

To the Graduate Council,

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Neil Lawrence Parrish entitled "Beyond the Walls: The Architecture of Imprisonment and Community." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Architecture, with a major in Architecture.

Ted Shelton, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Scott Wall

Mark Dekay

(Original Signatures on file with the Graduate School)

Beyond the Walls: The Architecture of Imprisonment and Community

A Thesis Presented
for the
Master of Architecture Degree
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville

Neil Lawrence Parrish
August 2011

BEYOND THE WALLS

THE ARCHITECTURE OF IMPRISONMENT AND COMMUNITY

by Neil Lawrence Parrish

The purpose of life is to be defeated by greater and greater things.

Rainer Marie Rilke

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family. To my parents, who first taught me to be humble enough to ask good questions and brave enough to seek their answers. To my wife, whose patience, brilliance, and kindness never ceases to inspire me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of the many people who helped me complete my Master of Architecture Degree and this thesis. I would like to especially thank my committee Ted Shelton, Jennifer Akerman, and Bob French, and Dr. Avigail Sachs who through the gift of their time, wisdom, and even their silence, helped encouraged me to ask a great deal of both architecture and myself.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the role architecture plays in both causing and ameliorating cycles of crime and punishment. To accomplish this task, the study combines an investigation of historical prison typologies, with an investigation into the philosophical and ethical questions surrounding the practice of imprisonment itself, as well as in depth sociological and criminological studies of the ways in which crime and incarceration affect the health of communities over time. It then employs the tools and conclusions of these studies to investigate the change over time in a single community in North Memphis, Tennessee from its roots as a thriving, multi-racial industrial hub to a community defined by endemic crime, poverty, and violence and, finally, to suggest a way to improve the health of the community through the prison system itself.

The study concludes that the prison system as it currently exists must undergo a fundamental philosophical and physical change in order to actually meet the goals of reducing crime and improving community health for which it was intended. To that end, the thesis suggests a vision of an incarceration facility for a single community in North Memphis that uses architecture as a vehicle to instrumentalize the key emotion that defines imprisonment -- how to escape from it -- in order to reconcile prisoners back to the communities they have offended.

PREFACE

Architecture is an embodied ethic. The culmination of a long process of investigation, reflection, and choice, it is a physical reflection of the values and people by whom it is shaped. Unlike purely theoretical ethics, however, its physical nature causes it to be situated in place and time with an effect that is at the same time fleeting and powerful.

As such, architecture is steadfastly anthropomorphic. Breathing, speaking, relating, protecting, and valuing are said to be among its features. Functioning in the metaphorical realm between embodiment and abstraction, meaning and material, culture and chaos, it takes on the dual role of citizen and stage.

In its capacity as citizen, architecture is a companion. Bridging the gaps of history and generations, it helps establish, symbolize, and maintain the web of social relationship and order that undergirds community. As stage, it provides a foundation on which culture can be built, beauty multiplied, and life made to flourish.

A function of making, architecture is an inherently optimistic act. It involves the creation of something new beyond that which already exists. The old and existing flow through this act of creation in the form of material, flesh, and skill to establish a new chapter of tradition –a simultaneous first step into the past and future.

To make, to breathe, and to love is to be part of architecture's tradition. A humble servant of community, its sole purpose is to forge the conditions necessary for human flourishing and enrich the earth on which it depends.

CONTENTS

Dedication	i.
Acknowledgments	ii.
Abstract	iii.
Preface	iv.
Figures	v.
Attachments	vii.
I. Introduction	1
II. North Memphis	4
III. The Problem of Incarceration	13
IV. Disorder, Crime, and Community	18
V. Incarceration's Purposes and Failures: Isolation, Rehabilitation, and Deterrence	27
VI. A Way Forward	33
VII. Conclusion	43
References	44
Vita	49

FIGURES

II. North Memphis

Figure 2.1	Memphis Region	4
Figure 2.2	Children Hanging Clothes 1906	5
Figure 2.3	Happy News Cafe 1936	5
Figure 2.4	Firestone Plant Construction	5
Figure 2.5	Firestone Plant ca. 1960	5
Figure 2.6	Workers assembling tires ca 1950.	6
Figure 2.7	Firestone Plant Interior	6
Figure 2.8	Condemned Home in N. Memphis, 2011	7
Figure 2.9	Old Manassas High School Abandoned	8
Figure 2.10	Derelict Apartments	8
Figure 2.11	Racial Demographic	8
Figure 2.12	Crimes Jan-Feb 2011	8
Figure 2.13	Mud Island	9
Figure 2.14	Empty Lot in N. Memphis	9
Figure 2.15	Household Income	10
Figure 2.16	Percent of Population Below Poverty Line	10

III. The Problem of Incarceration

Figure 3.1	Change in U.S. Prison Population Over Time	13
Figure 3.2	Incarceration Rate per 100,000 Citizens	14
Figure 3.3	International Survey of I.R	14
Figure 3.4	Recidivism Rates for Tennessee 2004-08	15
Figure 3.5	Likelihood of Incarceration	16
Figure 3.6	Affect of Incarceration on the Community	17

IV. Disorder, Crime, and Community

Figure 4.1	Giovanni Battista Piranesi Carceri	18
-------------------	---	-----------

V. Incarceration's Purposes and Failures: Isolation, Rehabilitation, and Deterrence

Figure 5.1	Shelby Co. Penal Farm	27
-------------------	------------------------------	-----------

FIGURES CONTINUED

VI. A Way Forward

Figure 6.1	Concept Diagram: Personal Freedom/ Community Reconciliation	33
Figure 6.2	Loosahatchie Bar, Memphis, TN	36
Figure 6.3	Firestone Site as it Exists Today	38

ATTACHMENTS

- I. SITE INFORMATION AND DIAGRAMS
 - 1.FINAL BOARD.DIAGRAMS AND SITE INFORMATION.PDF
- II. Community Site Plan...
 - 2.Final Boards.Community Site Plan.flattened.pdf
- III. Site Section Facing East and Vignettes
 - 3.Final Boards. Site Section and Vignettes.pdf
- IV. Site Section Facing North and Plan
 - 4.Final Boards. Site Section Facing North and Plan.pdf
- V. Workshop Wall Section; Homeless Shelter PLAN;
PAROLEE DORM PLAN AND SECTION; SKETCHES
 - 5.FINAL BOARDS. WORKSHOP WALL SECTION AND LINE DRAWINGS.PDF
- VI. ISLAND DIAGRAMS AND SKETCHES
 - 6.FINAL BOARDS. ISLAND DIAGRAM AND SKETCHES.PDF
- VII. ISLAND RENDERINGS
 - 7.FINAL BOARDS. ISLAND RENDERINGS.PDF

I. Introduction

The problems of crime and incarceration in the United States are as unique as they are ubiquitous. Among all nations in the world, the US maintains the highest number of incarcerated people, rates of incarceration, and prisoner recidivism. As a result, the role of prisons and other places of incarceration in American society have increased drastically over the last twenty years, to the point that the penal system is now the primary path through which many communities have contact to the government, outsiders, and the broader economy. And yet, despite the high civic costs incurred by an incarceration based penal system, throughout the United States crime rates in general and violent crime rates in particular, remain among the highest in the industrialized world.

As the primary vehicle of the American system of incarceration, prisons have been designed to embody its three-fold purpose, namely, isolation, rehabilitation, and deterrence. Unfortunately, due to their scale, detachment from the community, and homogeneous view of prisoners, American prisons fail to achieve any of the goals for which they are designed. Consequently, prisons today perversely reinforce the worst behaviors of street culture by failing to create an atmosphere and culture that is either separate or improved from that of the streets themselves. Moreover, by helping to institutionalize and concentrate “ecological” causes of crime in economically depressed, minority communities, prisons have unintentionally facilitated the degradation of the communities at the physical, civic, and cultural levels. In turn, these environmental factors, and the erosion of community order and value-formation to which they lead, have helped to reinforce a multi-generational cycle of criminal culture in some communities that subsequent policing, incarceration, and urban renewal strategies have been unable to break.

In response, I argue that the prison, if re-conceived as a tool of both prisoner rehabilitation and community renewal, offers the best possible means of restoring communities and combating crime at all levels. Such a re-conception will demand significant changes in prison scale, program, and context. Specifically, while a small portion of the prison focused on incarceration should remain isolated from the wider community, the portion focused on rehabilita-

tion should be sited in direct relationship to the communities most affected by crime and disorder. Since the cultures of the two remain intertwined, I suggest that reforms in one community can be used to encourage reforms in the other. Thus, the process of criminal rehabilitation and education can be used as opportunities to ameliorate the environmental causes of crime and disorder that plague high-risk communities. Put simply, prisons will rehabilitate criminals who will help rehabilitate communities that will therefore produce fewer criminals.

The site for my investigation is the New Chicago Community in North Memphis. With rates of violent crime and incarceration among the highest in the US, New Chicago offers a powerful example of a once prosperous community that has succumbed to a culture of crime. Following the closing of Firestone Tire, International Harvester, and Kimberly Clark's manufacturing facilities, the area slowly began to decline, giving way to the physical and social disorder that now dominate the community's streets. Divided from their most immediate neighbors on Mud Island by race, class, crime, and opportunity, the area is among the most polarized in the city. Nevertheless, despite this difficult reality, the community maintains deep sources of strength in its faith communities, natural beauty, relationship to place, and blue-collar history.

While some may question the role of architecture in helping to solve problems of culture, crime, and community disorganization, I argue that it is, in fact, among the most powerful tools at our disposal. For architecture, when conceived and executed in relationship with a community, opens a space for civic reinvention by acting as both a catalyst and symbol of shared community value. As such, architecture possesses the unique ability to draw on a community's particular histories and traditions in helping chart new physical and cultural paths for its future. Moreover, unlike singularly focused policing or education strategies that have in the past tended to focus only on transitional areas in danger of succumbing to disorder, an architectural solution, when used as part of a more wholistic strategy, also possess the ability to help communities that have already passed the tipping point into a culture of crime. Therefore, architecture should be viewed as an essential, albeit under utilized,

tool in the reestablishment and maintenance of healthy communities, as well as their battle against crime and disorder.

