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The prison in the city: Tracking the neoliberal life of the "million dollar block"

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Abstract
The concept of the 'million dollar block' refers to the spatially concentrated urban origins of the US prison population, most of whom come from a handful of neighborhoods in the country's biggest cities. Visualized through a series of maps charting home addresses alongside financial costs of imprisonment, the million dollar block has emerged as a powerful rhetorical umbrella for bipartisan collaboration on prison reform. This article critically tracks the way the million dollar block, as both a cartography and a discursive formation, has travelled politically over the past decade. Finding parallels with the 'neighborhood effects' discourse within urban studies, I suggest the million dollar block similarly functions to cast poor and racialized urban spaces primarily in terms of criminogenic risk. I describe how the discursive cartography of the million dollar block, despite its reformist intentions, serves a neoliberal model of prison reform, rationalizing *increased* carceral state intervention in urban space.

Keywords
Crime mapping, criminalization, mass incarceration, neighborhood effects, neoliberalism, prison reform, urban space

Introduction: Mapping the prison in the city through the million dollar block

The prison and the city have long been intimately related. Each has been structurally bound up with the social and economic transformations of the other since at least the

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early industrial period and the concomitant production of new classifications of urban crime (Linebaugh, [2004] 2006). In the United States, the massive growth and racialization of incarceration over the past 40 years is inextricable from the urban transformations and struggles of the same period. The contours and contingencies of this relationship have been usefully elaborated in a growing body of scholarly literature across the social sciences (Beckett and Herbert, 2008; Parenti, 1999; Peck and Theodore, 2008; Wacquant, 2001). Carceral geographers in particular have underscored the increased urbanization of prison populations alongside the ruralization of prison siting (Bonds, 2009; Gilmore, 2007). This work details how the fates of these seemingly distinct geographies have been braided together by the shared vicissitudes of neoliberal restructuring, deindustrialization, and the retreat of the welfare state. Theorizing the contemporary city and the prison together has thus proven to be an immensely fruitful approach from which to decipher the *productive* as well as destructive logics of prison expansion over the past four decades.

One of the more recent contributions to this body of work has taken a more explicitly and formally *cartographic* form, demonstrating the relationship between carceral expansion and urban disinvestment through the mapping of prisoners' home addresses. The Million Dollar Block Project (Cadora and Kurgan, 2006) is a high-profile criminal justice mapping project developed in the early 2000s which rendered visible two distinctly spatial facets of contemporary urban–carceral relations: the densely urbanized concentration of penal subjects, and the expansive geography of city–prison migration flows across the country. The concept of the 'million dollar block' refers to the spatially concentrated urban origins of the nation's 2.3 million prisoners,[1] a disproportionate number of whom come from just a handful of neighborhoods in the country's biggest cities. As the project demonstrates, in many places the concentration is so dense that states are spending in excess of a million dollars a year to incarcerate the residents of single city blocks—hence, the concept of the 'million dollar block'.

In this article I suggest that the million dollar block offers a unique vantage from which to critically assess the present conjuncture in US penal history. Especially since the onset of the 2008 Great Recession, the maps have emerged as an influential device for demonstrating both the demographic and financial links between the urban and the carceral. They have also figured as a powerful discursive intervention within political debate, operating as a popular rhetorical umbrella for bipartisan collaboration on criminal justice reform. Particularly under the policy auspices of 'justice reinvestment'—a prison reform initiative focused on reorganizing state correctional expenditure away from prisons—the million dollar block maps, however, have come to serve decidedly *neoliberal* visions for penal restructuring. I argue that such experiments portend less the *retreat* of the carceral state, than its transformation.

This article critically tracks the way the million dollar block, as both a cartography and a discursive formation, has travelled politically over the past decade. Finding parallels with the 'neighborhood effects' discourse within the field of urban studies, I suggest the million dollar block similarly functions as a heuristic to cast poor and racialized urban spaces in terms of criminogenic risk, thus rationalizing *increased*, rather than decreased carceral state intervention in urban neighborhoods. Despite the reformist intentions of their authors, I demonstrate how the maps in effect serve to reify both the

criminal and the prison within the contemporary social landscape. I offer a survey of media, policy reports, academic articles, and descriptions of policing efforts that have mobilized the million dollar block project in order to demonstrate how the maps reproduce the dynamics and logics of criminalization, economic displacement, and racialized social control. Their material effect has thus been to legitimate increased investment of correctional dollars in policing, probation, and reentry services into urban neighborhoods in the name of prison reform. By examining the work of the maps in the broader context of neoliberal entrenchment, urban restructuring, and the crisis of mass incarceration, I argue, we begin to see the carceral state both remaking itself, and outsourcing the social and racial control functions of the prison to the embattled space of the urban neighborhood.

Justice reinvestment and the "cost–benefits" of incarceration

The concept of the million dollar block first emerged publicly in the early 2000s, the product of a data mapping project conceived in the late 1990s by criminal justice researcher Eric Cadora. Cadora was then working for the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), an alternatives-to-incarceration program in New York. He had become interested in creating an alternative visual framework to the crime mapping that dominated the fields of criminal justice and law enforcement. By always plotting out where *crime* takes place, Cadora observed, such crime mapping occluded what he saw as a key dimension of the urban geography of mass incarceration: its relationship to and effects on prisoners' home communities. Cadora and his collaborators began to collect home addresses of people in New York who had been incarcerated and chart them geographically, neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block. As the resultant maps demonstrated, most incarcerated people come from very few neighborhoods in cities across the country, and within those cities, a cluster of concentrated city blocks: "[w]hen we compared concentration rates we found that the ratio between the highest to the lowest incarceration density was up to 20 or 25 times higher" (Cadora, interview with author, 2012).

