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# **Mass Incarceration by Design: The Impacts of Urban Renewal and Landscape Architecture's Absence on the Prison Industrial Complex and the Use of Landscape Architecture as an Antidote to Mass Incarceration**

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MASS INCARCERATION BY DESIGN:  
THE IMPACTS OF URBAN RENEWAL AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE'S ABSENCE ON  
THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AND THE USE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
AS AN ANTIDOTE TO MASS INCARCERATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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Master of Landscape Architecture

in

The Department of Landscape Architecture

by  
Abigail P. Phillips  
B.A. University of Puget Sound, 2011  
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Dedicated to the designers who realize the potential for their craft to positively impact all members of society, particularly those who are consistently marginalized; to those that have suffered the consequences of oppressive designs; and to the vision of a landscape void of structures that are used for subtle or direct social control and punishment.

Dedicated to the authors, activists, and professors that imagined, inspired and supported this effort to constructively criticize the contribution of designers of the built environment to social injustice and explore the possibilities for us to advance social justice:

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1   INTRODUCTION.....	1
2   SOCIAL JUSTICE + INJUSTICE IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE.....	6
3   MASS INCARCERATION BY DESIGN.....	21
4   SOLITARY GARDENS: LANDSCAPE DESIGN AS ADVOCACY.....	50
5   CONCLUSION.....	62
REFERENCES.....	66
VITA.....	73

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Prison Map Project illustrates the impact of mass incarceration on the landscapes of the United States with equally scaled images of most of the 4916 correctional facilities listed in the 2010 census.....	3
Figure 2. Map of Slave Populations of the Southern United States, derived from 1860 census data, used as the basis for Frederick Law Olmsted’s map illustrating the negative relationship between slavery and productivity.....	7
Figure 3. Frederick Law Olmsted’s Map titled “The Cotton Kingdom” illustrates that the areas of lowest production in the country were the areas relying on a slavery economy.....	8
Figure 4. A survey of the grounds of Central Park shows the location of Seneca Village.....	10
Figure 5. A map of Minneapolis illustrates the segregated urban zones (with discriminatory names) from 1935 overlaid with the modern highway system, which cuts directly through the neighborhoods considered “Negro and Foreign Born Slums.” .....	14
Figure 6. Prison Policy Institute’s graph showing rising incarceration rates.....	24
Figure 7. Prison Policy Institute’s Graph showing racial imbalances in incarcerated populations in 2010.....	24
Figure 8. Maximum Security Facility Footprints from Correctional Philosophy and Architecture by Howard Gill.....	30
Figure 9. Recidivism rates of Riker’s Green program compared with state, national and Prison Averages.....	36
Figure 10. ICIW Masterplan designed by students at Iowa State University under professor Julie Stevens instruction.....	37
Figure 11. Perspective of ICIW mounded lawn, designed by students at Iowa State University under professor Julie Stevens instruction.....	38
Figure 12 Cell at Halden Prison, designed to mimic a small apartment to lower re-entry stress post incarceration.....	38
Figure 13. Landscape at Halden Prison, designed to soften the aesthetic of the concrete and steel fences and provide a natural space for reflection.....	39
Figure 14. Esteban Park Masterplan, from the Great Plains Restoration Council.....	40

Figure 15. Jarid Manos, Founder of The Great Plains Restoration Society with one of the program participants constructing Esteban Park.....	40
Figure 16. Map from 1937 of available residential security in Oakland, California illustrating the “redlining” that encouraged white flight to city suburbs and the settling of black families throughout the 50s and 60s into the urban core, the neighborhoods painted red. This transition in urban ethnicity led to a removal of city resources from the center of the city and hence the development of the Black Panther Party.....	45
Figure 17. Letters from Herman Wallace to Jackie Sumell.....	47
Figure 18. To-scale Model of Herman Wallace’s Cell and scaled model of Herman’s House.....	47
Figure 19. Jackie’s questions about Herman’s cell’s dimensions with responses from Herman.....	48
Figure 20. Sumell’s Rendering of Herman’s House.....	49
Figure 21. Architect’s Model of Herman’s House derived from Sumell’s work.....	49
Figure 22. Location of Solitary Gardens in Lower 9 <sup>th</sup> Ward, adjacent to the new MLK High School .....	53
Figure 23. Sketch of cell-bed, illustrating a landscape overcoming concrete and steel.....	54
Figure 24. Development of cell-bed design from solitary cell.....	55
Figure 25. Still from animated model of Solitary Gardens, showing the tier of cell-beds.....	55
Figure 26. Albert Woodfox’s solitary garden bed.....	56
Figure 27. Solitary Gardens Plan View and Perspective.....	57
Figure 28. Solitary Gardens Perspective from MLK Highschool.....	57
Figure 29. Perspective of adjacent lot.....	58
Figure 30 Plan View of design for adjacent lot.....	58
Figure 31. Early Draft of Solitary Gardens Curriculum.....	60
Figure 32. Online Communication Platform Design.....	61

## ABSTRACT

The work of landscape architects has both positive and negative social impacts and landscape architects can strive to intentionally design for positive social impact. This paper utilizes mass incarceration as a lens for discussing the social impact of landscape architecture. The crossroads of mass incarceration and design offer a unique opportunity for Landscape Architects to examine the impact of many urban renewal efforts on marginalized communities, the benefits of landscape architectural involvement in prison design, and the use of design as protest against inhumane structures. This paper is separated into three sections, one detailing the history of social justice and injustice in landscape architecture, one explaining how mass incarceration developed and what landscape architects can do to respond to it and another detailing The Solitary Gardens in New Orleans, a landscape-based project that advocates against the use of solitary confinement and mass incarceration through collaborative design with incarcerated people. This research suggests that Landscape Architects can combat mass incarceration in a variety of ways: through collaboration with marginalized groups when designing urban spaces, through reformative prison landscape design, through work with ex-offenders and by lobbying against the use of inhumane designs. These findings beg further research into whether it is more appropriate for designers to lead socially progressive pursuits or respond to popular movements, what the best practices for navigating between marginalized and empowered stakeholders are, what the economic feasibility of social impact design as a profession is and how to prove the mental and physical benefits of inmates with access to green infrastructure.

## CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

*Tikkun Olam* is a Jewish, philosophical decree that all of an individual's professional actions should be made in an effort to repair the world around them.<sup>1</sup> Ethical standards are defined by a plethora of philosophies (the Hippocratic Oath, Bodhisattva Vows, etc.) but the philosophy of *Tikkun Olam* is particularly well-suited to designers of the built environment. Landscape Architects have a unique set of skills, which qualify them to tackle not only ecological, physical, and aesthetic issues but social issues as well. The mass incarceration of people in the United States, particularly young men of color, rests atop the apex of American racism's spatial manifestation. The history and values of landscape architectural education and professional practice are ripe with the potential to engage all designers of the built environment with the tools and perspective necessary to reform or protest the design of racially charged spaces. The crossroads of mass incarceration and design offer a unique opportunity for Landscape Architects to examine the impact of many urban renewal efforts on marginalized communities, the benefits of landscape architectural involvement in prison design, and the use of design as protest against inhumane structures.

The licensure requirements for Landscape Architects aim to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public.<sup>2</sup> These professional values are rooted in a rich and in some cases controversial history of social interest and engagement. Urban renewal efforts tend to benefit empowered community members but advance disadvantages on others.<sup>3</sup> The displacement of marginalized communities, redlining and the creations of urban ghettos, and the intentional placement of fences and entrances to control access to public resources, are all means by which Landscape Architects have failed to meet the needs of *entire* communities. It is important to note that a growing number of Landscape Architects rigorously pursue positive social impact work through design -- Randy Hester, Beth Diamond and Lucinda Hartley -- to name a few, but that the profession is not commonly recognized for its ability to address social injustices despite abundant opportunities for socially progressive work within the field. Acknowledging the historic role of Landscape Architects in balancing negative and positive social impacts sets the scene for an examination on the possibilities of applying design thinking to particular social issues. This paper hones in on the role of landscape architecture in mass incarceration via the relationship between urban renewal efforts and mass incarceration, and the possibility for Landscape Architects to contribute to prison reformation efforts and advocate against socially-neglectful decisions made by previous designers of the built environment. The issue of mass incarceration provides an opportunity for Landscape Architects to critically analyze the ways in which the profession facilitates social problems and design antidotes instead.