Finally, a guiding premise of this investigation is that social as well as physical structures combine to shape the fabric of community in which architecture functions. Thus, in seeking to develop an architecture that is both site and culturally specific, I believe it becomes necessary to investigate the socio-cultural milieu with extreme care in order to understand more fully the problems and potentials it contains. An architecture of social change, must first understand what society is before it can endeavor to change it for the better. For this reason, my argument employs numerous empirical and theoretical insights from the fields of sociology, criminology, philosophy, and social psychology, in the hope that by including such modes of inquiry, I might develop an architecture that is both beautiful and good.

II. North Memphis

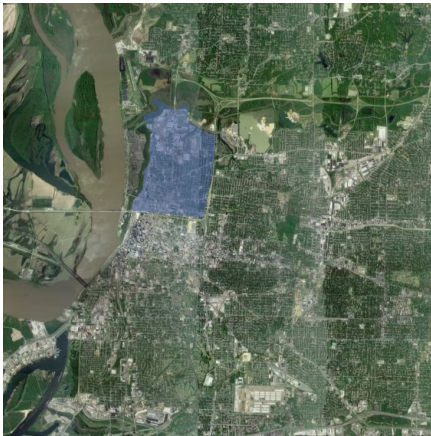


Figure 2.1 Memphis Region (Image Owner: Google Inc.)

History

The area of North Memphis was first settled not long after Memphis' founding in 1819 by John Overton, James Winchester, and Andrew Jackson (www.memphishistory.org). Maps from as early as 1832 show the area to be a stretch of reclaimed floodplain, dominated by water on three sides. Indeed, the preponderance of water was both a blessing and a curse, for while it proved to be of significant commercial advantage for Memphis' growth and businesses, it also contributed to yellow fever epidemics in 1828, 55, 67, 73, 78, and 79 killing a total of 8520 people (ibid). It was only after this last outbreak of fever, however, that efforts were undertaken to cleanup the waterways and put the gulch that once provided an eastern border to the city underground.

Following the Civil War's conclusion in 1865, Irish and German immigrants continued to flow into Memphis in search of work. Despite this influx, the thriving communities of Greenlaw and Chelsea to the North remained predominantly white and upper class (wikipedia, uptown). Following their annexation to the city in 1870, the area entered a heyday of political and economic influence that would last until the flood of 1912 destroyed many of the original

mansions and businesses, causing residents to seek newer, and more elevated residences. The Great Depression in 1929 caused the what remained of the community's power to wane and be lost (ibid).



Figure 2.2 Children Hanging Clothes 1906 (Image Owner: Memphis Public Library)



Figure 2.3 Happy News Cafe 1936 (Image Owner: Memphis Public Library)

In 1937, amid the interwar years, Firestone Tires elected to build a new plant just north of Memphis' downtown near the Wolf River (ibid). In so doing, Firestone began an industrial boom in the area that International Harvester and Kimberly Clark would later add to by building plants of their own. The centralization of these three immensely powerful companies in a single location, to say nothing of the countless businesses by which they were supported, caused the area to become the premier industrial hub for all of Memphis.



Figure 2.4 Firestone Plant Construction (Image Owner: Memphis Public Library)



Figure 2.5 Firestone Plant ca. 1960 (Image Owner: Memphis Public Library)

Blue-collar workers and recent immigrants of both European and African descent quickly moved to North Memphis to fill the wealth of newly created positions. This in turn led to the development of several diverse and vibrant residential communities nearby on the same streets that had been lined with granite curbs and mansions owned by the wealthiest members of the community only twenty five years before (ibid).

As their children and grandchildren told me, it was this group of workers — black and white — who literally built the community with their own hands. Many of them built and owned and maintained multiple houses and helped build the churches, businesses, and schools that came to defined life on the neighborhood's streets. Employing the same grit and spirit that had made the area such a desirable place for industry, these workers forged one of the most integrated communities in all of Memphis.



Figure 2.6 Workers assembling tires ca 1950.
(Image Owner: Memphis Public Library)



Figure 2.7 Firestone Plant Interior
(Image Owner: Memphis Public Library)

The period of prosperity that ensued as a result of their efforts lasted for almost forty years until the 1970's when the major corporations that once had been the source of North Memphis' financial stability and growth began to leave town. The largest and most significant of these defections was that of Firestone, who, after failing to embrace newer technologies for synthetic tires early enough, had begun to lose significant market share to its competitors. Following numerous labor problems in the early '70's and a fire on September 11, 1979, the plant produced its last tire on March 12, 1983.

The State of Change



Figure 2.8 Condemned Home in N. Memphis, 2011. Photo by Neil Parrish

The death of Firestone and its industrial counterparts marked a turning point in the life of North Memphis from which it is still struggling to recover. Those who could get out did. But for those who couldn't, the high rates of unemployment to which it led caused the neighborhood to list towards vagrancy and crime. As in similar communities throughout the country, these problems were only made worse by harsher penalties for criminals passed in the mid and late 1980's. Three strikes laws and mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines caused record numbers of people to be incarcerated for far longer periods of time than had been previously been the case. Since these regulations and the disenfranchisement to which they led hit minority communities the hardest, North Memphis began to sink into the cycle of crime that defines it today.

To an outsider, the area of New Chicago in North Memphis is today most accurately described as a war zone. Years of neglect and abandonment by local and national businesses alike, have left the area with few viable employers and a sense that its best days have past. Bordered by the Mississippi River to the West, the Wolf River to the North and Interstate 40, it is geographically as well as economically isolated from the rest of Memphis. Boarded up and burned out houses, overgrown lots, trash, and stray dogs dominate the residential streets.



Figure 2.9 Old Manassas High School Abandoned. (Image owned by Commercial Appeal.) Photo by Dave Darnell



Figure 2.10 Derelict Apartments. Photo by Neil Parrish

The area is also immensely polarized. While new Chicago is predominantly black, poor, crime-ridden and suffers from high rates of unemployment, less than one mile to the West, the Mud island community is a predominantly white, gentrified enclave of downtown that enjoys low rates of crime and unemployment. Despite their proximity, there is surprisingly little cultural or physical overlap between the two, with residents shopping at different stores, using different routes to commute, and different public spaces for recreation.

The public space between the two neighborhoods is also very different. A beautiful park stretches down the entire length of Mud Island, offering residents a well-policed and lit space from which they can take in unobstructed views of downtown and the Mississippi River. By contrast, the few public parks



Figure 2.11 Racial Demographic (Diagram by Neil Parrish)

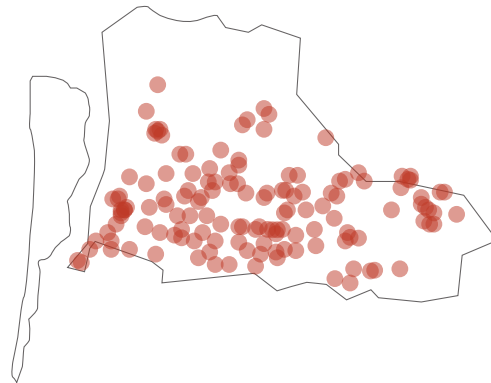


Figure 2.12 Crimes Jan-Feb 2011 (Diagram by Neil Parrish)

in New Chicago, though widely used by the community, are often littered with trash and dominated by any one of the area's multiple adolescent groups and gangs. This has caused public spaces in New Chicago to be precariously balanced between places of recreation and crime. A brief account of the same space on two different days should suffice to convey this dual nature.



Figure 2.13 Mud Island Photo by Neil Parrish



Figure 2.14 Empty Lot in N. Memphis Photo by Neil Parrish

Every one of the four or five time I have visited New Chicago, I have spent the majority of my time at a ministry located within site of the local middle school and community center. And every time I have been there, the public space between the two has been alive with children and young adults, either playing outside or on their way to the gym, basketballs in hand. On a different day, however, much like the ones when I visited, a social worker in that same ministry told me how she got a panicked phone call from a friend in the community who told her to get on the floor immediately. A few minutes later, while huddling on the floor as she was instructed, the woman heard the sound of gunshots erupt outside the community center. She found out later that a few members of a local gang (headed by the sons of the woman who called) had decided to take revenge on another gang who were playing basketball outside the center.

Crime here is cultural. This is not to say that all residents in New Chicago participate in criminal acts, for they certainly do not, but rather to point to the fact that the pervasiveness and influence of crime on the community cannot be overstated. Anyone, crack heads, shop-keepers, children, or ministers, anyone can tell you where to score some drugs, which streets to avoid, and

who is in charge of a given area. As a result, criminal activity often influences even the most positive elements of the community. One man told me how his minister won't let certain people in the congregation tithe, because he knows the money is coming from drugs. Similarly, volunteers with another ministry described how they had to be careful what they gave kids at the annual middle-school Christmas party for fear they would be mugged by older teenage children on their way home.

Moreover, how to navigate these networks -- to move drugs or interface with the right people if and when you need some money are viewed as "*skills*." Like any skill, this information is passed between generations through a combination of role modeling, enculturation, and practice. Poverty, high-unemployment, and little job training reinforce for residents on a daily basis the need to use any skills to which they have access, including street skills, just to get by. The neighborhood's median household income, for example, is only \$25,022 compared to an average of \$43,614 for Tennessee and \$52,029 for the entire US.