Cadora eventually migrated his project to the Open Society Institute (OSI) where he expanded its scope by incorporating home address data from across the country. He also added a powerful new dimension to the maps by totaling the amount of state money spent to incarcerate those individuals whose addresses were being plotted. He and his collaborators then turned their population density maps into money maps. They calculated how much the state was spending to remove and return people from particular city blocks to prisons sited, for the most part, far from urban centers. The new maps thus demonstrated not only the intensive urban concentration of those being incarcerated, but the massive *costs* in state expenditure of imprisoning its residents. As the maps visualized clearly, in a handful of urban neighborhoods in many of the country's biggest cities incarceration rates are so high that the state spends at least a million dollars a year imprisoning the residents of a single city block—hence the designate and emergent concept of the "million dollar block".

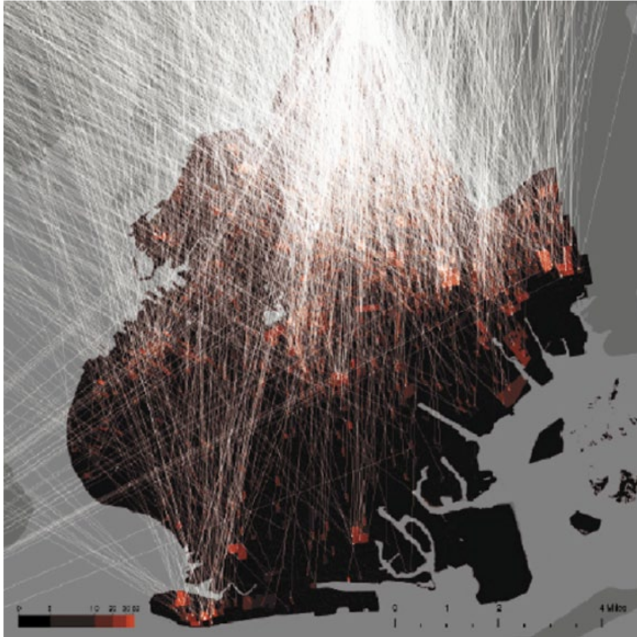

Figure 1. Prisoner migration patterns, Brooklyn, 2003 (Cadora and Kurgan, 2006).

Cadora soon teamed up with Laura Kurgan, a professor of architecture with the Spatial Design Lab at Columbia University, to translate his project into a series of large-scale and highly stylized visual maps that could find wide circulation. They created maps for a handful of cities from across the country, including Brooklyn, Wichita, New Orleans, and Connecticut. The result was a set of large-format visualizations so striking they were mounted as an art exhibit, showing in such prestigious institutions as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The exhibit included a series of variously scaled maps of Brooklyn, a New York borough that hosts a total of 35 million dollar blocks (see Figures 1 and 2). In one, a solid black background is set against a torrent of red lines, each shooting upward from a mass of dots clustered around a small number of neighborhoods. Each dot represents the home of a person who was sent to prison in 2003. The red lines dramatize the outward migration from those city neighborhoods to the constellation of state prisons sited mostly in rural areas upstate. In 2003, those red lines added up to $359 million in New York State alone. This is the sum total cost for that year of locking up individuals from—as the maps also demonstrate—a handful of Brooklyn's poorest, and most racialized, communities.

To Cadora, the maps offered a mechanism for critical thinking about mass imprisonment. What they made visible, he suggests, is more than just the financial cost of incarceration, but also the social cost: "[w]hat you ended up seeing is nothing very positive, but rather a real strain on the neighborhood by the removal and return year after year of large numbers of connected, parenting age men" (interview with author, 2012). The

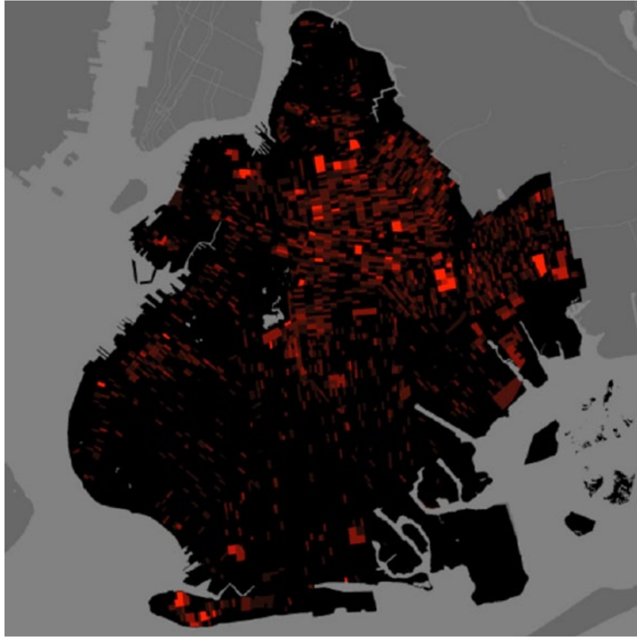

Figure 2. Prison expenditure by census block in Brooklyn, NY, 2003, represented as dollar totals (Cadora and Kurgan, 2006).

maps offered a simple way to powerfully dramatize otherwise abstract data, and to convey imprisonment not as something static, but an annual forced migration of residents from borough neighborhoods to rural prisons. They also offered a visual way to link high incarceration rates with other socio-economic issues, like concentrations of poverty, unemployment rates, and racial segregation. The existence of such links, if not the causes for them, is made explicit by the authors in the text that accompanied the Spatial Design Lab's maps. They write, for example: "[f]ocusing on where incarcerated people live when they are not in prison and comparing that with poverty suggests this conjunction rather starkly" (Cadora and Kurgan, 2006). In one especially provocative, if under-elaborated formulation, the text suggests that: "[p]risons and jails forms the distant exo-structure of many American cities today" (Cadora and Kurgan, 2006).