Mass Incarceration is inextricably tied to issues of space and founded in modernist design principles applied to correctional facilities, which aim to either dehumanize or reform

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<sup>1</sup> Note: this is the perspective of modern Jewish traditions, other interpretations of the phrase vary.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Landscape Architecture Review Board, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Zewde, 2016

citizens who do not conform to public standards.<sup>4</sup> In the United States, the idea of who is non-conforming was historically tied to skin color and economic-racial oppression, beginning with the immigration of colonial Europeans in the 1490s.<sup>5</sup> Spatial design plays a role in the Prison Industrial Complex (a network of people and organizations that benefit from prison as an industry) on two scales that provide Landscape Architects seamless opportunities to address mass incarceration:

- 1.) Urban planning decisions that historically relegated people of color to 'ghettos' and 'slums' and currently gentrify urban areas to the point of local displacement, cement the inability of marginalized people to progress away from systems of oppression placed on their community. This paper will discuss collaborative design processes and goals which aim to mitigate the neighborhood to prison pipeline that exists in many American cities.
- 2.) Correctional facility designs themselves evolved over the last century to emphasize economic efficiency/profit and correctional control rather than rehabilitation or humanity.<sup>6</sup> Prison buildings are generally harsh, sterile environments and the landscapes around them are a reflection of the system's punitive goals (Figure 1). This paper discusses a couple of inspiring examples of Landscape Architects who worked to redesign prison campuses based on the well-researched impact of green space as a tool for healing and reformation in other arenas - and work collaboratively with inmates and formerly incarcerated people on these design processes.
- 3.) A third opportunity for Landscape Architects to address the issue of mass incarceration exists in the use or refusal of design as protest- this paper examines the development of two projects, guided by artist-activist Jackie Sumell, that use design to address mass incarceration, titled Herman's House and Solitary Gardens.

The reasons for using design as protest against mass incarceration stem from an examination of the deep-rooted, racial ideas that developed during slavery in the United States and propel urban social inequity and mass incarceration of people of color today.<sup>7</sup> The injustices that oppress black people in the United States evolved from these ideas and now manifest as mass incarceration. The popular idea among slave owners that black people were criminal by nature justified the abuse of free labor and poor living conditions on their plantations.<sup>8</sup> Policies established during Jim Crow, redlining in the 30s and 40s and the War on Drugs in the 80s and 90s were all based on the same public fear of *inherent* black criminality. Neighborhoods were zoned and regulated, and prisons were bulk-designed and constructed in response to these racist policies and fears.

With a strong political push to crack down on crime in the 1980s and 1990s, elements of the United States' Correctional Facilities originally intended for reformation, such as solitary confinement, were transformed for use as extreme forms of punishment- despite existing

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<sup>4</sup> Davis, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Blackmon, 2009

<sup>6</sup> Western and Redburn, 2014

<sup>7</sup> Alexander

<sup>8</sup> Coates, 2015

research that suggests these practices are socially and economically detrimental.<sup>9</sup> Landscape Architects, and all designers of public space, consider the social repercussions of their work (both positive and negative), build on the existing philosophy of positive social impact design within the profession, seek out opportunities to design rejuvenating landscapes for marginalized people, and advocate against designs shown to promote systems of oppression, from racist urban planning policies to the design of solitary confinement cells.



Figure 1. The Prison Map Project illustrates the impact of mass incarceration on the landscapes of the United States with equally scaled images of most of the 4916 correctional facilities listed in the 2010 census<sup>10</sup>

Landscape architects, planners and other land-use professionals can play an important role in disconnecting the nations racial regimes from their spatial grounding. Environmental designers must begin consciously to write and draw the under-represented and the disenfranchised into their schemes and plans rather than ignoring or excluding such groups. They must also work actively to diversify the fields of practice in order to challenge white dominance in design and decision-making. These efforts need to go beyond the kinds of tokenistic community participation to surrender actual decision-making power to community groups.<sup>11</sup>

A project that works to challenge the dominant, white ideas that these oppressive systems are structured on by advocating against mass incarceration is the Solitary Gardens in

<sup>9</sup> Oshinsky, 1996

<sup>10</sup> Begley, 2010

<sup>11</sup> Lipsitz, 2007



New Orleans. Solitary Gardens is a park and landscape installation that responds to the evolution of prison from slavery, the fact that people of color are confined in some form of correctional control eight times more often than their white counterparts, and the lived experience of the 80,000+ people who are currently subjected to solitary confinement.<sup>12</sup> Solitary Gardens aims to illustrate what is wrong with the existing correctional system in the United States as well as what is possible.<sup>13</sup> The project was inspired by the story of the Angola 3, three men who spent between 23 and 43 years in solitary confinement- that is 23 hours a day, alone, in a 6' x 9' foot cell- for sentences based on incomplete evidence. The racism that prevails in the United States Justice System is exemplified by the fact that these black men received such extreme sentences without conclusive. Solitary Gardens uses the design process, the landscape of the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward in New Orleans, and an online communication platform to tell the stories of incarcerated people, to educate the public on the detriment of mass incarceration, and to activate advocates against the design and use of structure and landscape for cruel and unusual punishment.

The Solitary Gardens foster communication between persons subjected to indefinite solitary confinement and volunteer communities by utilizing design principles, an educational curriculum and art-based intervention strategies. The design of the park mirrors the intentions of the prison abolition movement with plants that were chosen with the intention that they would eclipse the prison architectures on site. People serving solitary sentences are partnered with volunteers “on the outside” to design the interior of a garden bed that mirrors the layout of a solitary cell. The incarcerated individual is encouraged to fill the bed with solid or plant material that reflects their experience in solitary confinement, and the volunteer is encouraged to implement the designs imagined by the incarcerated individual.<sup>14</sup>

The project utilizes design thinking and landscape architecture processes and principles to advocate for social justice, for a landscape void of the intention to punish. The actual site provides a contemplative and communal setting for observing the cell beds, considering the stories of these “incarcerated designers,” learning more about the impact of mass incarceration and advocating against the continued oppression of people of color. Herman Wallace, the man who inspired the project that led to Solitary Gardens often wrote of his desire to be in nature while serving a sentence in solitary confinement. Wallace served 41 years in solitary confinement, and in a letter to artist/activist Jackie Sumell, he says “I have tried many times to grow flowers and other plants here in this cell and it just won’t work! The concrete and steel and particularly the small closed-in area stifles growth, and causes the plant to die long before it develops.”<sup>15</sup> Solitary Gardens is a direct response to the social injustices articulated by the story of the Angola 3, a design that aims to impact the publics’ knowledge and understanding of mass incarceration, through the symbology of solitary confinement.

The implementation of social impact design has its challenges, but the potential for Landscape Architects and other designers of the built environment to respond to social need and promote social equity through design is strong. It is imperative that Landscape Architects

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<sup>12</sup> Casella, 2012

<sup>13</sup> SOLITARY GARDENS, 2016

<sup>14</sup> SOLITARY GARDENS, 2016

<sup>15</sup> Sumell, 2014

consider the successes and failures of their profession in terms of social impact work and stay informed about relevant social issues in order to extend due consideration and equitable services to marginalized communities. This paper articulates the possibilities for Landscape Architects interested in contributing to prison reformation efforts and serves as an example of how to utilize landscape architecture as a tool for repairing the social environment.