Figure 2.15 Household Income (Diagram by Neil Parrish)

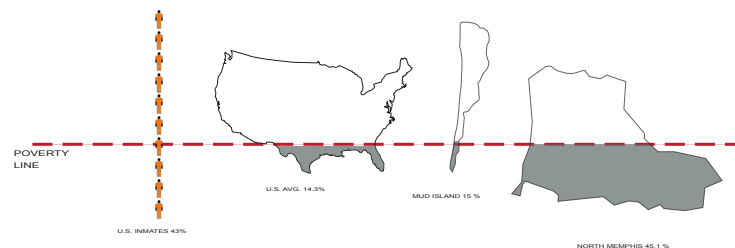


Figure 2.16 Percent of Population Below Poverty Line (Diagram by Neil Parrish)

One member of the community, a former drug dealer who went clean after being shot and having his first son, explained to me how being poor makes it difficult to resist crime: "After I got out of the shower this morning, I was sitting on my bed thinking how am I gonna get some money. And I thought about how before I would call and get some drugs to sell. I know I am not going to do that anymore, but I still need some money and I still know all those guys. I mean I could call somebody and be selling in 5 minutes."

Among the many outcomes of this combination of poverty and crime, the most powerful, and often most overlooked, is the development of an alternate set of cultural norms. The normal factors that act as the backdrop against which law-abiding members of the Memphis community evaluate their actions to be appropriate or inappropriate do not maintain the same function in the street culture of North Memphis. Over time, the social taboos against violence, murder, child pregnancy, drug-use, and homelessness have broken down one by one resulting in a new definition of normal to emerge in the community that completely relocates the baseline against which behavior is evaluated. "Going to jail just isn't seen as a problem," one man explained, "if you get caught, you go to jail and unless you are snitching, people 'll throw you a party when you get out." In these instances, it is equally amazing and appalling the extremes to which humans will allow their social milieu to devolve and still function as a community.

The division and isolation between the two cultures that results lends itself to corresponding delineations between insiders and outsiders. To use my own case as an example, from my perspective as a white suburban kid with the distinct look of naivete, I found the streets in North Memphis immensely frightening to the point I did not feel comfortable walking and even sometimes driving alone. To be sure, while an element of this fear is grounded in the bias inherent in my perception, a significant element is also grounded in reality. When speaking to a local social worker, I told her about feeling afraid to even drive on some of the streets, she looked at me and sternly replied, "On the streets where you feel afraid, you probably should be. I have been working here for 15 years and there are still streets I don't feel comfortable walking on." From the perspective of people within the community, however, because I am a young white man, I was almost always viewed as either a police officer, or if my project was discussed, as a developer. Either way, in their eyes I was a threat to the community. As an outsider, it comes as no surprise that I wouldn't be trusted at first sight, but the fact that this distrust is associated with the roles of the police and outside economic forces in particular is revelatory of the way in which external efforts to help are often perceived hostilely by members of

the community.

The weight of this hostility when combined with the frustrations inherent in trying to align two different value systems can be overwhelming for outsiders. Yet, this is the gauntlet through which all proposed solutions must pass.

Luckily, New Chicago, and other neighborhoods like it, are not without sizeable cultural and architectural resources of their own for combatting crime and helping regenerate the physical and social fabric of the neighborhood. Among these resources are churches and faith-groups, close-knit families, historical buildings, a vibrant street life, and a wealth of open space. It is of no small significance that many of these resources are among the factors that architects consider essential to a properly-functioning neighborhood or city. But if these elements are already present in the area, the question then becomes, what factors are conspiring to impede these resources from providing a more stable foundation for community? In response, it is the goal of the succeeding sections first to analyze these impediments, particularly as they relate to incarceration, and second, to suggest possible architectural and programmatic solutions, that might allow the community not only to develop new resources but also to take better advantage of the those already in its possession.

the US also incarcerates a higher percentage of its citizens than any other country in the world. In 2006, for example, the US incarceration rate, a ratio of people imprisoned per 100,000 citizens, was 738 (Hartney, 2-3; West, 2). For a brief time in 2008 that number rose to over 1,000, before declining again in recent years (Liptak, 1-2). That is, over one percent of all US citizens were imprisoned in 2008 – a staggering figure by any account.

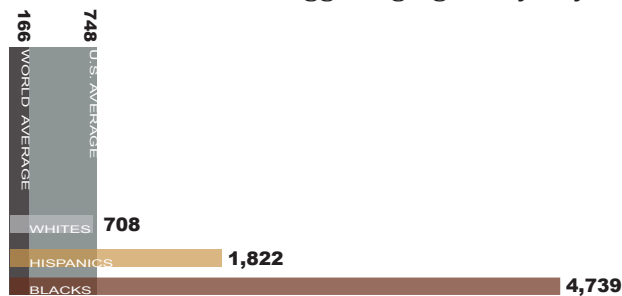


Figure 3.2 INCARCERATION RATE per 100,000 Citizens
(Diagram by Neil Parrish)

The average incarceration rate (IR) throughout the world, by contrast, is just 166 (Hartney, 2-3). Member states of the European Union do better still, with an average IR of 135 (ibid). But among the US' closest allies and countries, those with whom it most often compares itself in regards to questions of fairness, justice, and human rights, namely Japan, Germany, the UK, France, Italy, and Canada, the average IR is only 96 (ibid). Even states the US considers corrupt or sponsors of terrorism maintain much lower rates of incarceration. The average IR in Iran and Iraq, for example, is 133, while Rwanda's is 152 (ibid). Further, of the "nations noted by Amnesty International as having some of the most urgent human rights abuse issues" such as Uzbekistan, Iraq, Myanmar, and Sudan, the rate of incarceration is only 100 (ibid). Only the Soviet Gulag following World War II, with an estimated IR of 823, surpasses the current incarceration rate in the US (ibid).

Even more striking still is that the US's high rate of incarceration has not lead to a significant reduction in the rate of crime (Hartney, 5). Although American crime rates have decreased steadily since 1991, the US still has rates of property and nonviolent crime similar

The average incarceration rate (IR) throughout the world, by contrast, is just 166 (Hartney, 2-3). Member states of the European Union do better still, with an average IR of 135 (ibid). But among the

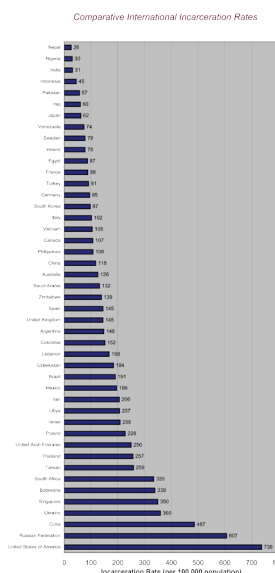


Figure 3.3 International Survey of I.R.
(Diagram by Neil Parrish)

to those of other industrialized nations (Mauer, 4). When it comes to violent crime, on the other hand, the US continues to suffer from far higher rates than those in Western Europe (ibid).ⁱ In 2004, for example, the rate of intentional homicides in the US was 5.5 compared to a rate of 1.5 in Western and Central Europe (Wikipedia, intentional homicide).

The number of criminals entering the criminal justice system in the United States is dwarfed only by the number of former criminals returning to jail. In Tennessee, for example, the recidivism rate for inmates during their first year of release from Tennessee Department of Corrections facilities is 28.8% (Karpos). If expanded to include the second and third year after release, however, the rates climb to 55.2% and 67.2% respectively (ibid). After the fourth year, over 80% will have returned to prison (ibid). Thus, among the many factors that contribute to a person's likelihood of becoming incarcerated, whether or not he or she has done time previously is among the most influential and likely predictors of future imprisonment.

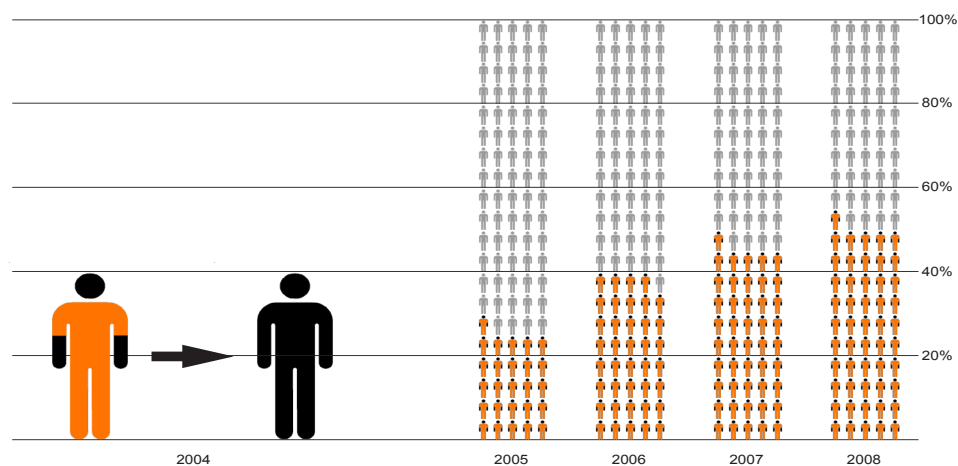


Figure 3.4 Recidivism Rates for Tennessee 2004-08 (Diagram by Neil Parrish)

ⁱ Due to discrepancies in reporting procedures and policies about which criminal activities amount to “violent” acts of crime, it is incredibly difficult to compare the violent crime rates of different countries. Nonetheless, the International Criminal Victimization Survey, though publishing only sporadically by the United Nations, does offer significant opportunities to compare rates of property crime and assault. (Hartney, 5; Mauer, 4; Van Dyck et al)

Race and socioeconomic class play a particularly large role in US patterns of crime and incarceration. In 2009, for example, while the incarceration rate for all US residents was 748, and 708 for white, non-Hispanic males in particular, it was a staggering 4,739 for black non-Hispanic males and 1,822 for Hispanic males (West, 2). Thus, black men were over six and a half times and Hispanic men two and a half times as likely to be incarcerated as their white counterparts (ibid). Moreover, unlike the national rate of incarceration, which has decreased slightly in recent years, these trends have only intensified over time.