The decision of Cadora and his various collaborators to link the geography of incarceration to prison expenditure was both a political one and a strategic one. The maps were born both out of a critique of mass incarceration in the USA, and an institutional commitment, at both CASES and the OSI, to prison reform. The hope was that they might facilitate a broad and bipartisan rethinking of more than three decades of prison growth. In an interview I conducted with Cadora in 2012, he explained: "[t]o me it was about data. To make a new framework you needed to have new information, to be able to put it forward in a way that helped people reframe their perspective." The maps, as he described them, were designed to facilitate a shift in public attention from the "problem"

of crime to the problem of prisons—and specifically, to their massive public costs at the expense of other community infrastructure. "These multi-million dollar blocks, in terms of opportunity, suggested a trade off", explained Cadora.

> And in fact led us to start talking a little bit more in terms of business language—what's the public safety *return* on this investment, for these places? Year after year, multiple millions of dollars, but what's changing in these *places*?

It is in this embrace of a market framework that that the million dollar block maps share a functional as well as discursive relationship to the emergent reform movement known today as "justice reinvestment". Cadora and his partner Susan Tucker at the OSI came up with the term justice reinvestment as a policy umbrella under which to propose the diversion of some portion of the millions of dollars states were spending on prisons, back into the social and physical infrastructure of the high incarceration neighborhoods identified by the million dollar block maps (Tucker and Cadora, 2003). As Cadora puts it, "[t]he JR ["justice reinvestment"] idea suggested that look, if we can reduce incarceration rates to a level, a systematic level that actually saves corrections dollars, why not invest those dollars locally?" (interview with author, 2012). Justice reinvestment (JR) was thus at least partially conceived as a financial accountability mechanism, a means of demonstrating not only that there exists a financial trade off between prison spending and community spending, but that the vast amounts of money being channeled into prisons have proven to be *bad* investment. As Tucker and Cadora (2003: 3) put it, "[f]rom an investment perspective, both our prison and parole/probation systems are business failures".

The language of "investment" was purposefully deployed—meant to appeal to the same business framework residents and lawmakers would presumably apply to any other spending decision in their lives. It was also meant to pose the problem in terms of a question, which is, suggests Cadora, "[w]hat are the returns of spending money over there and how does that compare to the potential returns of spending money here?" (interview with author, 2012). The rhetoric of the million dollar block thus shares with justice reinvestment an instrumentalist orientation through its appeal to the values of economic responsibility and cost efficiency. Its goals are framed in terms of returns on investment—in this case, returns on public safety. Prisons, it turns out, make neighborhoods actually *less* safe, rather than more safe (Clear, 2007). As a group of early JR champions put it, "[m]illion dollar blocks dramatized the trade-offs for specific neighborhoods between locally concentrated incarceration spending policies, and alternative, locally focused investment policies that could yield greater returns in public safety, strengthened community institutions, and expanded neighborhood networks" (Austin et al., 2013: 5).

To this end, the million dollar block project has been more influential than Cadora ever imagined it would be. As both a map and a concept it has proven enormously effective over the past decade at catapulting the idea of justice reinvestment to the national and even international stage. Soon after the concept of JR was launched by the OSI, it was formally institutionalized as the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) and adopted as a project of the Council of State Governments, the national association of state legislator and executive branch government leaders. They use the million dollar block maps to convince state legislators to sign on to initiatives that would help them downsize their

spending on prisons. Coinciding with budget crises in many states, especially since 2008, such visualizations of prison expenditures has helped build momentum for modest penal reforms, attracting attention from state legislators struggling to balance their budgets *and* from prison reformers seeking to find traction for decarceration efforts. State governments have jumped at the financial savings justice reinvestment promises. In the decade since JR was launched, more than a dozen states have formally signed on and some 27 states have participated in one way or another in its reform initiatives.

On its way to becoming a dominant paradigm among policy elites, journalists, and think-tank researchers, however, JRI has subtly shifted how justice reinvestment was originally conceived, and thus meant to be applied. JRI now describes justice reinvestment in these terms: "[a] data-driven approach to reduce corrections spending and reinvest savings in strategies that can decrease crime and strengthen neighborhoods". In 2011 Congress passed the Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act, which essentially authorizes the Bureau of Justice Assistance to provide monies for states to reduce their correctional expenditures and manage their correctional populations, and reinvest that money in crime and recidivism reducing efforts. As Cadora now acknowledges, both informally during interviews but more formally in a report he co-authored with a handful of other high-profile prison reformers (Austin et al., 2013) justice reinvestment has come to do quite different work under the mantle of JRI than originally intended. Taking stock of the JR movement 10 years in, the authors note how:

> In most of these early states, JRI measures to reduce prison populations were explicitly tied to commitments by the state to invest some portion of the savings in targeted "Million Dollar Blocks." To date, however, there has been virtually no reinvestment in education, employment, community revitalization or affordable housing development in those communities. Instead, JRI-guided legislation increasingly channeled modest reinvestment into community corrections and, more recently, law enforcement agencies.
>
> (Austin et al., 2013: 6)

While this group of critics sees the problem primarily in terms of *inadequacy* (i.e. that JR has failed to deliver *re*investments in basic community infrastructure at the urban level, including housing, health care, food security, and education) I argue that the problem is a much deeper and structural one, rooted in the million dollar block cartography itself. In order for one to see how it is that under JRI "the majority of reinvestment that has actually been going on has been to reinvest in local correctional programs" (Cadora, interview with author, 2012), we must revisit the million dollar block and track its public uptake. Indeed, as I will argue in the next section, in its political life as a discursive formation and its articulation through neoliberal and criminogenic logics, the million dollar block actually rationalizes the *expansion* of carceral state intervention at the urban level, further reifying the "criminal"—and the "criminogenic neighborhood"—as legitimate targets of control.