## CHAPTER 2 | SOCIAL JUSTICE + INJUSTICE IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Public health and welfare are core values in the profession of landscape architecture. Since the formal foundations of the profession, Landscape Architects have aimed to address related social needs through design.<sup>16</sup> In many cases Landscape Architects have been tremendously successful applying design as a response to social needs. Celebrated landscape architectural accomplishments range from Versailles to the High Line and Villa D'Este to Boston's Emerald Necklace. However, in some cases landscape architecture has resulted in further oppression of already marginalized communities through discriminatory urban planning that results in environmental racism and urban land acquisition and renewal efforts that lead to the displacement of local people. It is important for Landscape Architects to acknowledge both the successes and the failures of their profession in order to move forward with designs that are socially progressive and equitable.

Frederick Law Olmsted, the celebrated father of landscape architecture, laid the foundation of contemporary landscape architecture in the United States with social concern.<sup>17</sup> Raised and educated in horticulture, Olmsted viewed landscape architecture as an artistic pursuit "with a civic orientation."<sup>18</sup> Olmsted was a dedicated proponent of urban growth, believing that urban centers brought economic opportunity to laboring classes and women, a forward-thinking perspective for his time.<sup>19</sup> He argued for the city to provide beneficial resources for its working classes, to act as an extension of humanity- and his most tangible contributions were in the form of common green space. His understanding of the social needs of urban spaces in relation to successful economies grew from his time traveling through and writing about the southern states. He argued that the slavery based economy "lacked industrious incentive and wasted time," whereas the northern state's capitalist economy "emboldened industrious competition and thus urban progress."<sup>20</sup>

Olmsted spent years traveling throughout Europe and the United States, studying the ways in which landscapes gave way to culture and culture in turn impacted landscapes. He envisioned urban centers as hubs for civic progress, a step away from the harshness of rural lives with the benefit of high culture, but he still valued the ability of the pastoral aesthetic to invoke emotions.<sup>21</sup> "His designs considered immediate social needs and future environmental opportunities and constraints. He saw urban planners as predictors of the future and parks as a medium for addressing social and environmental shifts."<sup>22</sup>

In 1861 he edited his three publications from his journey through the south: *A Journey through the Seaboard States*, *A Journey Through Texas* and *A Journey in the Back Country*, into a body of work that discusses the relationship between slavery and economy, he called it *The*

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<sup>16</sup> Council of Landscape Architecture Registration Board, 2016

<sup>17</sup> Scheper, 1989

<sup>18</sup> Scheper, 1989

<sup>19</sup> Masur, 2011

<sup>20</sup> Olmsted, 1851

<sup>21</sup> Beveridge, date unknown

<sup>22</sup> Rybczynski, 1999

*Cotton Kingdom: A Travellers Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States.* Holding true to his consideration of social relationships he writes “an arbitrary political line may divide the north part from the south part [of the united states], but there is no such line in nature... the currents and countercurrents of trade, of love, of consanguinity, and fellowship, will flow north and south.”<sup>23</sup>

*The Cotton Kingdom* articulates the concern Olmsted formed on the economic detriments of slavery in southern states, and these views were published by the New York Times and widely read.<sup>24</sup> He argued that slave labor was inefficient, limited the potential for re-investment of capital and had tremendous overhead cost.<sup>25</sup> He rallied significant support for the abolition of slavery on economic grounds.<sup>26</sup> One woman wrote to him “if we can re-make the government, abolish slavery and get the central park well under way for our descendants, we shall have done a work worthy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.” His popularized writings developed into a map of the productivity of slave states (based on Figure 2).

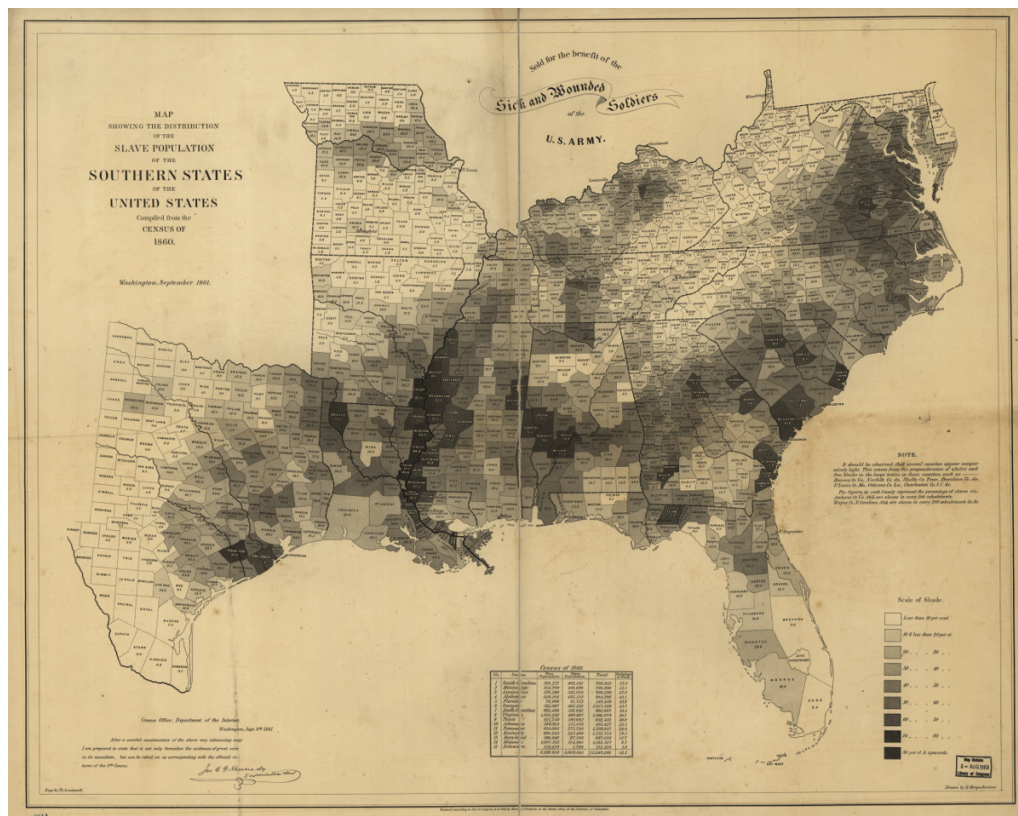


Figure 2. Map of Slave Populations of the Southern United States, derived from 1860 census data, used as the basis for Frederick Law Olmsted’s map illustrating the negative relationship between slavery and productivity.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Olmsted, 1851

<sup>24</sup> Masur, 2011

<sup>25</sup> Olmsted, 1851

<sup>26</sup> Masur, 2011

<sup>27</sup> Schulten, 2011

In his travels through the south “instead of a place of wealth and prosperity, Olmsted found a closed society imprisoned by the crop, unable to advance, diversify or feed its own people.”<sup>28</sup> His map (Figure 3) aimed to simply visualize that slavery was not economically worth defending using two variables: the relationship of the free and slave population and the production of cotton. Olmsted mapped areas of the United States where slaves outnumbered freemen (in grey stripes) and classified the entire southeast based on how much cotton each county in the state produced (blue regions produced two bails of cotton per slave, yellow areas produced less than two and red areas produced almost none).<sup>29</sup> Olmsted efficiently illustrated that most areas with high cotton productivity had low slave populations, stating that “these areas shaded as highly productive were direct evidence against slavery.”<sup>30</sup>