Figure 3.5 Likelihood of Incarceration (Diagram by Neil Parrish)

In addition to racial factors, socioeconomic characteristics are also deeply interwoven with US incarceration patterns, and, therefore, with crime. Despite the US Department of Justice's unfortunate failure to monitor data regarding the socioeconomic status of criminals prior to arrest, criminologists and sociologists have documented a marked correlation between poverty and high rates of crime in urban areas. But contrary to popular belief, this relationship is neither simple, nor linear. While the majority of inmates do

come from low-income households, poverty alone has not been conclusively shown to lead to subsequent increases crime (DeFina and Hannon, 3;Jonsson, 1). The current recession offers the best example of this disconnect, for despite a rise in the number of Americans considered poor to 15%, crime rates across the US have continued to trend downward (ibid).

One aspect of the relationship between crime and poverty that has been conclusively demonstrated is incarceration's marked effect in *creating* and *perpetuating* cycles of poverty. As DeFina and Hanon argue, the current trends in mass incarceration have caused an ensuing increase in poverty "through the

removal of primary earners from low-income families, as well as constraints placed on the employment and earnings of the previously incarcerated” (2009, 3). They go on to suggest that because inmates are not counted in current studies of poverty, prison communities might actually make the problem of national poverty seem better than it actually is (ibid).

Over time, the financial and social disadvantages to which current and former inmates, as well as their families, are subject have become concentrated in certain communities. Higher rates of imprisonment among racial minorities have caused these disadvantages to accumulate in minority communities with far greater intensity and frequency than elsewhere. Nevertheless, because these impediments are the result of disruption at the most structural levels of community, they can and do affect communities of all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. As will be examined in the following section, the structural impediments reinforced and caused by high rates of incarceration can help facilitate an environment in which crime is more likely to occur.

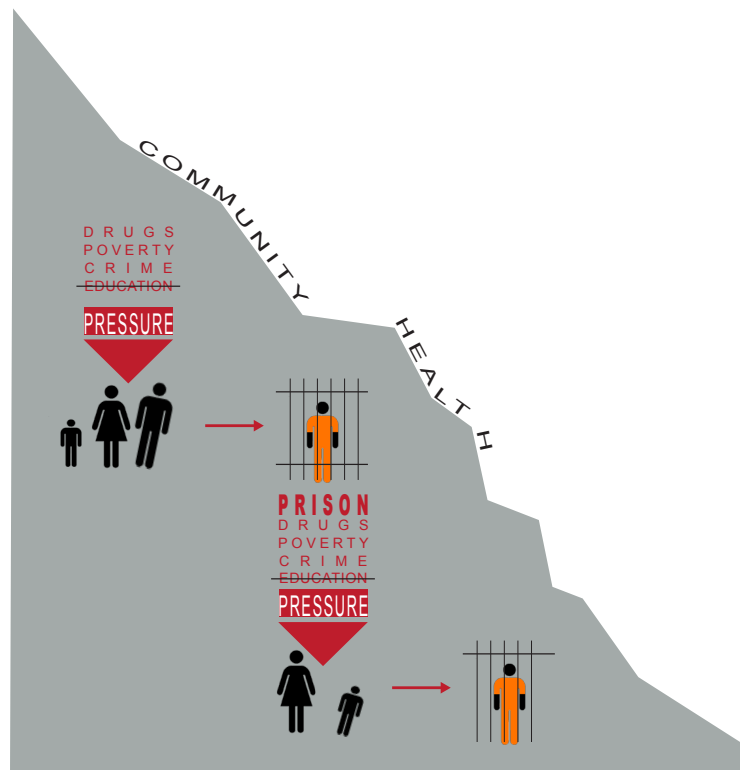


Figure 3.6 Affect of Incarceration on the Community
(Diagram by Neil Parrish)

IV. Disorder, Crime, and Community



Figure 4.1 Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *Carceri* (Image Owner: British Museum)

Introduction

The problems of incarceration and crime in the United States are thoroughly entwined with the health and order of local communities. Consequently, high rates of imprisonment have unintentionally contributed to the erosion of informal systems of order and community maintenance on which local communities depend. While these deleterious effects can have affected all levels of American society, they are most concentrated in minority and economically underprivileged urban communities that, not coincidentally, also suffer from far higher rates of crime and imprisonment. A negative feedback loop emerges from this process through which communities are put under increasing amounts of stress as more and more people become incarcerated. The goal of this section of my argument is therefore to look at the particular ways in which this feedback loop affects order and crime in urban communities, to provide a firm foundation upon which to build the suggestions for an architectural solu-

tion.

Social Disorganization and Broken Windows

The relationship of community health to disorder and crime has its roots in a much broader discussion regarding the impact of the physical and cultural environment on individual behavior. Over the last century, this discussion has been articulated most clearly through the ideas of Social Disorganization theory and its more recent offshoot “Broken Windows” theory. Taken together, these two theories have cast a great deal of light on the question of community order and how it is perceived, participated in, and maintained by individuals both from within and outside a given community. Though often viewed as competing, theorists from both camps agree that community health at a civic level is deeply enmeshed with the presence and perception of order at the environmental level across multiple scales of interaction.

Social Disorganization Theory grew out of work in the 1920’s by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki regarding the “process of acculturation” by which a “person’s thinking processes and attitudes are constructed by the interaction between that person’s situation and his or her behavior”(wikipedia, Soc, Disorganization). This idea was later applied to communities within cities in particular by Robert Ezra Park and Ernest W. Burgess, who, in their work The City, “proposed that cities are environments like those found in nature, governed by many of the same forces of Darwinian evolution, i.e. competition, that affects natural ecosystems” (ibid).

Edwin Sutherland, Ruth Shonle Cavan, and other members of the Chicago School were among the first and most influential in linking initial insights about the relationship of individuals to community networks to “community level” questions about “ecology and crime” (ibid; Sampson and Wilson, 39). Building on this idea, in their work, Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay “argued that three structural factors – low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility – led to the disruption of local community social organization, which in turn accounted

for variations in crime and delinquency rates” (ibid). Furthermore, they discovered that “high rates of delinquency persisted in certain areas over many years, regardless of population turnover” (ibid). This caused them to go beyond “individualistic explanations of delinquency and focus instead on the processes by which delinquent and criminal patterns of behavior were transmitted across generations in areas of social disorganization and weak social controls” (ibid). Shaw and McKay’s reframing of crime as a function of order at the community, rather than individual, level led to a cascade of theoretical and empirical studies regarding the factors influencing community disorder and the erosion of internal social controls that continue to the present.

Broken Windows theory first emerged in response to questions within social disorganization theory about the causal relationship of disorder and crime (Kelling and Wilson, 1). In their article “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety,” George Kelling and James Wilson suggested for the first time that environmental and interpersonal disorder within a community, if tolerated, could lead to a subsequent escalation of disorder, ultimately resulting in the degradation of community life and the ascension of crime (Ibid, 2). Therefore, if a community wished to address the underlying causes of crime, Wilson and Kelling argue they must first address the environmental sources of disorder.

Wilson and Kelling postulated that this “developmental sequence” was linked to the presence of a tacitly agreed upon level of order, governed by “informal controls” within a given community (Ibid, 3). The degree to which this informal system of order was maintained would determine the relative health of the community and its susceptibility to the diseases of disorder and crime. According to Wilson and Kelling, equally important to the actual functioning of this system was the citizens’ *perception* of its functioning, that is, whether or not they believed the community to be ordered and healthy. Therefore, efforts to reduce crime or clean up the streets in a particularly problematic area of a community may fail to achieve the desired long-term effects on community health and order if they are not communicated to local residents in an effective manner.

The most striking aspect of Wilson and Kelling's argument, however, was their suggestion that the *physical*, as well as the cultural, elements of a community were central to both the establishment and perception of order by its inhabitants. Indeed, so powerful was the linkage between civic and environmental order, that Wilson and Kelling named their theory after what they viewed as a perennial physical symbol of disorder in both – the Broken Window. As they explain:

Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken *and is left unrepaired*, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighborhoods as in run-down ones. Window breaking does not necessarily occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window-breakers whereas others are populated by window-lovers; rather one unrepaired broken windows is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing. (ibid)

Thus, disorder is “contagious” (Gladwell). And because it is not only contagious, but, like order, is communicated through countless informal cues and relationships, it must be checked aggressively through informal as well as formal means.

This causal relationship, according to Wilson and Kelling, has significant practical implications for the role of the police. “The essence of the police role in maintaining order,” they suggest, “is to reinforce the informal control mechanisms of the community itself,” and thus not simply to apprehend and remove criminals (Ibid, 6). Therefore, it is necessary to reassert “order-maintenance” as a complement to “law-enforcement” as a primary function of the police (Ibid, 6). Furthermore, order-maintenance, like all informal means of community maintenance, is best achieved through face-to-face relationship. Consequently, Wilson and Kenning conclude that increased police presence on the streets, most notably in the form of foot patrols, best lends itself to this type of relationship and therefore should be encouraged over and above the use of patrol cars, which erect subtle but consequential barriers to police interaction with community members (ibid).

Since it was first published in 1982, Wilson and Kelling's conclusion, that a causal link exists between initial disorder and subsequent crime, has been the source of broad discussion and criticism. Support for their research has included numerous empirical studies, including those involving the countless new strategies for policing and community maintenance to which it gave rise (see Gau and Pratt, 759). Criticism of the Broken Windows theory, on the other hand, has tended to focus on two key areas of inquiry. The first calls into question the nature of the relationship between disorder and crime and, specifically, if such a distinction between the two can be established in the first place, while the second criticizes Broken Windows generality and failure to account for the particular cultural, socio-economic, racial, and environmental factors that contribute to order in a community (Gau and Pratt; Sampson and Wilson).