The "neighborhood effects" of the million dollar block

In the late 1990s a new subfield within urban studies scholarship, known as the "neighborhood effects" literature, emerged and gained particular influence, averaging about 100

papers a year by 2000 (Sampson et al., 2002: 444; also see Ellen and Turner, 1997; Jencks and Mayor, 1990). The field of neighborhood effects seeks to link the life chances of particular urban residents to their neighborhood conditions. The focus within such studies tends almost exclusively to be high-poverty neighborhoods and the *ill* effects considered consequent to their concentrated poverty. This is how critical urban scholar Tom Slater (2013: 268) describes the overarching thesis of the neighborhood effects literature, in a nutshell: "[n]eighborhoods matter and shape the fate of their residents (and their young residents most acutely), and therefore, urban policies must be geared towards poor neighborhoods, seen as incubators of social dysfunction". Key variables within this putatively causal relationship are limited almost exclusively to matters of culture and individual behavior, seen as pathologically incubated by the space of the neighborhood itself.

Since its introduction, the million dollar block has been constructed as itself a kind of "neighborhood effect". As framed and interpreted in public discourse, the phenomenon of the million dollar block constitutes a kind of undifferentiated spatial determinate of life changes—in this case, chances of imprisonment. Reproduced within the framework of the million dollar block, the logic of neighborhood effects looks something like this: where you live determines whether or not you are likely to engage in criminal behavior, and *therefore* whether you will be likely to be sent to prison. This is a very different kind of analysis then, for example, one in which systemic transformations in urban space (e.g. privatization, gentrification, implementation of trespass laws, expanded urban policing budgets, and restructuring of the urban labor market) might be connected to and investigated as co-productive of mass incarceration and related penal trends. In other words, the hegemonic reasoning conventionally used to explain imprisonment—criminal *behavior*, located in the *individual*—remains uncontested. Here's an illustrative instance from an article about million dollar blocks in the online news site *Huffington Post*:

> For Holder, the temptations and problems seemed to lurk around every corner, and interactions with those from the bad old days were a test of his will—and the guidelines of his release. In Holder's East Harlem neighborhood, 1 in 20 men has been convicted of a felony, the Justice Mapping Center reported. But in Holder's circle, it's just about everyone, he said, making even the most routine trip through the neighborhood a possible trap door back to prison.
>
> (Lee, 2012)

Here as elsewhere in the media where the million dollar block is expounded, the risk of recidivism emerges via the contagion effects of a socially dysfunction neighborhood; the block itself is to blame for its overrepresentation of incarcerated residents.

In a 2012 radio documentary produced for the National Public Radio (NPR) show *All Things Considered*, the host poses the goal of the million dollar block project as follows: "[t]o break the cycle of crime and violence that plagues certain neighborhoods" (Orson, 2012). High concentrations of prisoners are thus equated seamlessly with the problem of crime and violence, rather than, say, spatially uneven policing practices. The documentary, which features an interview with Cadora and is largely sympathetic to the critique of mass incarceration, is set in front of a new probation office in Brownsville, Brooklyn, home to one of the highest concentrations of million dollar blocks in the state. Says Cadora to his interviewer: "[t]oday when we look and we see those blocks, things have

changed, quite a bit. There's been a investment by the city and the state, and in particular the Department of Probation" (Orson, 2012).

The program then moves quickly to Connecticut, where the mapping of a number of million dollar blocks has helped facilitate the adoption of Justice Reinvestment Initiatives. The focus of the documentary shifts to something called the "Prison Re-Entry Initiative" located in New Haven and which "came out of those conversations that were inspired by the maps". The initiative is described as an office "that helps ex-offenders make that transition back home from prison", the maps serving as "a guide to target resources". So as the reporter tells us: "[o]nce prisoners return from prison they go back to live in these communities that are identified in the maps. And the Reentry Initiative targets those folks for service" (Orson, 2012). As we learn quickly, however, the substance of this intervention is almost entirely psycho-behaviorist rather than structural or material. For example, participants must agree to attend personal development courses and a staff member is quoted as saying: "[t]hey've just come back from what we call the Yard, or Prison, where there's a culture of behavior that they've had to master in order to survive. So we've got to really re-socialize them, but that takes work." The project, furthermore, collaborates with local law enforcement in its programming. A reporter describes a participating detective as saying "[p]olice officers want offenders to know that police officers are here to help" and then quotes him: "[i]t shows a united front. We do care where you go down the road" (Orson, 2012). While more will be said later about reentry projects in particular and their tendency to focus on psycho-social behaviorism, for now it is worth noting the way the maps here have helped organize *more*, not less, intervention by law enforcement and branches of the criminal justice system in targeted neighborhoods.