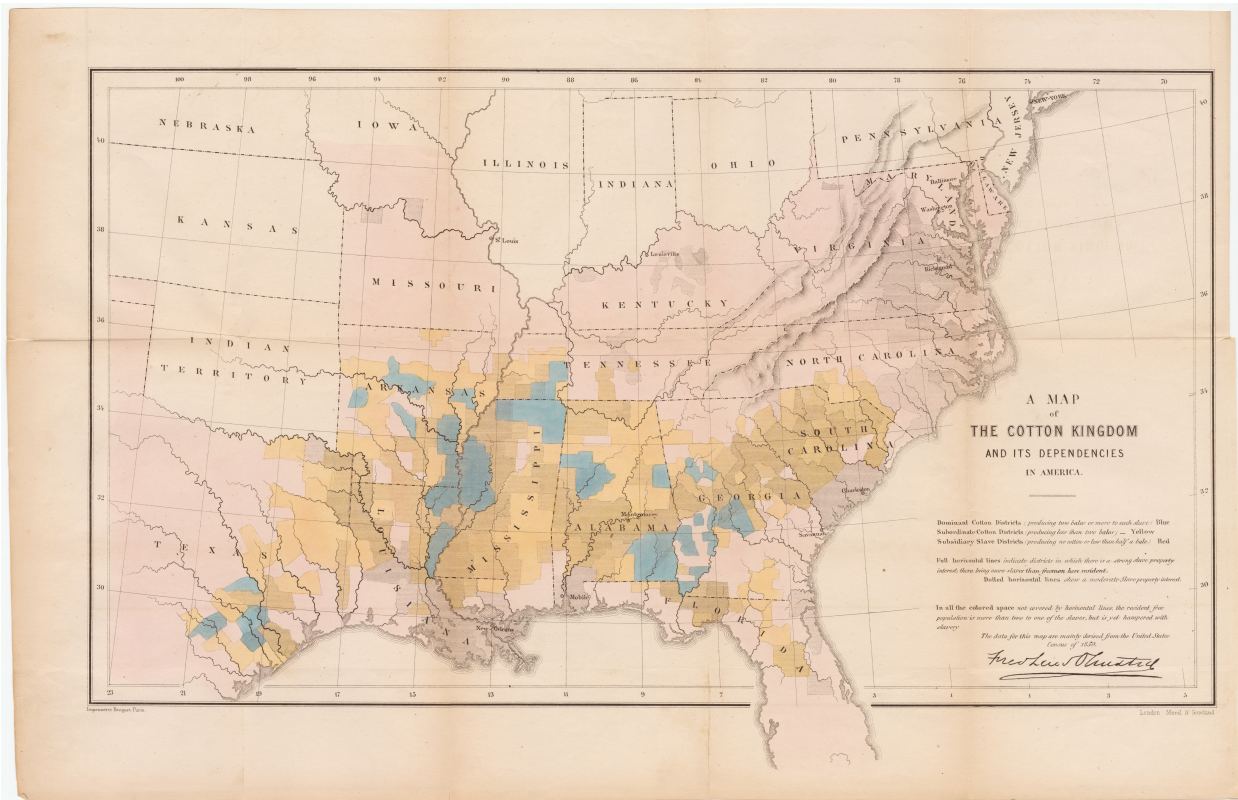


Figure 3. Frederick Law Olmsted’s Map titled “The Cotton Kingdom” illustrates that the areas of lowest production in the country were the areas relying on a slavery economy.<sup>31</sup>

The Island of Port Royal of the coast of South Carolina was one of the first areas where former slaves managed plantation land without white ownership. As the executive secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, Olmsted advocated for a system that would manage plantations and former slaves of Port Royal after abolition, arguing that

<sup>28</sup> Schulten, 2011

<sup>29</sup> Schulten, 2011

<sup>30</sup> Olmsted, 1851

<sup>31</sup> Schulten, 2011

“the federal government had a duty to save the lives of the negroes and to train or educate them in a few simple, essential and fundamental social duties of free men in civilized life.”<sup>32</sup> His suggestions were not implemented at the time, but the former slaves of Port Royal were able to establish their own free system for managing the island’s land.<sup>33</sup> In 1862, the government implemented the Port Royal Experiment, which was structurally similar to Olmsted’s proposal.<sup>34</sup> The experiment enlisted teachers, ministers and doctors to help freemen transition from slavery and learn about their rights. The philanthropists working on the Island actively advocated for the legal protection of the rights of the islanders. General Rufus B. Saxton wrote to Washington with concern that the government would seize land from these free black people due to accidental tax evasion.<sup>35</sup>

The prospect is that all the lands on these sea islands, will be bought up by speculators, and in that event, these helpless people may be placed more or less at the mercy of men devoid of principle, and their future well being jeopardized, thus defeating in a great measure the benevolent intention of the Government towards them.

To prevent this, and give the negroes a right in that soil to whose wealth they are destined in the future to contribute so largely, to save them from destitution, to enable them to take care of themselves, and prevent them from ever becoming a burden upon the country, I would most respectfully call your attention to the importance of the immediate passage of an act of Congress, empowering the President to appoint three Commissioners, whose duty it shall be to make allotments of portions of the lands forfeited to the US... to the emancipated negroes...<sup>36</sup>

The concern expressed in Saxton’s letter, eluded to a pattern of government land acquisition which halted the social progress of people of color across the United States for the next century. While Olmsted’s writings for the New York Times and his map illustrating low productivity in the slave states and his work as the Sanitary Commissioner contributed greatly to political and public discourse on the abolition of slavery, his landscape designs did not bolster the success of free black people- rather they favored the white working class.<sup>37</sup> Olmsted’s written arguments for the abolition of slavery were mainly economic, and his reluctance to acknowledge the humanity of enslaved black people in *The Cotton Kingdom* is echoed in the decision to level a community of free black people and Irish immigrants who resided where Central Park is now.<sup>38</sup>

Olmsted and Vaux layered thoughtful circulation patterns, rooms and design elements throughout their design of Central Park in New York City, intending to benefit specific social classes in leisure activities. They both spoke firmly about the activities that were suitable for

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<sup>32</sup> MacLean, 2014

<sup>33</sup> Roper, 1965

<sup>34</sup> Roper, 1965

<sup>35</sup> MacLean, 2014

<sup>36</sup> MacLean, 2014

<sup>37</sup> Dooley, 1998

<sup>38</sup> Pacyga, 1996



this park, fighting back against any public desires for recreational fields or sports facilities. The result of their firmness is a heavily used, pastoral sanctuary with recreational flexibility. The less celebrated portion of Central Park's history exemplifies a common struggle between under-valued landowners and a city's ability to claim eminent domain. 200 years ago, on the grounds where Central Park is located, the largest community of free black property owners and Irish immigrants lived in Seneca Village (Figure 4).<sup>39</sup>

