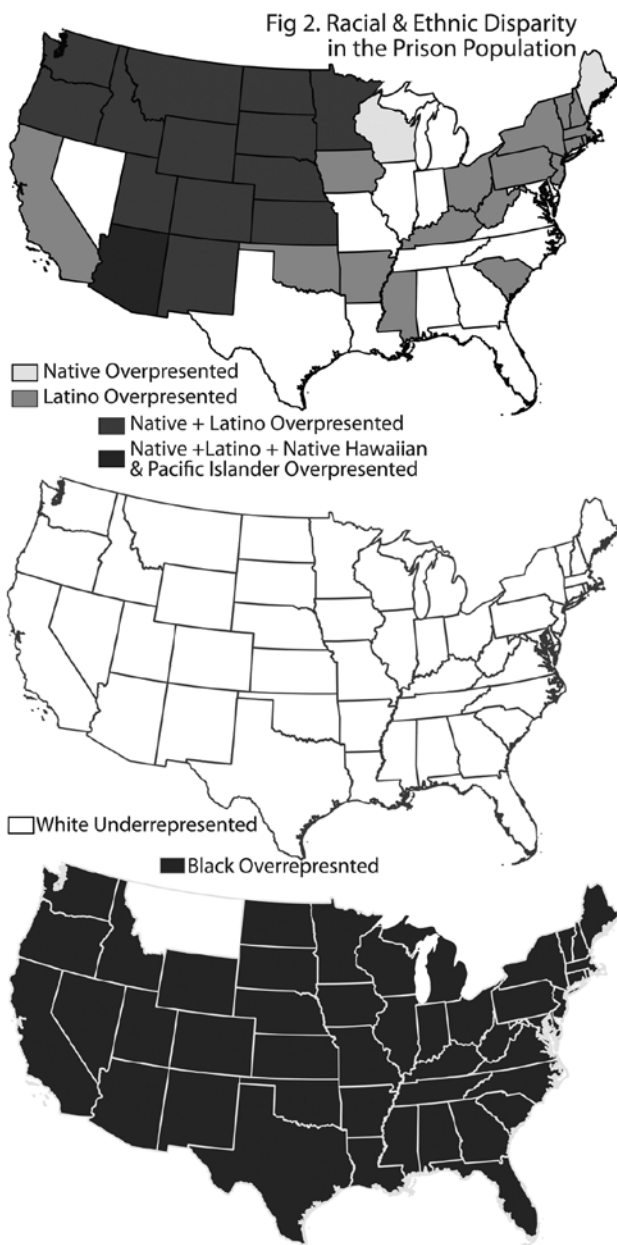
One of the first challenges in examining patterns in this system is a lack of complete data. For example, recent research by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) found that police killings are consistently underreported, and projects like FatalEncounter.org rely on crowdsourcing to create a complete database of police killings. Just finding arrest data can also be difficult. Only thirty-three states participate in the FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). In another three states, one to four agencies participate. The non-participating states include New York, Florida and California.

Still, over 3,000 municipal agencies are included in the NIBRS database (see Figure 1) and we can see patterns

emerging around arrests. Overall rates of arrests are quite low. This suggests that arrests are concentrated in certain municipalities, and when you start to pull apart the data, we see that larger cities are more likely to have higher arrest rates. We also know that these arrests are not evenly spread across these large cities. The Million Dollar Block Project from Columbia University’s Spatial Information Design Lab – led by Architect Laura Kurgan – visualized some of this disparity in New York City. The project examined patterns of imprisonment, and found areas where governments were spending the eponymous million dollars to incarcerate residents of single city blocks. Also, not every arrest leads to the same type of sentencing. The combined impact of

uneven arrest and sentencing patterns is also visible in the US prison population, where communities of color are consistently overrepresented.

Drawing on calculations from the Prison Policy Initiative, Figure 2 shows the patterns of racial disparity in the prison population for Latino, Native, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander communities. Arizona is the one state where all three communities are overrepresented. On the other hand, white populations are underrepresented in all states except Hawai’i, and Black folks are overrepresented in the prison population of every state except Montana.



Looking at Figure 3, which combines US Census data with data from the NIBRS, there is no clear pattern between arrest rates – represented by the size of the points – and the percent of Black people in a municipality’s population – read along the horizontal axis line. If there was a relationship, the problem of overrepresentation in prisons might be explained by overzealous policing in cities and towns with larger Black communities. Instead, the results in Figure 3 suggest that Black people are being arrested, sentenced and imprisoned at disproportionate rates regardless of the rates of incarceration or the numbers of Black people in the community. Figure 3 also makes the important relationship between race and income visible. Just to get technical for a second, this graph uses the log of median household incomes; this log transformation is a pretty typical move to force data into a normal distribution – with most results in the middle and fewer at each extreme. Normal distributions make certain comparisons and calculations easier than using raw data. In Figure 3 we see that the transformation works for municipalities below the

median for percent Black population. But for the municipalities above the median there is a persistent negative relationship between percent Black population and median household incomes. This highlights the increasing income inequality in the country, along with the spatialized and racialized character of this inequality.