Most notable, and controversial, of the case studies in favor of Broken Windows has been New York city's effort to reduce crime during the 1980's. Recently outlined by Malcolm Gladwell in "The Tipping Point," as a hired consultant to William Bratton, New York's head of transit police, Kelling helped to usher in a series of reforms focused on the elimination of petty crime and the restoration of order on the New York City Transit system. The program combined arresting fare-dodgers, vandals, and petty thieves with aggressive train and station maintenance involving daily inspections, general repairs, and trash collection. Perhaps most important to the success of the reforms, however, was the war the city waged against graffiti. As Gladwell recounts:

Gunn made it a rule that there should be no retreat, that once a car was 'reclaimed' it should never be allowed to be vandalized again. 'We were religious about it,' Gunn said... If a car came in with graffiti, the graffiti had to be removed during the changeover, or the car was removed from service...the idea was to send an unambiguous message to the vandals themselves. (Gladwell, 143).

During the period of Kelling's consultancy, crime in New York City plummeted. Yet, there is a growing debate about the causes of this decline. While it would be easy to see the drop in crime as the unavoidable outcome of Kelling

and Bratton's reforms, as countless theorists and social commentators have pointed out, similar drops in crime occurred in other cities throughout the country that had not used any new policing protocols based on Broken Windows theory. This has given rise to a significant amount of speculation and research into potential causes for the decline that, while theoretically important and interesting, remain beyond the purview of this investigation. Nonetheless, one element common to all of the studies that does bear on the current conversation is the common understanding environmental factors such as disorder and crime *do* play a role in the maintenance of a healthy community, though researchers often disagree about which is primary or whether a community is able to perceive a difference between the two (see Gau and Pratt, 758-766).

A significant element of research in Social Disorganization and Broken Windows theory deals with the roles of race and poverty in relation to the "concentrated disadvantage" of certain communities in establishing order (Shaw and McKay; Gau and Pratt 759; Sampson and Wilson 38-9). Two of the most important voices in this debate are Robert Sampson and William Wilson, who, like Shaw and McKay before them, are interested in isolating the "macrosocial or community-level...characteristics of communities, cities, or even societies that lead to high rates of criminality" (Sampson and Wilson, 38-40). Specifically, they attempt to, "view the race and crime linkage from contextual lenses that highlight the very different ecological contexts that black and whites reside in – regardless of individual characteristics" (Ibid, 38). The result of his view is, as they state:

The basic thesis...that macrosocial patterns of residential inequality give rise to the social isolation and ecological concentration of the truly disadvantaged, which in turn leads to structural barriers and cultural adaptations that undermine social organization and hence the control of crime. This thesis is grounded in what is actually an old idea and criminology that has been overlooked in the race and crime debate – the importance of good communities. (ibid)

In practical terms this means that unhealthy communities have a negative cumulative affect on their members regardless of race or class distinctions.

When combined with larger cultural patterns of disadvantage already at work in minority and low-income communities, however, these negative effects impact residents with redoubled force. This is why, for example, high rates of unemployment among black males have led to equally high rates of “disruption” in black families, which is “substantially related to rates of black murder and robbery, especially by juveniles” (Ibid). To be totally clear, this is not to say that *being* a minority makes a person more likely to commit crime. Rather, it merely points to the fact that the structural disadvantages that can lead to criminal behavior afflict poor minority communities with far greater regularity than equally poor white communities (ibid, 43-6). Moreover, residual disadvantage and lack of opportunity of this sort accumulates in communities over time to create feedback loops that are incredibly difficult to break.

Another such cycle, as has already been mentioned, is the role of incarceration in creating and perpetuating urban poverty. Here too, the problem is multi-generational. Inmates not only lose the ability to earn money for themselves, but for their families as well (Defina and Hannon, 2010, 390). As a result, high rates of incarceration among adults in a given area often leads to still higher levels of poverty among children (ibid). In turn, high rates of childhood poverty, when combined with other “concentration effects,” such as hindered access to “jobs and job networks, involvement in quality schools, availability of marriageable partners, and exposure to conventional role models,” as well as countless others, lead to the destabilization of order in the community, which leads to juvenile crime, which leads to poverty and so on.

To conclude, the US’s current patterns of incarceration have led to numerous and sustained negative consequences for communities in general, and impoverished or minority communities in particular. The source of these deleterious effects has been the diminishment of informal controls at the community level, which rely on physical as well as social cues to communicate a sense of order. Although such informal mechanisms of community maintenance are shaped by any number of factors, the collateral damage of incarceration only intensifies their most negative effects, thereby reinforcing regressive patterns of crime and the further devolution of community.

A Role for Architecture

While Social Disorganization and Broken Windows theories have been widely adapted to help at risk communities avoid self-reinforcing patterns of disorder and crime, communities that have already passed these fatal “tipping points” have proved immensely difficult to help. In these more extreme cases, policing, educational, urban renewal, and community action oriented initiatives have each had to walk a thin line between naïveté and blind support, on the one hand, and paternalism and coercion on the other. Combined with the little to no attention that such communities receive in literature on the subject, confusion about the best course of action has abounded. A history of piecemeal solutions, punctuated by large amounts of displacement, disenfranchisement, and disappointment has been the result.

Architecture, I believe, has the ability to integrate these myriad interests and succeed where previous efforts have failed. This is because architecture involves both a physical and programmatic component. Just as the integration of these two components is necessary in the successful functioning of a given building, so too is it essential in the establishment and maintenance of healthy communities. The problems of crime, as I have attempted to show, involve difficult questions about the establishment and conveyance of order in a community, which is, I contend, a fundamentally architectural task.

Building or rebuilding in a community defined by disorder, violence and crime offers a significant break in the physical fabric and history of the community that can lead to additional breaks at the social and cultural levels. Good design of specific buildings and neighborhoods can therefore help to combat disorder by providing better conditions for civic participation and self-monitoring to occur. But this is not the most significant promise architecture holds. Architecture is a function of making, and thus is an inherently optimistic act. If done in relationship to the community, architecture opens a space for conversations about a new future for the community to occur. Such conversations are key to reestablishing both the presence and perception of order.

In this respect, architecture is unique in its ability to act as both a catalyst and symbol of shared community value and history. Here too, if well practiced, architecture can help guard against the sizeable pitfall of patriarchy inherent in such conversations. Because while it is entirely appropriate and necessary for outside forces to help reestablish these values in communities overrun with crime, the historical strains of civic structure within the communities themselves being frayed and worn, the gesture from without must merely be an invitation for conversation to those within.

Previous strategies have ignored the need for both physical and programmatic components to their detriment. Policing and education strategies are most often applied *to* a community from outside and therefore lack a substantive physical presence in the fabric of the community itself. Urban renewal and housing schemes, by contrast, make the opposite error by focusing overmuch on the bricks and mortar of a community, while ignoring its cultural realities – particularly if they are unpleasant. Both suffer from a more egregious, interpersonal detachment however, for the decision-making bodies in each are almost always located outside the communities they seek to help. Finally, community action and faith-based initiatives, though they are often closely integrated into the community, involve an implicit ultimatum without either accompanying mechanisms for enforcement or multiple paths to compliance.

Architecture, then, possesses the ability not only to help maintain order in communities where it already exists, but, more importantly, reestablish order in places where it has long ceased to define community life. If seen as an opportunity for dialogue and combined with the right program, such as one that emphasizes vocational work and personal skill, it can be used as a catalyst for the development of individual pride and civic engagement at the personal level as well as order and beauty at the community level.

V. Incarceration's Purposes and Failures: Isolation, Rehabilitation, and Deterrence



Figure 5.1 Shelby Co. Penal Farm
(Image Owner: Memphis Library)

Plato argued that criminals and the practices of punishment applied to them can be divided into two primary categories – those who can be rehabilitated and those who cannot. Of this division, Plato remarks:

Now the proper office of all punishment is twofold: he who is rightly punished out either to become better and profit by, or he ought to be made example to his fellows, that they may see what he suffers, and fear to suffer the like, and become better. (Gorgias, 525 A-B; Peters, 5)

Thus, for the former, punishment is to serve as a catalyst for rehabilitation and a strict caution against further infractions. For the latter, by contrast, punishment is meant to serve the broader society by acting as a deterrent for other citizens and by dispatching the transgressor to the afterlife, where the gods will take over his punishment (ibid). Although the argument for personal reformation didn't take root until the Middle Ages, the understanding of punishment as a means of deterrence has been widely accepted from Plato's time to the present (ibid). Before the modern period, however, deterrence most often meant retribution and torture.

The single-most influential thinker and theorist on the subject of torture and imprisonment is Michel Foucault. In his seminal work, Discipline and

Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault analyses the shift in practices of torture, punishment, and imprisonment from ancient to modern, in light of what they reveal about economies of power, justice, and social relationship. Of the countless insights this sweeping work presents, its clear depiction of punishment as a function and therefore reflection of the cultural values that form and maintain the economy of community is the most pertinent to the present investigation.

In the modern world, places of incarceration and imprisonment are most often defended for much the same reasons as those proffered by Plato. Prisons, it is argued, serve the health and proper function of society by acting as places of isolation, rehabilitation, and deterrence. Regardless of their specific function or program, all places of incarceration appear to seek justification under one or more of these reasons. Thus, in seeking to evaluate the role instruments of incarceration play in society it is necessary first to examine the reasons for which places of incarceration are said to exist, in order to have a base against which the actual function of places of incarceration can be evaluated.

The first and perhaps most tacit reason for which prisons exist is for the purpose of isolation. According to this line of thought, in order to protect society and the law-abiding citizens that comprise it, a place must be provided to which non-law-abiding citizens can be removed. By providing a place where the dysfunctional members of a community can be isolated, prisons allow communities to insulate themselves from the contagion of criminal behavior and thereby increase the ability of law-abiding citizens to flourish.