In the policy literature, a similar framing occurs but through a much simpler slippage. Despite the fact that the million dollar block project does *not* actually map where crime takes place, its main utilizers cite it as an instrument of *crime reduction*, as well as of prison expenditure recoupment. The analytic framework of mass incarceration that holds it to be a *consequence* of criminal behavior (i.e. that reifies crime as a fixed category of social ill and imprisonment as the logical, if inefficient, solution for putative criminality) remains unchallenged. The justice reinvestment movement, to which the million dollar block has proven so useful, further reproduces this conflation between neighborhoods and criminality. To illustrate this point, here is one sympathetic description in the academic literature of JR:

> Justice reinvestment is a term that refers to a variety of approaches that have sought to combat burgeoning prison populations by tackling the *root causes of criminality* […] The central proposition of "justice reinvestment" is that it is far better and cheaper to focus resources on preventing criminality than solely on catching and incarcerating criminals. The new approach seeks to rebalance criminal justice expenditure by redirecting funding that would otherwise be spent on custody into community based initiatives which tackle the underlying causes of crime.
>
> (Fletcher, 2010: 67, emphasis added)

The author goes on to name the million dollar block directly in the application of this approach.

As critical scholars have long demonstrated, *criminality* is not the same thing as *criminalization* (Linebaugh, [2004] 2006; Muhammad, 2011). While criminality is understood to be a state of objective deviance located in the individual, to be criminalized is to be subjectified as well as subjugated by the coercions of law enforcement and the criminal justice system, both of which are highly malleable relative to changes in laws, policy, and institutional dictates. As Hallett (2012: 215) puts it, "[r]ecent scholarship asserts that today's hyper-incarceration of mostly impoverished and chronically unemployed minority citizens reflects not a rise in the criminality of individual offenders, but a de facto shift toward the penal regulation of urban poverty". During the 1980s and 1990s for example, US criminal justice policy saw not so much an actual increase in the problem of crime, but shifts in the management of urban and racialized poverty through expanded criminalization mechanisms and policing powers (Simpson, 2000). Indeed, the framework of criminality as opposed to criminalization throws up a very different set of political and economic interventions.

Within the framework of criminality, the million dollar block as spatial determinate of one's carceral future becomes conflated with both a cultural and behaviorist damnation of the million dollar block as a space that itself *incubates* deviance or criminality. It is in this way that it most resembles the neighborhood effects literature and advances a new kind of "where you live affects your life chances" thesis: in this case, where you live affects whether or not you will be sent to prison *via* the criminal contagion effects of your block.

The idea that spatial form can have a criminogenic effect, and that the urban neighborhood bears deterministically on human action, extends as far back as the controversial Chicago school of urban ecology, whose central figures mapped biological theories of criminal behavior to the neighborhood scale (see, for example, Shaw and McKay, 1942). One also finds echoes here of the once-popular "culture of poverty" thesis guiding the work of urban sociologists and policy makers in previous decades. Enormously influential theories attempting to account for persistent poverty and low levels of educational attainment were famously promoted by figures like Oscar Lewis (1961, 1966) and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was President Nixon's Secretary of Labor. In a controversial report he authored in 1965, Moynihan argued that black American families were in a crisis due to their social reproduction of particularly self-sabotaging and pathological behavioral traits, such as laziness and hyper-sexuality (see Rainwater and Yancey, 1967). As the report argued, the recycling of these cultural and behavioral traits via the family unit is what prevented the children of these families specifically, and black people more broadly, from succeeding in mainstream society. Within the "culture of poverty" framework, the family unit was the dominant unit of blame and intervention, and deeply racist, sexist and classist assumptions coded behind references to an urban "underclass" informed analyses of the persistence of "under-privilege" across a variety of indexes.

While the million dollar block project thus purports to offer a new way of looking at the phenomenon of mass incarceration, an actual survey of the public and political life of the maps reveals the continuation of very *old* ways of looking at the phenomenon, reproduced in newly spatialized terms.

The cartography of the million dollar block serves to shore up the "criminal" as a reified category of bad, and reproduce the ostensibly causal relationship between "crime"

and prisons. This discursive formation serves to produce a new category and attendant object for state intervention: the criminogenic urban neighborhood, for which the million dollar block becomes both euphemism and compass.

In the neoliberal period of generalized gentrification (Smith, 2002), urban space has become a favored unit of pathologized crisis and criminogenic risk for conservatives as well as liberals looking to account for particular patterns of marginalization across groups of people. The neighborhood now occupies much the same role as the family in the Moynihan Report: a putative spatial incubator for the cultural production of so-called black criminality. Like the culture of poverty thesis and the neighborhood effects discourse, a focus on culture and behavior at the expense of structural conditions dominates the million dollar block discourse, with the space of the neighborhood now figuring as the critical influence on the reproduction of criminogenic cultures and behaviors. The rise of urban space as the privileged site for subsequent state intervention cannot be divorced from the broader economic context within which urban space is experiencing deepening pressures and growing contestation in the face of hyper-gentrification, neoliberal restructuring, and intensified real estate investment.

In Stuart Hall's (2001: 72) view, discourse

> constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about or reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others.

As Harvey (1993: 23) notes further, the representations of space and their contestations are "as fiercely fought and as fundamental to the activities of place construction as bricks and mortar". Representations of space, as discursive formations, influence the way governments and policy makers, but also NGOs, philanthropists and entrepreneurs, organize their interventions and plans for the remaking of those spaces.