Income, Race and Profitable Prisons

It is important to think about the relationship between income and race because it is expensive to get arrested or go to prison, and prisons are also a growth industry. Figure 4 maps the size and location of prisons run by the top two private prison corporations, and shows the prisons they manage for ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Prisons managed by just these two companies have the capacity to hold 6% of the US population of imprisoned people. These corporations, along with various contractors and other advocates, have also nudged governments towards shifting the costs of housing prisoners onto the families, friends, loved-ones and communities of people in prison – and remember these are disproportionately communities of color. The Center for Public Integrity reported on some of these costs, which include toothpaste, doctors, winter clothing, toilet paper, electricity, email and room and board fees. Companies like JPay make a profit from fees for money transfers from families, and in some states have negotiated exclusive contracts for transferring funds to people in prison. The JPay CEO describes the \$50 million revenue his company made from fees alone as a drop in the bucket of prison profits. Private prison companies have also wrangled occupancy requirements out of some states, which require that law enforcement

agencies agree to keep occupancy rates in these prisons above a certain level. So just to be clear here, states are agreeing that they will arrest and imprison a certain number of their residents so that these corporations are guaranteed a profit. These agreements are not about justice – not even revenge- or punitive-based justice – and certainly not about rehabilitation or restoration. They are about profit and capital.

Costs to Local Government

While governments do manage to skim a bit off of these prison profits, the police and prison system is also a large expenditure for governments, particularly for municipal governments. Figure 5 looks at all census-designated places in the US, and suggests that, as with arrests, people who are incarcerated are also urban residents, and the system is being paid for by cities. Total municipal budgets in the US add up to about a third of total state budgets, but states contribute to 37.8% of police, judicial and legal and corrections system (PJ&LCS) spending, while cities contribute 31.5%. Figure 6 draws on data from the US Census, BJS and the Federal Transit Administration to compare expenditures in the PJ&LCS, public education and transit.

Fig 4. Private Prisons Owned by CCA & Geo Group

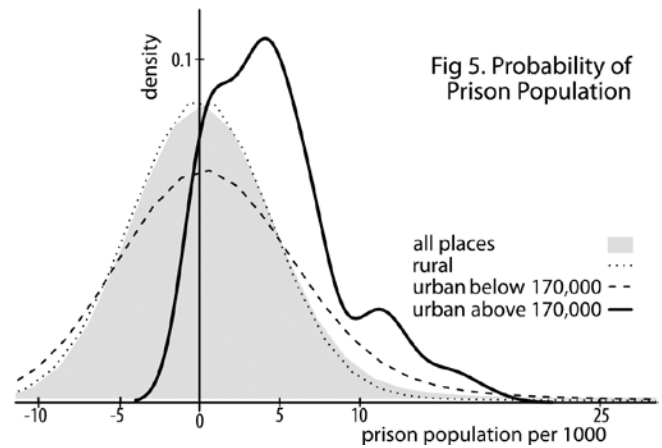
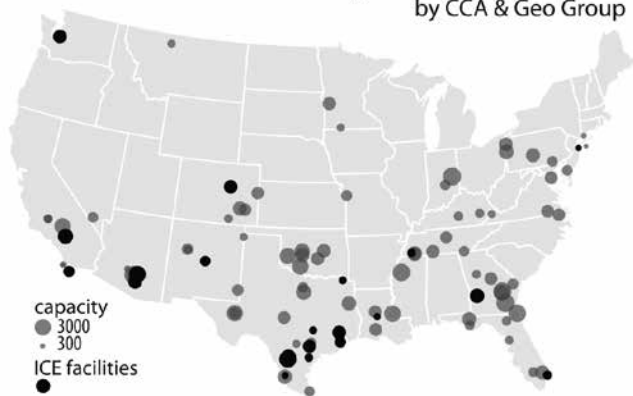