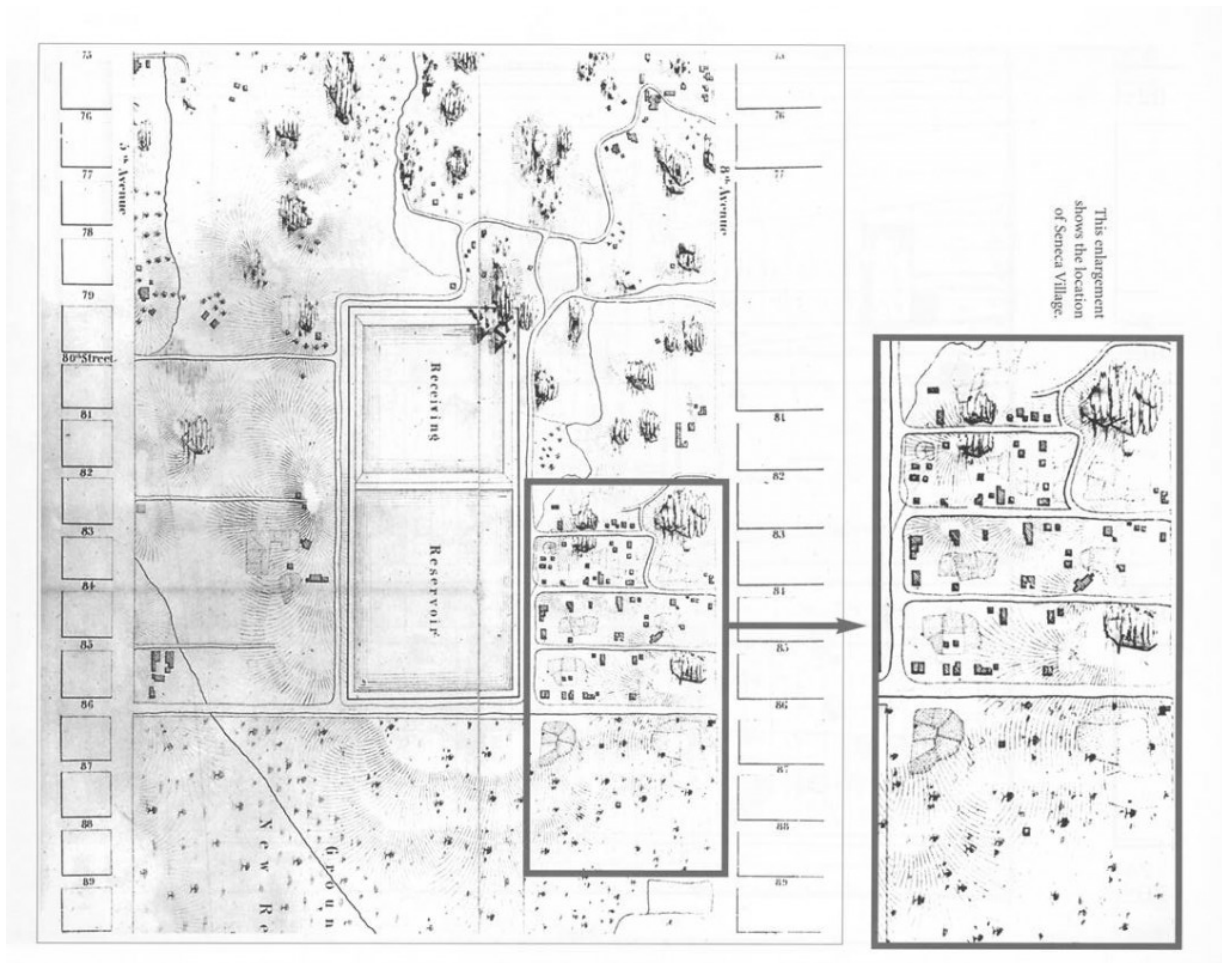


Figure 4. A survey of the grounds of Central Park shows the location of Seneca Village<sup>40</sup>

In 1855 Seneca Village was home to 250 residents and 70 houses and land ownership in this area allowed a handful of free black men the right to vote in 1821 in New York.<sup>41</sup> In 1855, there were 2,000 free black people in New York, but only 100 were eligible to vote. Of those 100 voting, free, black people, ten of them lived in Seneca Village; the rate of land owned by

<sup>39</sup> Copeland, 1998

<sup>40</sup> Copeland, 1998

<sup>41</sup> Copeland, 1998

free black people in Seneca Village was five times higher than the city's average.<sup>42</sup> But by 1853, when the growing white, professional, uptown New York population began advocating for a larger urban green space, the legislature approved the use of eminent domain over Seneca Village to create Central Park.<sup>43</sup> Many homeowners from Seneca Village argued their rights to the courts, but ultimately the political force supporting the creation of the park won and these families were displaced.<sup>44</sup>

Today Central Park is viewed as a huge benefit to all of New York's residents and visitors, but the decision to displace the inhabitants of Seneca Village exemplifies the detrimental impact that Landscape Architects can have if they fail to consider the needs of both empowered and marginalized communities throughout the design process. Olmsted's efforts to abolish slavery and help former slaves transition into life as freemen were highly influential, but he either did not or could not effectively advocate against the displacement of these black and Irish families in New York. If the design of Central Park encompassed rather than leveled Seneca Village, with proximity to green space in Manhattan, these families' properties would be some of the most desired in New York City. Instead though, these families were displaced with what seemed to many of them as unfair compensation for the property that they legally owned.<sup>45</sup>

### **Social Impact Design by Landscape Architecture**

Landscape Architects have the opportunity to guide social behavior subtly or directly through site design. Thoughtfully capitalizing on this opportunity throughout the design process allows Landscape Architects to address social issues and promote equitable design processes; Neglecting or disregarding this opportunity has in the past led to the perpetuation of social injustices, as was the case for the inhabitants of Seneca Village. This section focuses on the specific social effects of urban growth, renewal, revitalization and gentrification and how the design of public urban space acts as an impetus for racial equality and/or discrimination.

#### **Positive Social Impact Design**

Designers of the built environment constantly adopt new technology and revise methodology, drawing on logic and imagination, to develop a series of solutions for a given site or issue. This process (also known as Design Thinking), can be applied to social issues as fluently as it translates to site design. Landscape Architects have applied Design Thinking to address ecological and social issues simultaneously in a wide variety of ways. Projects that utilize new technology to respond to increasing coastal storm intensity or for political agency with marginalized people are just a few examples of the possibilities for landscape to bolster ecological and social progress. Positive Social Impact Design resulting from landscape architecture is very often ecologically or politically driven: the Rebuild by Design contest after Hurricane Sandy and Trust for Public Land's Climate Smart Cities initiative are both examples of applied Design Thinking, with an ecologic drive, grounded in landscape architecture, and resulting in positive social impact. Detroit, Michigan's urban agricultural response to economic

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<sup>42</sup> Copeland, 1998

<sup>43</sup> Pacyga, 1996

<sup>44</sup> Copeland, 1998

<sup>45</sup> Copeland, 1998



downfall and the Nelson Byrd Woltz Conservation Agriculture Studio, aimed at helping farmers adapt to sustainable methods, are examples of applied Design Thinking that are politically driven, landscape based solutions to social issues.

The Rebuild by Design initiative began as a design competition in response to Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The leaders of the competition quickly realized that similar fast-paced, design-based processes could be useful in the wake of other catastrophic natural events, so they expanded their office and have been involving local communities and civic leaders throughout the Northeastern United States in creating and implementing resilient strategies to prepare and respond to natural disaster.<sup>46</sup> The initial competition resulted in ten proposals, which considered physical, ecological and social resilience, seven of which are being implemented in areas of the Northeast affected by Hurricane Sandy.<sup>47</sup> In response to this success, the firm expanded to address research and policy concerns related to resiliency.<sup>48</sup>

The Trust for Public Land is also widely known for innovative ecological research. Their Climate Smart Cities Initiative acknowledges that cities have the potential to provide for the needs of growing population, but as densely populated places they face strong repercussions from increasing global temperatures and intense storms.<sup>49</sup> The Climate Smart Cities initiative aims to create and conserve natural resources in urban areas with four goals in mind:

- 1.) Building networks of carbon-free transportation towards local destinations and between neighborhoods.
- 2.) Increasing green space to combat the “heat island affect”-protecting people from heat waves and reducing the need for air conditioning.
- 3.) Improving storm water infiltration in urban areas in order to reduce flooding, recharge drinking water supplies and save energy for water management.
- 4.) Protect coastal communities from rising sea levels and coastal storms.

The entire effort involves ecological, landscape-based solutions to human-centered problems.<sup>50</sup>

Urban agriculture is another ecologically important effort in landscape architecture, but the economic or political intentions behind Detroit’s urban agricultural boom have led to unique social benefits.

An innovative experience led by black women activists has taken root in Detroit, they’re participating in urban agriculture as a way of recessing their cultural roots and reclaiming personal power, freed from the constraints imposed by consumerism and marketing, on the supply of food in the city of Detroit. By farming, they demonstrate agency and self-determination in their efforts to build a sense of community. Using an ecofeminist perspective, this article examines the relationship between women’s resistance and the environment. By focusing on women’s urban gardening, the article broadens the definition to include less formal, but no less important, forms of resistance. These activists construct the farm as a community safe space, which

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<sup>46</sup> Rebuild by Design

<sup>47</sup> Rebuild by Design

<sup>48</sup> Rebuild by Design

<sup>49</sup> Climate Smart Cities Initiative

<sup>50</sup> Climate Smart Cities Initiative

operates as a creative, public outdoor classroom where they nurture activism and challenge the racial and class based barriers to accessing healthy food. In addition to providing access to healthy food by repurposing vacant land, they are transforming their communities into safe and green spaces.<sup>51</sup>

A relatable socio-political agricultural effort emerged from the Conservation Agriculture Studio at Nelson Byrd Woltz. The firm aims to integrate design with conservation science to bolster agrarian efforts.