This idea of isolation is most easily understood by way of comparison with surgical procedures to treat cancer. In order for the body at large to remain healthy, cancerous cells must be found and removed. The removal of these diseased cells will both allow the healthy cells to flourish as well as prevent the future spread of contagion from the cancerous cells to the rest of the body. In both the case of the prison and the body, the act of isolation is viewed as a painful, yet utterly necessary procedure upon which healthy life depends.

In this respect, prisons ideally provide a parallel, if restricted, culture

to that of the wider community, where the behavioral and cultural norms of the law-abiding populace are asserted with renewed force and poignancy. The combined forces of stigmatization and incarceration that is delivered through a sentence of imprisonment are intended to provide sufficient catharsis for a prisoner to accept his or her error and willingly engage in the process of personal reinvention. Thus, at its base, prison is conceived of as a place of profound education and rehabilitation, where bad habits of experience or chance can be unlearned, flawed moralities reconsidered, and one's debt to the civic virtue of community can be repaid.

Unfortunately for both inmates and communities, prisons in the United States fail to achieve the requisite foundation of isolation. The prison community, by and large, is not a more restricted segment of the broader, healthy segment of society. In actual fact, the entire prison system as well as the community it spawns, functions instead as an extension of the very street culture that it is purported to be working against. When interviewing members of the North Memphis community about their experience of prisons, everyone from ex-cons and drug dealers to community organizers and ministers emphatically described to me how powerful word of mouth communication systems and contraband cell-phones cause prisons and state penitentiaries to be merely an extension of life on the streets. Complete with equal amounts of violence, drugs, gang affiliation, intimidation, and sexual assault, prison offers little difference from the lives offenders leave behind.

The second purported goal of prisons is rehabilitation. Bound to the first goal of isolation, to be successful the act of rehabilitation requires a certain distance from the community for at least two reasons. First, the prisoner must be removed from the culture of crime in order to be given the greatest chance to clear his or her mind and start anew. Second, since the prisoner is still understood to be an element of criminal culture until the process of reeducation is concluded, he or she must also be kept isolated for the protection of the law-abiding community. Further, by reinforcing the social stigma of crime, separation and isolation from the civic community is meant to create not only the space but also the desire for rehabilitation to occur on the part of

the prisoner.

The failure of the prison system to achieve a degree of isolation, however, as well as lack of sufficient incentives to engage in programming, has led to a consequent failure in regards to rehabilitation. In fact, most people I spoke with in North Memphis indicated that prison actually made the situation worse by acting as “school for criminals” (C. Interview, 10.13.10). “If they don’t go in with a gorilla mentality,” said one man I interviewed, “they are going to come out with that mentality.” Another man, who had done several stints for drugs and assault in the Shelby County Jail known as 201, said “you go in knowing something and once you are there you talk to somebody else who knows a little more and you better your skills” as a criminal (G. Interview, 10.13.10). A local minister explained the situation this way, “If you are not cliqued up with a gang when you go to prison, you are going to clique up when you get there. You just have to do something to survive”(K, 10.14.10)

Many of the ex-cons with whom I spoke pointed to the mixing of offenders with vastly different crimes as a primary source for the chaos. Anyone arrested on a simple drug possession charge, for example, could be kept in a holding cell or placed on an elevator with another convict serving time for multiple homicides. The level of fear and intimidation that results from this mixing contributes to the creation of strict hierarchies and allegiances that mirror and are tied into those of gang culture throughout Memphis. Thus, otherwise non-violent criminals are forced to change their behavior in order not to become the target of violence and intimidation themselves. In legal terms, his change amounts to a potential shift from property or drug-related crime to violent crime. In moral and psychological terms, it means a deliberate personal shift toward violence. According to former inmates, this is particularly true when moving from the Shelby Co. jail to the state penitentiary where a completely different hierarchy with its own unique levels of intensity is at work.

The obvious denial of freedom and choice inherent in the processes of isolation and rehabilitation is intended to fulfill incarceration’s final goal of acting as a deterrent to crime. Just as in the case of Plato’s rhetorical criminals, imprisonment today has an individual and social component. For free citizens,

the incarceration of others is meant to act as a reminder to stay within the confines of the law, while for inmates, it is meant to offer a harsh backdrop against which future temptations to break the law can be judged.

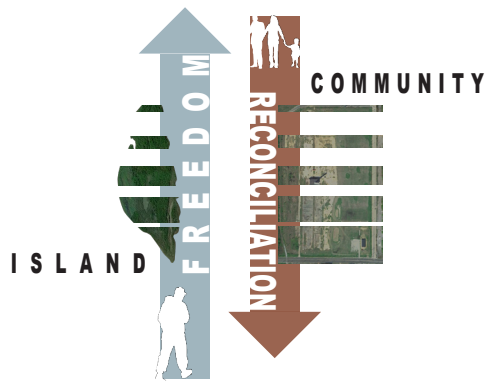
Due to the shortcomings of prisoner isolation and rehabilitation, however, prisons also fail as deterrents for people submersed in cultures of crime. While they certainly act as instruments of deterrence for the majority of people already operating within the law, they do not appear to offer sufficient disincentive to break cycles of criminal behavior once established in a given community. One man, for example, explained to me that for \$20,000 he would willingly “go lay down” (i.e. go to prison) for three or four years (G. Interview, 10.13.10)! When I then asked him what he thought would serve as a deterrent, he shrugged his shoulders and said, “the death penalty I guess” (ibid). Much like negative political advertising, which everyone purports to hate, but is nonetheless affected by, studies have shown that executions have little to no affect on deterrence and crime reduction (Radelet and Lacock, 2009 in DPIC).

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this information. First, the prison population is in no way isolated from the culture of crime and therefore is of no less a threat, and in actual fact might be of greater threat, to the law-abiding community and the rule of law by which it is maintained than he or she was prior to prison. Second, due to the proximity of prison culture to street culture, the process of re-educating prisoners towards more civic-minded behaviors is impeded by a valorization, rather than a stigmatization of illegal behavior. Third, as a consequence of this valorization and the culture of violence to which it leads, the catharsis inmates often experience in prison is not between the legal and illegal as intended, but rather between criminal behavior and worse criminal behavior.

Thus, our current system of incarceration in the United States fails to achieve any of the purposes for which it was conceived – isolation, rehabilitation, or deterrence. The causes of this failure are rooted in the near universal misunderstanding that prisons are punitive and rehabilitative agents of mainstream culture, when in fact they function as extensions of street culture and the plethora of criminal behavior it inspires. A second, although often over-

looked, cause is the belief that all criminals are the same, when in fact their behavior and values are far more likely to be similar after, rather than before their time in prison. These misunderstandings have led to corresponding shortfalls in prison design, particularly in regards to program, scale, and context. In light of these many failures, the prison and its relationship to community must be entirely reconceived.

VI. A Way Forward



**Figure 6.1 Concept Diagram: Personal Freedom/
Community Reconciliation (Diagram by Neil Parrish)**

To find the suitable punishment for a crime is to find the disadvantage whose idea is such that it robs forever the idea of a crime of any attraction. It is an art of conflicting energies, an art of images linked by association, the forging of stable connections that defy time: it is a matter of establishing the representative pairs of opposing values, of establishing quantitative differences between the opposing forces, of setting up a complex of obstacle-signs that may subject the movement of the forces to a power relation.

Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 104

Introduction

When asked about his goals for the New Chicago community, Cornelius Sanders, director of the local Community Development Corps (CDC), leaned back in his chair and pointed at a quote written in marker on a large easel that read,

Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city will be filled with boys and girls playing there. (Zechariah, 8:4-5)

“That is what I want. My goal is to make it so there is life here again; that this will be a community where people will want to come back to and raise their children.”

Prisons, I believe, have the ability to help create this kind of change in a community, particularly, if as in the case of New Chicago, it has become defined by a culture of crime. The source of a prison’s power to help a community is the same as its power to harm a community, namely, the immense and accumulating influence it exerts on inmates as well as the families and communities from which they come. If viewed simply as a force, rather than an inherently negative force, prisons and the system of criminal justice they embody can, and I argue should, be reconceived with the health of the community as their primary focus. If reconceived as instruments of prisoner rehabilitation and community health, prisons can begin to reverse the cycle of crime they have helped to create.

This kind of redefinition will demand fundamental changes at the physical and programmatic levels in prisons. In terms of design, this means that prisons need to be redesigned at much smaller scales, divided into components based on a prisoner’s place in the process of rehabilitation and not offense, and be strongly connected back to the community. In regards to program, the entire prison experience should be aimed at a linear progression leading to the total rehabilitation of the prisoner.

The key to this process is rehabilitating the prisoner and the community at the same time so that any feedback loops that do occur will be positive rather than negative. A major factor in prisoner recidivism today is a lack of sufficient support programs in the community after release. Therefore, by further intertwining the final stages of prisoner rehabilitation and reintroduction to the community the sudden shock and lack of structure that often leads former inmates to return to a life of crime can be avoided. Furthermore, binding the goals of incarceration with those of community development draws attention to the need to use incarceration as an opportunity for prisoner rehabilitation instead of as the blunt tool of punishment alone. Rehabilitation, in this sense, means getting a person whatever vocational, psychological, social, or any oth-

er kind of skills he or she needs to return to and live in the free world without dependency on either the system or a life of crime. Jim Kennedy, founder of Economic Opportunity Ministries, a non-profit organization in Memphis with a 20 year history of doing just that, explains it this way, "Reentry has to start the day they are arrested, because 99% of the time, no matter what they did, they are coming back out."