Fig 5. Probability of Prison Population

Fig 6. State Expenditures: Percent of Total

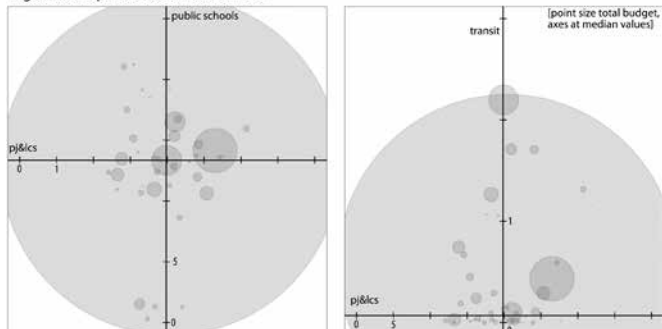
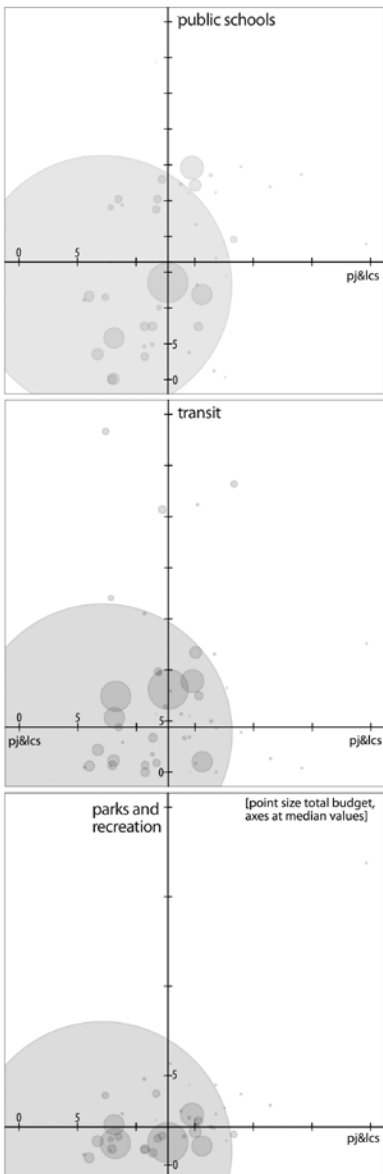


Figure 7 looks at spending for the forty-nine largest municipalities exploring the same types of expenditures. Additional data from The Trust for Public Land adds information about municipal spending on Parks and Recreation programs.

One thing to note before getting into the comparison is that in municipalities we really are talking about police spending. In these large cities the median portion of the PJ&LCS spent on police is 94.5%.

Fig 7. Municipal Expenditure: Percent Total Budgets



Denver, at 39.9%, has the lowest rate. Looking across the country, states contribute 13% to the total police spending, and cities 60.4%.

Comparing state and large municipality expenditures we see the larger median levels of PJ&LCS spending in municipalities as compared to states, and that cities with smaller budgets are often using a larger percentage of their budget on PJ&LCS spending. We can also see that in these cities PJ&LCS spending is comparable to school expenditures and dwarfs spending in other areas. Municipal spending falls well within the traditional purview of planners, impacting issues such as employment accessibility, urban design, housing, community development and sustainability. Advocating for resources in public schools, transit and parks and recreation, planners could also align themselves with advocates for an alternative justice system focused on community stewardship, caring, health and peace.

All of this also means that the police and prison system is also costing communities who are often marginalized in multiple ways. This system costs low income, Black and other communities of color by removing community members – largely men, but increasingly women – and breaking social and cultural ties in the community. These are also community members who – if they were under an economic system where work and living wages were valued – could be contributing financially to their communities. The folks left behind – largely women – are now working and going without in order to pay the monetary price for their imprisoned loved ones. They are also paying to try

and stay in touch through visits, or even just phone calls and letters, connections that are shown to reduce repeat offences. Finally, these are the communities where public resources that might provide alternatives or support people returning from prison are often limited.

The Challenge for Planners

In the US, choices have been made to arrest rather than to care, to imprison rather than to focus on restorative justice options and to offload the cost of the prison system from collective government responsibility towards privatized solutions. In this model, individual families must take on the costs, risks and responsibilities, and private corporations make the profits. These choices are also part of more general trends around gendered and racialized inequality and political-economic neoliberalization.

Planners need to pay attention to these choices, and understand the connections between the things that we comfortably think of as planning issues, and the impacts of the police and prison system. The process of neoliberalization was at least in part related to left-radical actors ignoring the state, while regressive-liberal actors were happy to take up the slack. As we move into a period of seeming permanent austerity, planners need to make our own choices: to ignore these issues and processes and continue to simply fiddle in the margins, or to take up and integrate the policing and prison system – including advocacy for alternatives – as a critical urban issue running through all areas of planning practice and research. **P²**