Agrarian landscapes present an important opportunity for landscape architects to apply their broad skillset to landscapes and issues that are often considered beyond their realm. Agrarian landscapes account for an enormous portion of land-use and as Woltz stated are 'the largest non-point source of pollution in the nation.'<sup>52</sup>

The studio approaches landowners to offer master plans that efficiently increase cultivation, restoration, and conservation efforts.<sup>53</sup>

### **Negative Social Impact Design**

People tend to identify with space on a spiritual level, a phenomenon described as Genius Loci, the spirit of place. This tendency leads people to build "allegiances to defensive localism and hostile privatism. It encourages well-off communities to hoard amenities and resources, exclude allegedly undesirable populations and maximize property values in competition with other communities."<sup>54</sup> Landscape Architects in conjunction with other designers and decision makers can influence policy and practices that have historically tied race, place and power: consider restrictive covenants during the industrial era, urban renewal and urban restructuring in the late industrial and early post-industrial periods, and Indian removal in the age of westward expansion.<sup>55</sup>

The unfortunate consequence of the extraordinary accomplishment of Central Park was the displacement of the inhabitants of Seneca Village. The same can be said of many efforts to renew or revitalize urban centers. Marginalized people are the first to bear the negative impact of a design or urban planning initiative that stops short of considering negative social repercussions. This impact has compounding affects on communities of color.<sup>56</sup> An impact that might be mitigated in well-off communities can devastate marginalized ones, and Landscape Architects should be aware of this effect.<sup>57</sup>

The design of public spaces and resources can and has resulted in positive social impact, but in many instances urban designs have negative social impacts. George Lipsitz, an American

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<sup>51</sup> White, 2011

<sup>52</sup> The Dirt Contributor, 2011

<sup>53</sup> The Dirt Contributor, 2011

<sup>54</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>55</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>56</sup> Zewde, 2016

<sup>57</sup> Alon, 2007

Studies professor at The University of California- Santa Barbara in the department of Black Studies, argues that realizing these historic patterns places Landscape Architects in a position now to make their primary goal “to disassemble the fatal links that connect race, place and power.” He explains that:

[H]aving a better understanding of differential space, of the roles played by exclusion, exchange value and use value in determining the racial meanings of places, can help landscape architects and other professionals whose work shapes the built environment to ameliorate the racialization of space and the specialization of race.<sup>58</sup>

Lipsitz’ research highlights how decisions about the organization of public space in the United States have always had racial implications, and that people of color, especially black people, bear the burden of these decisions more often than their white counterparts (Figure 5).

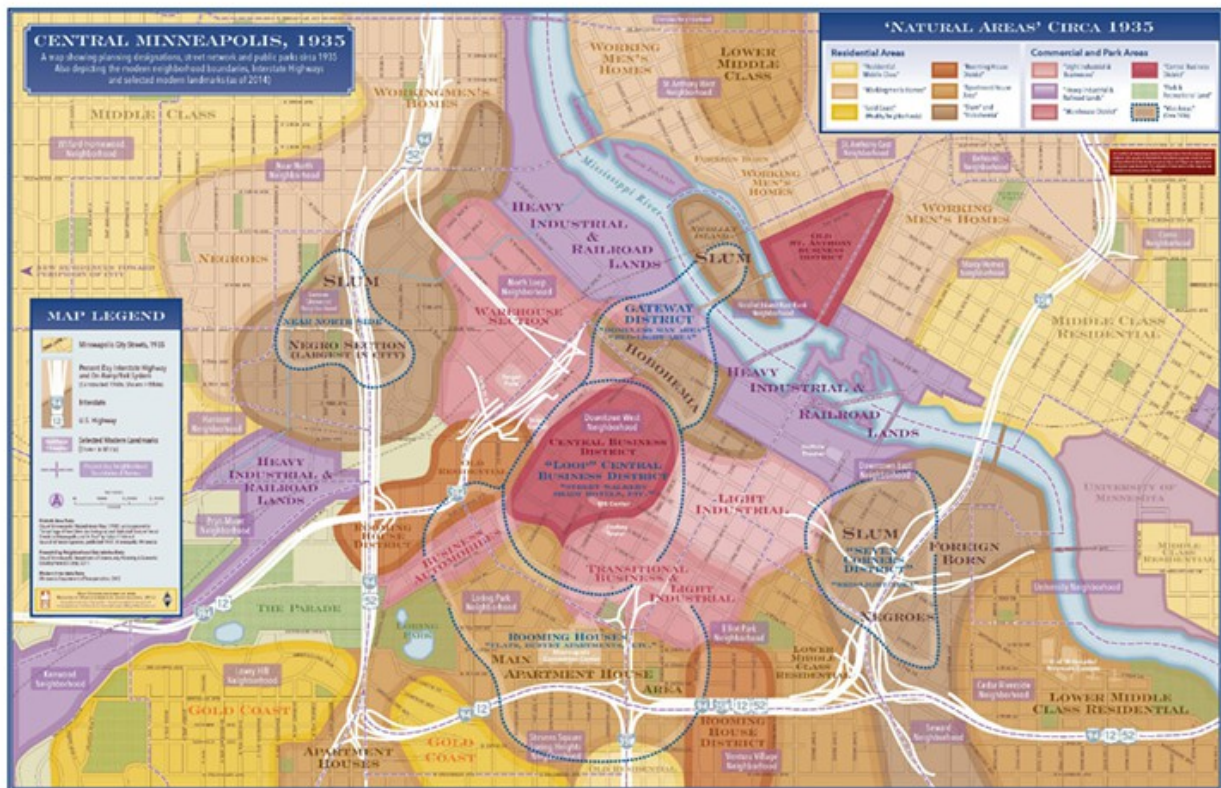


Figure 5. A map of Minneapolis illustrates the segregated urban zones (with discriminatory names) from 1935 overlaid with the modern highway system, which cuts directly through the neighborhoods considered “Negro and Foreign Born Slums.”<sup>59</sup>

Displacement, dispossession, exclusion and control shape the contours of racial subordination and exploitation in decisive ways. From the theft of Native American and

<sup>58</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>59</sup> Samuels, 2015

Mexican land in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the confiscation of black and Latino property for urban renewal projects in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the trail of tears to the Japanese internment, from the creation of ghettos, barrios, reservations and Chinatowns to the disproportionate placement of toxic hazards in minority neighborhoods, the racial projects of American society have always been spatial projects as well. The particular subordination of slavery and sharecropping has inflicted the African American encounter with the racialization of space and the spacialization of race in unique ways. The plantation, the prison, the sharecropper's cabin and the ghetto have been visible and obvious manifestations of white supremacist uses of space.<sup>60</sup>

Place manifests as a network of racially or socially inclusive and exclusive systems. The urban planning decisions that relegated people of color to specific areas in a city have lasting impacts on education levels, access to transportation, ability to rise out of poverty and in some cases even access to safe public resources, like drinking water.<sup>61</sup> Displacement due to urban renewal and the appropriation of cultural creativity have for a long time oppressed black people in many cities, including New Orleans. The Crescent City celebrates black heritage in terms of art, music and food, while simultaneously boasting a long history of housing discrimination, environmental racism, discriminatory urban renewal, and police harassment towards African Americans, this has all resulted in an urban plan that, intentionally or not, perpetuates marginalization.<sup>62 63</sup> Many of the effects of racial categorization can be understood in spatial dimensions- historically, through legal segregation, people were relegated to live in specific neighborhoods and use certain school zones, police districts and transit systems due to their race.<sup>64</sup>

The Bywater neighborhood in New Orleans is a classic example of the detrimental effects of urban renewal. Urban renewal efforts determined how New Orleans was redeveloped post Hurricane Katrina. The storm devastated many parts of the city, displacing thousands of local people, increasing land and home vacancy throughout the city, and creating what some considered "a blank slate for redevelopment."<sup>65</sup> The redevelopment efforts in the city came from grassroots locals and incoming transplants, who either wanted to help rebuild or take advantage of cheap property. Roberta Gratz details the stages and conflicts of urban renewal efforts in New Orleans post Hurricane Katrina, highlighting the demolition of Charity Hospital and the city's 1930's era public housing, neither of which sustained much damage from the storm but both of which became targets for politicians and businesses who aimed to redevelop the city.