The map is among the most potent vehicles for the representation of space. As critical scholars have well demonstrated, maps are never objective or neutral, but rather reflect the organization of existing or preexisting power relations in a society (Harley, 1989; Wood 1993). Maps have, for example, played a central role in imperial projects of managing colonial subjects (Driver, 2001; Edney, 1997) and as tools for the consolidation of power and territory in struggles over rights to land and resources (Sparke, 1998). Beginning in the 1970s, critical re-theorizations of cartography underscored "the way in which maps acted as agents for the normalization of power relations" (Crampton, 2001: 239). As representations and sites of power-knowledge, maps are always embedded within historical landscapes of social relations, dominant ideologies, and structures of common sense. In short, they are themselves social constructions, mediated by the power relations within which they are both produced and utilized. In order to assess the work that maps do as a discourse, we are thus encouraged "to read between the lines of the map—'in the margins of the text'—and through its tropes to discover the silences and contradictions that challenge the apparent honesty of the image" (Harley, 1989: 3).

The million dollar blocks maps' authority, like the authority of all maps, lies precisely in their descriptive power. The difference between *description* and *explanation*, however, is particularly difficult to discern when confronted with visual data, especially

maps. Indeed, once invested in explanatory power, the tendency of *these* maps is to occlude, rather than disclose, the kinds of structural factors and social relations that actually do give rise to spatially differentiated chances of incarceration. Not only is the category of crime left intact, despite its historical contingencies, but so are the urban processes for which the categories of crime and differentiated arrestability are put to work: gentrification; labor deregulation; racial profiling; and capital accumulation. This logic misses the key structural questions not only of why people live where they do, but why their neighborhoods are criminalized as they are. A whole lot gets written out of this picture, including, most glaringly, the state.

The Brooklyn neighborhood of Brownsville, which is mapped prominently within the million dollar block project, offers a useful example. While arrest and incarceration rates are indeed high in this low-income and predominantly African-American neighborhood, it is also *policed* much more intensively than elsewhere in the city. Designated a "high impact" zone, Brownsville has long been flooded with novice police officers fresh out of police academy, and the NYPD's highly controversial stop-and-frisk program, deemed unconstitutional in 2013, has been enforced here with exceptional vigor. In the small portion of the 73rd Precinct that covers Brownsville's public housing towers and overlaps with its million dollar blocks, 3020 stops were recorded in the first three months of 2013. This is compared to 751 stops for the rest of the precinct (Brice, 2014). Meanwhile, this same neighborhood has been widely touted as the next frontier of Brooklyn's rapid gentrification, with perceptions about crime identified as the single biggest remaining barrier to real estate valorization (Berger, 2012).

Indeed, where you live *does* effect whether or not you will be sent to prison. But what is at stake analytically and politically are the reasons for that to be true. The elision of *causation* within the million dollar block maps renders them vulnerable to capture by a reasoning that either implies, or outright claims, that the relationship between cities and prisons is that space itself produces criminal behavior. There are two steps within this logic: first, that these (mostly young, black) men are imprisoned because they did deviant (i.e. "criminal") things, and second, they did "criminal" things because of the neighborhood effects of the million dollar block.

It is instructive to note, moreover, that no actual empirical evidence has emerged to prove the neighborhood effects thesis right. Despite the paucity of data proving the existence of causal mechanisms such as "peer influence" or "role model effects" that are supposed to constitute the neighborhood effects of concentrated poverty (Galster, 2012: 23), policy makers have consistently applied this research to promote policies that actively deconcentrate neighborhoods via displacement and/or resettlement of poor people (August, 2014: 29). Insofar as the million dollar blocks project contributes to a new, criminogenic version of the neighborhood effects thesis, the material consequences of the "neighborhood effects" discourse once translated on the ground serve as a critical forewarning. Indeed, as the following examples illustrate, the million dollar block maps are already being appropriated as tools for further intervention in poor and racialized communities, under the familiar guise of "crime reduction", and deployed most instrumentally by law enforcement agents and their state partners.

In a 2012 policy essay entitled, "Bringing social context back into the equation: The importance of social characteristics of places in the prevention of crime", the author

emphasizes the "crime prevention potential of place based approaches" to law enforcement strategy and public policy (Weisburd, 2012: 317). In making this argument, the article at once allies itself with "broken windows theory" (which massively expanded policing efforts across urban landscapes) *and* the million dollar block concept, offering no acknowledgment of a tension between those bedfellows. Both frameworks help the author advance his thesis that, "[w]hether a place was a crime hot spot or not [is] strongly related to its social characteristics" (Weisburd, 2012: 321). More importantly and alarmingly, both are heralded as useful tools for directing political attention and resources to scaled-down, street and block-level interventions in "crime prevention".

The question of what those interventions are and may be is precisely the problem with the million dollar block discourse. Hot spot policing here easily co-exists, as it does within broken windows theory and the neighborhood effects literature, within a continuum that includes the kind of targeted economic investments that are already facilitating the accelerated gentrification of many of the neighborhoods identified in the million dollar block maps (see, for example, Smith, 2013), as well as serving as ideological cover for the creation of "mixed income communities" via "poverty deconcentration" policies. That this was never the intention of these million dollar block maps is not in question; that it is within their *capacity* to lend themselves in such a way, however, remains a problem worth deconstructing.

This capacity is being more fully exploited in some of the other nations, globally, where the million dollar block concept has travelled, including Australia and the United Kingdom. For example, an East London policing initiative, called "Diamond" uses the mapping technique pioneered by Cadora and his collaborators to target a set of British "diamond districts": neighborhoods where a concentration of incarcerated individuals are identified using home address data. The debate and attendant interventions surrounding the Diamond District initiative share in the spatial pathologizing of the mainstream US discourse. For example, the *Evening Standard*, a British newspaper, opens a piece about the initiative this way:

> 15 London council wards with the largest number of criminal residents have been named by the Met in a new bid to cut offending. Police say each one contains hundreds of offenders, including a hard core of serious criminals responsible for luring others into their world sometimes over several generations.
>
> (Bentham, 2008: 24)

Proposed alternatives within this initiative to the high concentration of ex-prisoners (or "criminal residents") are, moreover, underwritten by the criminal justice system: "[r]epeat offenders will be targeted to ensure they comply with court orders or conditions of release, and police will act against those who fail to do so" (2008: 24). Home Secretary Jacqui Smith is quoted as promising that "increased support and supervision" would be "backed up by swift enforcement measures" (2008: 24). High concentration neighborhoods are identified by both police and media as, "increasing the chances of convicts reoffending" (2008: 24). Here one finds parallels with the million dollar block as criminogenic neighborhood effect discourse, but translated into an actual law enforcement strategy.