To be sure such a program is not without risk and that is why choice is paramount. Neither coercion, nor intimidation, nor even compulsion are able to initiate the kind of change choice is able to achieve in a person. For, in its simplest terms, what this and every other program aimed at rehabilitation is asking participants to do is choose to change themselves. Since most former inmates I spoke with did not see crime as a matter of choice, the first and most important role a place of rehabilitation must fulfill is to show criminal behavior to be just that. At a large scale this happens by making communities better and prisons harsher so that the difference between the two is more apparent. At the scale of the individual, the most powerful way to help someone to begin this process, particularly if they are accustomed to having little to no choice over their lives, is to make rehabilitation itself a matter of choice. Although this will cause change to start slowly, over time it will employ the same processes of self-selection, word of mouth, and hierarchy that define life on the streets to create a tipping point in the direction of rehabilitation. These steps will not only make the prisons' internal functions more efficient, but will also strengthen the prison's penal and rehabilitative roles in the community by casting in the starkest relief possible the choice between crime and culture; individual and community; a future of life and a present and past of death.

Pre-Design Proposal

In the interest of choice, I am proposing to construct two facilities in North Memphis: one defined by choice and protection and the other by restriction and exposure. Both will be mediated by a wall that, in the former, will serve to protect the inmates from the community, and, in the latter, will protect the community from the inmates. Though connected only visually, the two

components will function as opposing ends to the same linear progression of prisoner rehabilitation and community redevelopment.

The restricted facility will be sited on an island near the western shore of the Mississippi river.



Figure 6.2 Loosahatchie Bar, Memphis, TN. Photo by Neil Parrish

A low-lying and tree-covered space, the island is exposed to flooding from the North, storms from the South, views from the South and East, and wind from all directions. Contrary to numerous historical prisons exemplified by Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, that sought to restrict prisoners' view in the interest of denying their access to the outside world, I propose to embrace the island's raw exposure (Johnston). By bringing criminals, and by implication crime, into the light and by allowing them to look out on a world they are no longer allowed to inhabit, I hope to heighten the separation and resulting desire for reconnection that prisoners feel. This denial will be reinforced in section, by suspending the prisoners off the ground. The goal is not to torture. Quite to the contrary, it is to use something positive — the love of home, family, and community — as a catalyst to encourage prisoners to begin the process of change so that they can get back to their families far quicker and in a more positive way than would otherwise be possible.

As a hard backdrop for choice, the ethos of the facility will be stern and will be communicated both in the physical and programmatic elements of the architecture. Since the program is the first part of a larger sequence of rehabilitation, entry, movement, and exit will take on an even more important role than they do in other prison facilities. The simplest way this different will be highlighted is by putting entry and exit in different locations. The notion of

progression will govern their as well as the cell layout, which will reward progress through the program with slight changes in location and amenity. However, all prisoners will start in the same place and end in the same place.

A staged process of vocational and educational training will dominate the work day. Welding, sorting recyclable metals for sale, packing sandbags for levy control along the Mississippi are all possible tasks in which inmates may be engaged. It is not important for these tasks to offer high level training in any one area, but to make prisoners want to engage in such training later by demonstrating that prison is far more difficult and less rewarding.

Given the nature of the site constraints, particularly in regards to flooding, and the expressed goals of exposure and denial of contact, possible materials might include a metal frame system for the cells and prisoner spaces and more massive materials for the guard and personnel spaces. A contrast of materials between prisoner components and non-prisoner components would serve to further heighten the distinction I am attempting to make. However, each of the material components and spaces, regardless of their perceived differences are aimed at the single goal of encouraging a prisoner to pursue admittance to the other facility.

The more open facility will be placed inside the New Chicago community itself, on the same site formerly occupied by the Fisher Tire Plant. In addition to its clear historical and metaphorical significance as the previous source of employment and life for much of the community, this site is ideal for the community based facility because it sits at an intersection of views between the newly remodeled grade school and the more restrictive facility. The intent is that prisoners moving to this second facility will see the choice between their past and a future for their children clearly through architecture. Moreover, because the second facility will be designed both in its initial configuration as a place for prisoner rehabilitation and again as a town center after the community begins to be rebuilt, its primary concern will be shelter and protection, for the inmates and the community itself. As such, it will seek to draw on the natural beauty of the land and serenity of the Wolf River to the North. Physically this will mean a more massive structure that is figuratively and liter-

ally rooted in the community. Part walled garden, part working monastery, life will emanate from its center.



Figure 6.3 Firestone Site as it Exists Today
Photo by Neil Parrish

The program will work to reinforce this understanding of the space by fusing vocational and educational training around a shared understanding of work, craftsmanship, and vocation. Specifically, participants in the program will take part in either a building or landscaping programming. The landscaping program will grow, plant, and distribute greenery throughout the immediate neighborhoods and the rest of the city, while the building program will work to disassemble abandoned buildings, clear vacant lots, and begin to rebuild houses, businesses, and community structures at the scale of the residential community. The guiding principle in this respect will be to use former criminals to alleviate the environmental sources of crime in the community and conversely, to use the environmental sources of crime in the community as an opportunity to train former criminals in a vocation.

Revised Program Following Design

At root, this project offers a vision for a prison, designed for a single community in North Memphis whose primary goal is to help offenders reconcile themselves with the community they have harmed. Since reconciliation of this sort demands both a change in individuals and their relation to the community, the prison is divided into two primary components. The first is focused

on a progression of change within the individual and is therefore located amid the relative detachment and wilderness of the Loosahatchie bar, an island of eroded sediment and wetland trees in the middle of the Mississippi River. The second is focused on changing the relationship of criminals to their communities and is therefore located within the community itself on the former site of the firestone tire plant, once the single most important employer in the area.

Though distinct, the two components are interrelated pieces of a common progression that employs the separation inherent in incarceration as an opportunity to address the causes of crime both within individual criminals and the community itself. Unlike more traditional prisons that simply isolate prisoners based on security status, the levels of security in this facility are instrumentalized and made part of a progression to reflect and encourage a prisoner's preparedness to be part of the community once again. For prisoners, the progression relies on their power of choice to create positive change in their lives through a combination of isolation, education, and work in the trades. For the community, the program seeks to ameliorate the environmental components that foster crime by employing parolees to repair or remove derelict buildings, plant trees and greenery, and to construct new buildings and homes. The intended result of this process is to use prison to create positive feedback loops that help rather than harm criminals and communities, thus making crime far less likely to occur and communities healthier over all.

As noted previously, the primary reason that prisons fail in their mission to improve the life of communities is because they are designed for the sole purpose of punishment. Due to their immense scale, static architecture, and detachment from the community, prisons cultivate their own internal communities that couple the worst and most violent aspects of criminal behavior from the streets with the dehumanizing fatalism and criminal culture of imprisonment. The prison culture that results bleeds back out onto the communities from which prisoners come. Over time, the countless negative effects of this cycle unsurprisingly become concentrated in those communities whose members experience the highest rates of incarceration, thereby creating increasingly powerful negative feedback loops from which once healthy commu-

nities struggle to escape.

The deleterious effects of these cycles are particularly evident in North Memphis where decades of high crime and incarceration rates have helped erode the physical and social fabric of a community that was once among the most diverse industrial and cultural hubs of the city. Today, the factories and support buildings that once produced tires, paper, and tractors around the clock have been almost entirely abandoned or torn down. Houses built by the hands of plant workers, as well as the countless schools and businesses they patronized have suffered a similar fate. Socially, in addition to high rates of incarceration, the community has been rocked by chronic unemployment, failing schools, as well as high rates of teen pregnancy and drug use. A nearly homogeneous African American neighborhood defined by crime, violence, and xenophobia has been the result.

Architecture has played a role in both sides of this harmful equation. In prisons, it is the primary vehicle of exacting the required amount of punishment through a combination of physical isolation and psychological retribution. In communities run down by chronic poverty, disenfranchisement, and low rates of home-ownership such as Uptown and New Chicago in North Memphis, it is a tacit, yet ever present reminder of not only that the social contract has failed, but that no one cares.

Because architecture is complicit in the decline of communities, it must also be an essential component in returning them to good health. To this end, it should be used as a tool of rehabilitation and reconciliation for individuals and an enduring symbol and engine of order and social trust for communities.

For criminals in North Memphis, this process begins on the island with a period of punishment through isolation. In an effort to deny the physical, cultural, and social comforts and/or pressures that fund criminal arrogance and behavior, prisoners on the island are isolated architecturally from visual and physical access to the earth, other people, and work. The amount of isolation in each respect decreases as inmates progress through the program; an increase of freedom that is reflected more generally in the expansion of the site plan from south to north. The speed of their progression depends on both an

administrative and personal review of their progress. If an inmate wishes to take more time or not to participate, they have the freedom of choice to do so.

Inmates first arrive at the island by boat at the hanging gate, where they are placed in open-air cells that are suspended from the roof of a massive concrete frame. After being processed over a period of days, they are then moved to the solitary towers where they are again suspended high off the ground and exposed to the raw force of the Mississippi river and its surrounding landscape. New inmates are placed on the topmost floors of the towers, furthest from earth. Like all inhabitants of the towers, newcomers are provided a view only of the community they have wronged and are denied visual and physical access to all other people. While in the towers, inmates do not work, but undergo individual education and therapy for drug, alcohol, and psychological problems in a private treatment room on the lowest level.

From the towers, inmates are moved to the second phase of habitation, where they are allowed a view of one other prisoner. In this phase, inmates begin to work in silence as unskilled laborers in the cement and lumber mills on the island. Here, the personal education begun at the towers continues and is augmented by additional academic and professional training in the trades, which takes place in nearby support structures. Though prisoners have greater access to others through work, education, and meals, much of their day is still spent in silence and solitude.

In the third phase of habitation, prisoners finally rest upon the ground in small clusters of housing units arranged around the central path. Here, though inmates still live alone, they have the greatest access to each other, more specialized training, and skilled work in a foreshadowing of their pending return to the community.

Inmates who are unwilling or fail to participate in this process at any point are sent to the stasis wall. Hanging precariously from the massive concrete wall, inmates peer out over the movement and progress of others, but are unable to participate themselves. If they decide to re-involve themselves in the process, following a review, they must start their progression over at the beginning.