While the house and the city block might be revived on a local level, entities like hospitals and housing (and highways and levees) are huge undertakings that reflect the

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<sup>60</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>61</sup> Gratz, 2015

<sup>62</sup> Twitty, 2015

<sup>63</sup> Zwede, 2016

<sup>64</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>65</sup> Gratz, 2015

priorities, capabilities and values of a society, they are formed at a scale beyond the capabilities of any ordinary individual.<sup>66</sup>

This is the scale at which Landscape Architects and other designers of the built environment play a fundamental role. Gratz argues that “reforming the inequalities inscribed in the streets of New Orleans and elsewhere will require a more [large] revaluation of what constitutes our idea of the just city and the public good.”<sup>67</sup> This can only occur with a major shift in the priorities of design professionals, and Landscape Architects are well situated to guide this shift.

Decades-old zoning decisions have determined the racial patterns of neighborhoods in cities across the country. While diversity is often boasted as a benefit of urban environments, old policies established the areas where people of color and new immigrants could legally reside, and a combination of factors anchor future generations to those areas, including the desire to live near family and the cost of moving.<sup>68</sup> This is not necessarily problematic, until the city fails to deliver safe resources based on these antiquated boundaries, as may have been the case with the water crisis in Flint, Michigan.<sup>69</sup>

Bryce Covert and Mike Konczal articulate how the Flint Water Crisis discovered in early 2016 was blatant environmental racism, made possible by antiquated urban planning decisions. Environmental Racism is described as the process by which people of color and low-income people are most likely to be situated near sources of contamination and away from clean water, air and soil. City officials in Flint, a city that is more than 50% black in a state that is more than 80% white, looking for money-saving shortcuts, failed to update old lead pipes that carried water from the nearby river to inner city homes. People of color settled in Flint because of racist policies in the 1930s, when redlining made it impossible for black people to afford homes outside of inner city neighborhoods, while cheap home loans were offered to white families fleeing to the suburbs, exacerbating already widespread poverty in black communities. By the 1960s, Flint was 94% racially segregated.<sup>70</sup>

Whereas many of the water-related impacts of urbanization are related to local planning and permitting decisions, it is also a local level of planning that has influenced the concentration of low-income communities and communities of color into marginal urban geographies. Once trapped in the inner-city, these communities were routinely selected as dumping grounds for urban sources of pollution and contamination. With few resources and little political clout, poor black communities were ill equipped to resist their new role.<sup>71</sup>

Covert and Konczal point out that the EPA has denied 95% of the civil rights claims brought by people of color against sources of pollution, including residents of Flint who previously fought

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<sup>66</sup> Gratz, 2015

<sup>67</sup> Gratz, 2015

<sup>68</sup> Coats, 2015

<sup>69</sup> Covert and Konczal, 2016

<sup>70</sup> Covert and Konczal, 2016

<sup>71</sup> Covert and Konczal, 2016

against the air-permit for a steel mill that would lower the air quality of the city. In 2014 when “sour-smelling, discolored water came out of Flint residents pipes, their complaints went ignored [again] for two years.”<sup>72</sup>

While Landscape Architects are generally not part of the decision-making process for who should receive updated infrastructure, they can still look to this as an example of environmental racism based on unequitable city/urban planning- a reality that might have been avoided if neighborhoods in Flint had been intentionally designed to be socioeconomically diverse. While the work of Landscape Architects can and has been publicly beneficial, examples of the primary and secondary contributions of urban planning, from displacement via gentrification to zoning-based environmental racism, perpetuating and reinforcing existing social problems. If Landscape Architects working with urban decision makers bring social analysis and forethought to the table, urban, social progress, ranging from equal access to city provisions to fair housing for urban minorities, will ensue.

### **Social Impact Philosophy in Landscape Architecture**

Lipsitz explains that the ability and the need for Landscape Architects to genuinely collaborate with the people who will be impacted by their designs is strong. His statements are in line with a collection of literature that explains how social impact philosophy can govern landscape architectural processes.

Landscape architects, planners and other land-use professional can play an important role in disconnecting the nations racial regimes from their spatial grounding. Environmental designers must begin consciously to write and draw the under-represented and the disenfranchised into their schemes and plans rather than ignoring or excluding such groups. They must also work actively to diversify the fields of practice in order to challenge white dominance in design and decision-making. These efforts need to go beyond the kinds of tokenistic community participation to surrender actual decision-making power to community groups.<sup>73</sup>

The theories on social impact in Landscape Architecture are well-developed, though the reality of the practice is that social impact is only one component in a multitude of important factors to consider when designing urban spaces. Landscape Architects have been praised for their ability to address social need through design, as was the case after Hurricane Sandy, and criticized for the detrimental social impacts of their work, as is the case post-Katrina in New Orleans.<sup>74</sup> However, if theory is any indication of practice, there is potential for Landscape Architects and other designers of the built environment to move beyond a contentious history of positive and negative social impact and toward the application of beneficial social impact theory in every stage and type of design.

Ecology, society and aesthetics reoccur as important themes in the work of Landscape Architects across cultures. Landscape Architects have a long-standing history as advocates for

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<sup>72</sup> Covert and Konczal, 2016

<sup>73</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>74</sup> Gratz, 2015

environmental preservation, conservation, and protection, with work driven by a strong appreciation for the aesthetics of nature. Incorporating social impact analysis into ecologic and aesthetic work yields thoughtful designs, which benefit clients and site users. *Ecology, Community and Delight* discusses the variance in values held between professional landscape architects. Almost all professionals hold the ecological, social, and artistic functions of a site as the guidelines for design, but some value one aspect over others.<sup>75</sup> Olmsted is celebrated as his designs accomplished all three values- his efforts were progressive in the sense that he aimed to create spaces that would be relevant to future generations, as well as ecologically robust and beautiful.<sup>76</sup> But despite his ability to balance these values, the majority beliefs of his time skewed the benefits of his sites towards white professionals.<sup>77</sup> When one value overpowers another in a site design, the benefits of all three are pulled off balance. The goal to provide beauty in nature to Manhattan's elite and working class pulled the design of Central Park away from equitable social benefit.<sup>78</sup>

Social impact theory in landscape architecture has evolved from an emphasis on cultural landscapes into a philosophy of designing for social progress and resilience.<sup>79</sup> Cultural landscapes illustrate the theoretical importance of balancing ecological, communal and aesthetic needs by defining the social impact of existing landscape architectural works. The loose definition of cultural landscapes provided by The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) suggests that the social impacts of existing landscapes vary tremendously:

Cultural Landscapes provide a sense of place and identity, they map our relationship with the landscape over time; and they are part of our national heritage and each of our lives. They are sites associated with a significant event, activity, person or group of people, they range in size from thousands of acres of rural land to historic homesteads, they can be grand estates, farmlands, public gardens and parks, college campuses, cemeteries, scenic highways and industrial sites, they are works of art, narratives of cultures and expressions of regional identity.<sup>80</sup>

The TCLF landscape definitions share emphasis on the unique significance of a site to a group of people, describing specific ways in which existing landscapes have social meaning, significance or impact. TCLF defines designed landscapes as "consciously designed or laid out by a Landscape Architect, master gardener, architect or horticulturist according to design principles or an amateur gardener working in a recognized style or tradition."<sup>81</sup> Vernacular landscapes are landscapes that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped that landscape. "Through social or cultural attitudes of an individual, family or a community, the