As Gilmore (2009: 82) reminds us, prison reform has historically, as now, "opened the door to expanding prison under the guise of social improvement".[2] Differentiating between reformist reform and non-reformist reform in practice, however, is a difficult and sometimes contradictory challenge. Commitment to non-reformist prison reform must therefore include a critical deconstruction of those reform initiatives, whatever their intentions, which risk structuring further social immobilization, displacement and racialized surplus life under the guise of penal critique.

Embedded in the million dollar block and justice reinvestment discourses are powerful and deeply problematic ideas about who prisoners are (i.e. criminals), where crime comes from (i.e. deviant behaviors incubated by the criminogenic effects of poor and racialized neighborhoods), and the appropriate state response (i.e. a neoliberalized remaking of carceral state practices, in which economic inefficiencies associated with mass imprisonment are corrected by a reallocation of state budgets into new carceral interventions at the community level). To underscore the material implications of these logics, I now turn to a growing set of critical literature, some of it focusing on the burgeoning reentry movement, that offers important forewarning about the *expansion* of the carceral state via strategies that mimic a critique of mass incarceration. I draw on this literature to showcase the context of state austerity, carceral restructuring, and neoliberal penal reform within which the million dollar block is being put to work. Like the bulk of current prison reform initiatives forged in the context and service of unabated neoliberal experimentation (Gottschalk, 2014), the million dollar block maps serve primarily to legitimate new forms and spatializations of racialized disenfranchisement and social control.

Urban space, transcarceration, and the neoliberal carceral state

Mark Mauer (2011: 36, emphasis added) notes that almost a decade after its introduction, "[m]ost of the justice reinvestment movement has focused on shifting resources within the criminal justice system, particularly reducing prison funding while *increasing* resources for community-based supervision and services". Indeed, much of the prison savings afforded under the mantle of JRI have been simply reallocated to other, often non-custodial departments of the criminal justice system. These include, on the one hand, increased investment in law enforcement and policing infrastructure, but also increased spending on reentry programming and other facets of post-custodial state supervision. As Cadora and others have noted, with some disappointment,

> Among many lawmakers, the "justice reinvestment" label has come to stand for any correctional reform effort that is expected to save states money and improve public safety, but without concomitant reinvestment in community and, it turns out, without significantly reducing correctional populations.
>
> (Austin et al., 2013: 4)

It is important to underscore first, how a simple re-allocation of resources within criminal justice departments constitutes a very different strategy from the investment in

housing, education, and community infrastructure that the million dollar block maps portended to invoke, and that may have made the idea of justice reinvestment so initially appealing to penal reformers (Austin et al., 2013). Second, and perhaps more significantly, the result of such re-allocation of state resources has been the development of new forms of state and civil society intervention, including alternative-to-incarceration programming, often with the urban neighborhood as the participating agencies' preferred target. These new forms of intervention are being charted in the name of prison reform and even decarceration. Their effect, however, has been to reproduce, in the urban spaces outside the prison, many of the same neoliberal rationalities and carceral coercions as the prison system itself.

There is increasing evidence that the downsizing of the formal prison system is being forged at the expense of extending *other* forms of surveillance and social control. Minnesota, for example, long billed as a "community corrections state" (meaning probation is used rather than incarceration when possible), boasts lower rates of imprisonment of those convicted of a crime, and yet actually has a larger percentage of its population under correctional control than other parts of the country. While one in 31 adults are subject to some form of correctional control nationally, in Minnesota that number is one in 26 (Pew Center on the States, 2009). Byrd (2013) thus argues that the dominant reentry movement functions, in actuality, to extend the penal system beyond the walls of the prison edifice.

Reuben Jonathan Miller (2014), an ethnographer who has charted the proliferation of reentry programs across urban communities, advances the term "carceral devolution" to convey what he sees as a kind of "double movement" of hyper-local intervention targeted on the one hand at former prisoners' home communities, and at the same time inside former prisoners' heads. Miller describes how the programs he has examined in depth focus their interventions entirely on the character and behavior of the ex-prisoners returning home, rather than the infrastructure, institutions, and economies of home communities or the structural conditions of their lives. He defines "carceral devolution" as: "[a] reformist shift in criminal justice and social welfare policy and practice where the state's capacities to rehabilitate prisoners have been offloaded onto community based actors and organizations" (2014: 327). The offload is only a partial one, and indeed the notion of "carceral devolution" shares much with other terms scholars have deployed to describe how the carceral state is restructuring itself in the face of its own legitimacy crisis. Parallel concepts are beginning to crop up across the critical prison studies literature, illuminating the myriad ways community interventions relate to the system from which they are ostensibly diverting.