Upon completing the individual work of the island, inmates are transferred back to the Firestone site. To leave the island, inmates are met by a boat in the north, which carries them across the Mississippi and up the Wolf River back to the community. After disembarking the boat, they enter the site from the North. There, a process of architectural recompression begins aimed at reintroducing them in a slow and controlled way to the dense life of the community. After entering the Firestone site, inmates take on a status akin to parolees and begin to apply what they have learned personally to their relationship with the community. This process is facilitated by working in the community throughout the day either as a craftsman laboring to construct, repair, or remove homes and buildings or as an arborist growing and planting trees and other greenery. Together, these two processes aim to not only provide inmates with professional skills, but also ameliorate the environmental causes of crime in the community and reaffirm the health of the social contract.

At night all of the parolees return to protected quarters on the Firestone site. The progression of housing begun on the island continues in the community with parolees placed in four person residences that draw closer together as residents move closer to the Firestone building, the metaphorical, historic, and physical center of the site. The residences invert the island's use of suspension over the water and exposure to the natural world as instruments of punishment by seeking to employ them instead as vehicles of beauty. Located firmly on the earth, each residence has a private component set amid the trees of a small garden to which only they have access, as well as a public component that projects out into a long reservoir of water. From this more public space, residents enjoy framed views of the nursery and their work beyond.

Finally, the Firestone site provides fertile ground where multiple aspects of community can take root and be regrown. By providing space for a women's center, homeless shelter, police station, community center, and safe playgrounds for children, the site attempts to create a place where all members of the community can imagine a new future, seek the human flourishing that is their right, and meet one another anew.

VII. Conclusion

Through the course of this argument, I have endeavored to show that the United States has a cyclical problem of incarceration and crime. However, because the crime affecting our communities is the result of cultural as well as individual behaviors, it is vulnerable to macro-level solutions from the cultural sphere in general and architecture in particular. Nonetheless, since the causes of crime exist across a variety of scales, proposed solutions must be capable of addressing it with at least an equivalent amount of diversity and dexterity. Furthermore, I have argued that given the complete failure of prisons and the system of incarceration that they embody to remedy the problem of crime or to fulfill any of the goals for which they been conceived, the need to develop new solutions is both urgent and timely. And while much of the discussion about these issues may appear abstract, the consequences of such conversations on places like New Chicago are as practical as they are serious.

Finally, in response to these myriad issues, I have offered architecture and its unique ability to embody and instantiate value as a possible solution. In this respect, the prison, ironic as it may seem, offers the perfect architectural vehicle to break the cycle of crime and aid in the simultaneous rehabilitation of prisoners and the communities from which many of them come.

Nonetheless, while it is an immensely powerful tool in the construction and maintenance of healthy communities, architecture is merely the physical matrix that undergirds community, not the soul within it. What life architecture has, it borrows from those who design, build, or inhabit it. Thus, as architects, we can and should work to imbed that matrix in the existing life of a community, and through our own manner of listening and working, help seed it with life in the hope that it becomes rooted in ways beyond our skill and imagination to conceive. For despite its limitations, architecture at its best, can help open a space in the life of community from which a new future can be imagined, no matter the foundation of the past; concretize a community of our choosing in the very stones beneath our feet; and, perchance, reveal a glimpse of the human soul that funds communities of all kinds. Such is architecture's promise and its responsibility. To achieve its potential, however, it must begin and end with the people and communities by which it is ensouled.

References

Bouten, Esther, Heike Goudriaan, and Paul Nieuwbeerta. "Criminal Victimization in Seventeen Industrialized Countries." *Crime Victimization Book*. 4.26.2002.

Charlier, Tom. "Census Data Grim for Memphis Health, Crime." *The Commercial Appeal*: Memphis, TN, 7.9.2010.

Darnell, Dave. *Old Mannassas High School Abandoned*. [Online Image]. Retrieved April 13, 2011 from *The Commercial Appeal*. <http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2010/nov/21/old-school-ties-new-mcs-reality-communities-of/>

DeFina, Robert and Lance Hannon. "The Impact of Mass Incarceration on poverty." *Crime and Delinquency*. Online. 2.12.2009.

DeFina, Robert and Lance Hannon. "The Impact of Adult Incarceration on Child Poverty: A County-level Analysis, 1995-2007." *The Prison Journal*. Online. 9.9.2010.

Dijk, Jan van, John van Kesteren, and Paul Smit. Criminal Victimization in International Perspective: Key Findings from the 2004-5 ICVS and EU ICS. BJU, 2007.

Foucault, Michele. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1977.

Gau, Jacinta and Travis Pratt. "Revisiting Broken Windows Theory: Examining the Sources of the Discriminant Validity of Perceived Disorder and Crime." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38. 2010. 758-766.

Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. USA: Back Bay Books, 2002.

Hartney, Christopher. "US Rates of Incarceration: A Global Perspective." 2006.

Jonsson, Patrik. "Poverty Rate Paradox: Poverty Rises, but FBI Crime Rate Falls." *Christian Science Monitor*. Sept 13, 2010.

Johnston, Norman. Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions. Philadelphia:Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1994.

Karpos, Mary; Michael Gasiecki; and Vanessa Langston. "Tennessee Department of Corrections Recidivism Study Felon Releases 2001-2007. TDOC Policy, Planning and Research Unit, 3.15.2010.

Kelling, George and James Wilson. "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety." The Atlantic. 1982.

Liptak, Adam. "1 in 100 U.S. Adults Behind Bars, New Study Says." The New York Times. February 28, 2008.

Mauer, Marc. "Comparative International Rates of Incarceration, An Examination of Causes and Trends." Presented to US Commission on Civil Rights. 6.20.2003. The Sentencing Project.

Morris, Norval and David Rothman eds. The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Parrish, Neil. *Condemned Home in North Memphis*. Taken October 14, 2010.

Derelict Apartments. Taken October 14, 2010.

Empty Lot in North Memphis. Taken October 14, 2010.

Firestone Site As it Exists Today. Taken October 14, 2010.

Loosahatchie Bar, Memphis, Tennessee. Taken October 14, 2010.

Mud Island. Taken October 14, 2010.

Piranesi, Giovanni Battista. *Carceri*. [Online Image]. Retrieved 4.2.2011. After Babel.<http://www.oscarcolomina.com/Blog/?p=333>

Radelet, Michael and Traci Lacock. "Do Executions Lower Homicide Rates:: The Views of Leading Criminologists." The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology. Vol. 99, No. 2. Northwestern University, School of Law, 2009.

Sampson, Robert J. and William Julius Wilson. "Toward a Theory of Race, Crime and Urban Inequality." Crime and Inequality. John Hagan and Ruth Peterson eds.. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.
Shaw, Clifford and Henry McKay. Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

West, Heather. "Prison Inmates at Midyear 2009-Statistical Tables." Bureau of Justice: Statistics: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/corr2tab.cfm>. 2010.

Memphis History. <http://www.memphishistory.org/Beginnings/Memphis-Timeline/tabid/61/Default.aspx>. Accessed 12.8.2010.

Bureau of Justice Statistics. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov>. Accessed 9.2010.

Wikipedia. Intentional Homicide Rate. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_intentional_homicide_rate. Accessed 12.7.2010.

Wikipedia. Social Disorganization Theory. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_disorganization_theory. Accessed 12.4.2010.

"Facts about the Death Penalty." The Death Penalty Information Center. Washington, DC, October 20, 2010. www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

Children Hanging Clothes 1906. Memphis/Shelby County Room, Memphis Free Public Library. Retrieved October 13, 2011.

Firestone Plant Construction. Memphis/Shelby County Room, Memphis Free Public Library. Retrieved October 13, 2011.

Firestone Plant Ca. 1960. Memphis/Shelby County Room, Memphis Free Public Library. Retrieved October 13, 2011.

Firestone Plant Interior. Memphis/Shelby County Room, Memphis Free Public Library. Retrieved October 13, 2011.

Happy News Cafe 1936. Memphis/Shelby County Room, Memphis Free Public Library. Retrieved October 13, 2011.

Memphis Region. [Online Image]. Retrieved March 1, 2011 from Google Earth. http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=&q=memphis+tn&rlz=1B7GGGL_

enUS366US367&um=1&ie=UTF-8&hq=&hnear=0x87d57e1eea439745:0xd193f315601ab6fe,Memphis,+TN&gl=us&ei=48neTe2NJ4rJgQeg1OHXCg&sa=X&oi=geocode_result&ct=image&resnum=1&ved=0CD8Q8gEwAA

Workers assembling tires ca 1950. Memphis/Shelby County Room, Memphis Free Public Library. Retrieved October 13, 2011.

Shelby County Penal Farm. Memphis/Shelby County Room, Memphis Free Public Library. Retrieved October 13, 2011.

Websites Containing demographic information for zip 38107:

<http://www.city-data.com/zips/38107.html>
<http://www.neighborhoodlink.com/zip/38107>

C. Interview. North Memphis. 10-13-10.

G. Interview. North Memphis. 10-13-10.

K. Interview. North Memphis. 10-14-10.

Jim Kennedy. Interview. North Memphis. 10-13-10

VITA

Neil Lawrence Parrish was born in Louisville, Kentucky where he attended St. Xavier High School. In 1999, Neil entered Centre College in Danville, Kentucky where he later earned A Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Spanish Literature. After graduating from Center, Neil worked as a full-time contractor and steel framer for Parrish Contracting in Louisville, Kentucky.

In 2005, Neil traveled to Otago University in Dunedin, New Zealand as a Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholar, from which he received a Diploma for Graduates in Religious Studies in 2005. Upon returning to the U.S., Neil married Heidi Lampela in the summer of 2006, before enrolling in the Vanderbilt University's Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee where he completed a Master of Theological Studies in Ethics.

He received his Master of Architecture degree from the University of Tennessee in 2011 and currently lives in Knoxville with his wife Heidi.