Katherine Beckett and Naomi Murakawa (2012: 222), for example, use the term "the shadow carceral state" to describe those activities *outside of*, but effectively in support of, more visible criminal law and criminal justice institutions, or as they put it, the "more submerged, serpentine forms of punishment that work in legally hybrid and institutionally variegated ways". These include: the expansion of civil and administrative pathways to incarceration; the creation of civil alternatives to invalidated criminal social control tools; and the incorporation of criminal law into administrative legal processes (Beckett and Murakawa, 2012: 224). These activities, while seemingly outside and beyond the prison and situated within civil law, serve both to further carceral logics and enhance

state carceral power insofar as they effect punitive bodily control and create new criteria for criminalization proper.

Others have mobilized the concept of "transcarceration" to refer to the "neoliberal reorganization of prison facilities through a consolidation of both capital and the state's captive population" (Schept, 2013b). Judah Schept (2013a), for example, offers a powerful excavation of a liberal "justice campus" championed by local politicians and community leaders overtly critical of mass incarceration. The effect of their efforts, despite their reformist intentions and profusions, was an *expanded* detention facility with the capacity to contain and demobilize a greater number of human beings than existed before their campaign began. The concept of "transcarceration" has also been applied more broadly to the non-prison modes of socially controlling former and could-be prisoners (Hallett, 2012: 223). James Kilgore (2014), for example, critically impugns the growth of "non-alternative alternatives" to incarceration, a category that for him encompasses such community-based initiatives as drug courts, day reporting centers, and electronic monitoring schemes. He considers these "non-alternative alternatives" a form of "repackaging" mass incarceration, and suggests that however much they purport to change existing penal practices, they "in essence simply perpetuate the culture of punishment" (Kilgore, 2014). Such programs, he writes "typically involve heavy monitoring of a person's behavior including frequent drug testing, limitations on movement and association, [and] a whole range of involuntary but supposedly therapeutic programs of dubious value and very little margin of error to avoid reincarceration" (Kilgore, 2014).

Kilgore's critique of community-based "alternatives to incarceration" finds almost uncanny resonance in the forewarning offered nearly four decades previous by the scholar Stanley Cohen (1979) in his essay, "The punitive city: Notes on the dispersal of social control". Writing from another period in which the legitimacy of incarceration seemed to be waning, Cohen surveys the "alternatives" on offer in order to problematize the ideology of community control itself. He writes:

> The major results of the new movements towards "community" and "diversion" have been to increase rather than decrease the *amount* of intervention directed at many groups of deviants in the system and, probably, to increase rather than decrease the total *number* who get into the system in the first place. In other words: "alternatives" becomes not alternatives at all but new programs which supplement the existing system or else expand it by attracting new populations.
>
> (1979: 347, emphases in original)

While there are important differences in the character and form of the state and civil–society activities these authors are critiquing, their varying descriptors encompass a central shared concern: the reproduction of the power of the carceral state in the lives of particular, often poor and racialized, populations in terms that mimic and exploit growing criticism of incarceration. The point, then, is that simply relocating new forms of state intervention out of the prison and into the community does not in itself mark a transformation of the carceral system, its dominant logics and its productions of disposable life; indeed, they might even reproduce and reinforce a *remade* carceral state via the material of its own critique.

Like the million dollar block project, many of these endeavors may be forged with the most progressive of intentions. In effect, however, they risk and in some cases already actualize further racialized immobilization, displacement, and social control in the name of prison reform. My argument in this article, therefore, concerns the ways in which seemingly reformist discourses, especially those instrumentally cast in neoliberal terms such as "diminishing returns" and "economic efficiency" as the million dollar block maps are, risk further reinforcing the power of the carceral state rather than weakening it. By reproducing the cultural logics of "criminality", reifying the prison as a consequence of "crime" and "criminals", and serving up poor and racialized neighborhoods as criminogenic "neighborhood effects", the cartography of the million dollar block works to reproduce the very neoliberal imperatives and social relations that helped produce mass incarceration in the first place.

Conclusion

So long as they operate within the field of neoliberal prison reform, the lasting effect of the million dollar block maps will only be to intensify the dispersion of carceral forms and to blur the borders between the space of the city and the space of the prison. They do so by extending the power and influence of the carceral system, including its rationalities as well as its technologies, into neighborhoods, further absorbing the family, the school, and various community agencies into the carceral work of responsibilization, individuation, disenfranchisement, economic abandonment, and racial control.

We continue to see a neoliberal approach to state formation, and as Peck (2003: 226) notes, the "prison system can be viewed as one of the epicentral institutions of these neoliberalized times". My suggestion is that the prison is neither the only, nor the most necessary, space through which neoliberalism, racial capitalism, and the carceral state reinforce each other. If we are indeed witnessing, as some suggest, the unfolding demise of the USA's regime of hyper-incarceration, then it is incumbent upon those of us critical of the prison system to extend our critique to those *other* spaces in which the carceral state may be repackaging itself. To that effect, we might be witnessing a supplanting of the prison as the state's privileged spatial fix (Gilmore, 2007), and the advent of new, community-based instruments for the race-making, labor regulating, and management of surplus life functions prisons have long served. The urban landscape and transformations therein thus continue to constitute a significant site for the transformation, adaptation, and contestation of state carceral power.

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Notes

1. While estimates of the US prison population now hew closer to 2.2 million, the population at the time of the mapping project hovered around 2.3 million.
2. In the context of the prison system non-reformist reform can be understood as “changes that, at the end of the day, unravel rather than widen the net of social control through criminalization” (Gilmore, 2007: 242). As Gilmore reminds us, reformist reform is particularly powerful in the way that neoliberalism operates; its very ability to incorporate and adapt itself to critique is part of what makes neoliberalism—and the structures of violence it necessitates and enacts—so dangerous and so oppositional to the project of prison abolition.

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