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<sup>75</sup> Thompson, 2000

<sup>76</sup> Rybczynski, 1999

<sup>77</sup> Dooley, 1998

<sup>78</sup> Copeland, 1998

<sup>79</sup> Thompson, 2000

<sup>80</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2015

<sup>81</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2015

landscape reflects the physical, biological and cultural character of those every day lives.”<sup>82</sup> Historic sites are landscapes significant for their association to specific events, activities or people.<sup>83</sup> Lastly ethnographic landscapes contain a variety of natural and cultural resources that are defined as heritage resources by the associated people.<sup>84</sup>

While these definitions are absolutely valuable in terms of landscape and cultural preservation, they do not result in a framework for designing future landscapes that have social and cultural meaning. Social Impact Philosophy builds on the idea that places have meaning, to encourage designers to consider the impact and potential of design and process on individuals and communities. Social Impact Philosophy argues that balancing social-needs with design-outcomes leads to social, environmental and economic gain.<sup>85</sup> Complex problems require holistic solutions; the consideration of economic, environmental, and social needs into the design process yields sustainable solutions and increasingly resilient and attractive, economic, environmental, and social systems.<sup>86</sup> A theory of Social Impact Design has been in the works since at least the 1960s when the International Council of Societies for Industrial Designers began consulting with UNESCO on projects for “the betterment of the human condition.”<sup>87</sup> In 1968 the American Institute of Architects convention addressed social responsibility and diversity within the profession. In 1981 Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility formed to encourage designs, which responded to relevant social and environmental issues.<sup>88</sup> Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s countless social impact design efforts were founded ranging from Architects without Borders to the National Endowment for the Art’s ‘Social Impact Design’ grant series.<sup>89</sup> Social impact philosophy can apply to all design sectors and offers benefits to all design stakeholders, but Landscape Architects are unique in their ability to apply the philosophy to ecological, economic, and social issues. The publication NextCity offers an inspiring collection of social impact designs that benefitted marginalized communities:

### **Social Impact Design with an Environmental Emphasis**

In Southern California, the fresh water supply is entirely depleted, leaving residents with water-use restrictions and expensive imported water.<sup>90</sup> A Desalination Facility outside of San Diego aims to deliver 50 million gallons of drinking water per day from the Pacific Ocean to San Diego County but this effort requires a lot of funding and fossil fuels- neither of which are a reliable long-term solution.<sup>91</sup> So, scientists and designers are working together to develop low-cost, low-impact desalination methods for Californians- one startup uses solar power to decontaminate agricultural runoff while another idea is to use “water-chips” uses an electrical

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<sup>82</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2015

<sup>83</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2015

<sup>84</sup> The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2015

<sup>85</sup> Smithsonian, 2013

<sup>86</sup> Kapper, 2000

<sup>87</sup> Smithsonian, 2013

<sup>88</sup> Smithsonian, 2013

<sup>89</sup> Smithsonian, 2013

<sup>90</sup> Goodyear, 2014

<sup>91</sup> Goodyear, 2014



charge to desalinate water.<sup>92</sup> These designs aim to address the social cost of water scarcity in California.

### **Social Impact Design with an Economic Emphasis**

The affordable housing crisis is driven by what critics are calling “the missing middle,” the idea that there is not enough middle-income housing available for people who cannot afford luxury housing or families that cannot fit inside small apartments.<sup>93</sup> Missing middle houses are described as multi-unit, small-scale developments (think duplexes or three-story apartments).<sup>94</sup> Designing more of “the missing middle” would increase the supply of houses on the market, slowing the rising rents, making housing unaffordable in urban centers thereby combating gentrification.<sup>95</sup> This form of housing is also very dense, which would improve neighborhood walkability, and it is almost inherently more environmentally efficient than detached homes. Condensing affordable housing with low-middle class homebuyers and families in mind may be a human-centered strategy that responds to not only to economic issues but environmental and social issues relevant to urban centers as well.

### **Social Impact Design with a Social Emphasis**

One thing you need in a city, that is the cheapest thing to do but also the hardest is a culture of openness and collaboration and sharing. If people are twice as likely to engage with each other, then maybe you don’t need residential density, and if you live in a city or place where no one talks to each other, then the density doesn’t matter.<sup>96</sup>

New companies are striving to design communities based on existing cultural frameworks, incorporating the goal of social interaction into their designs. In Chengdu, China, urban planners are studying the street markets that spring up overnight, providing a platform for a wide variety of social networks to collide in one space, with an eye to increase social interaction between social classes.

The theory and practice of landscape architecture is diverse and the impacts of landscape architecture extend beyond site designs into environmental, economic, and social spheres. The multidisciplinary nature of all design professions means that Landscape Architects are able to and have applied social impact philosophy to sites and issues through work with nonprofits, government departments, planning offices, and design firms. Design disciplines can further embolden students to pursue social impact coursework and projects by building social consciousness into curriculums, insuring that even more of the upcoming graduates are socially conscious designers. The designer who forgets or neglects their impact on ecology, economy, and society has arguably forgotten not only the practical foundation of landscape architecture but the philosophy of designing for social impact that effectively tackles this trifecta of values, which Landscape Architects have always attempted to accommodate.

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<sup>92</sup> Goodyear, 2014

<sup>93</sup> Hurley, 2016

<sup>94</sup> Hurley, 2016

<sup>95</sup> Hurley, 2016

<sup>96</sup> Matuszak, 2014- Quoting Lee Hsieh

## CHAPTER 3 | MASS INCARCERATION BY DESIGN

Mass incarceration is defined by extremely high rates of imprisonment, particularly of the most marginalized members of society.<sup>97</sup> The United States' rate of incarceration is considered high compared to both historic domestic rates and contemporary international rates.<sup>98</sup>

The United States accounts for only 5% of the world's population, but is responsible for nearly 22% of the world's prison population. More than 2 millions people are incarcerated in U.S. prisons as well as local and county jails. 1 in 3 black men in the United States will go to prison or jail if current trends continue. An average of 5 million people are under state or federal supervision in the form of probation or parole.<sup>99</sup>

The system of mass incarceration in the United States is inextricably tied to issues of space, and founded in modernist design principles applied to facilities, which aim to either dehumanize or reform citizens who do not conform to public standards.<sup>100</sup> Historically the idea of who was non-conforming was blatantly tied to skin color and economic-racial oppression.<sup>101</sup> Current social hierarchies that perpetuate inequalities are the basis of the systems that feed mass incarceration.

Spatial and structural design impact mass incarceration at two scales: urban planning that relegates people of color to “ghettos” and “slums” cements the inability of people to progress away from systems of oppression placed on their community, and most correctional facilities are designed without the intention or opportunity to rehabilitate offenders, leading to high rates of recidivism.<sup>102</sup> Prison designs evolved over the last century into the Prison Industrial Complex, which emphasizes economic efficiency/profit and correctional control over rehabilitation or humanity.<sup>103</sup> Elements of United States Correctional Facilities that were originally designed with reformation in mind, such as solitary confinement, have been transformed into extreme forms of punishment, despite research that suggests this pattern is socially and economically detrimental.<sup>104</sup>

Critics of mass incarceration fall mainly into two camps: reformers and abolitionists, both of whom maintain philosophies that would support the involvement of Landscape Architects. Prison reformers believe that the structures and policies that support the Prison Industrial Complex should be adapted to serve as rehabilitating services for offenders. Reformers generally believe that the majority of criminals can be taught not to repeat offenses

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<sup>97</sup> Travis, Western and Redburn, 2014

<sup>98</sup> Bonczar, 2003

<sup>99</sup> Amnesty International, 2016

<sup>100</sup> Guenther, 2013

<sup>101</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>102</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>103</sup> Western, 2014

<sup>104</sup> Frost and Monteiro, 2016

and provided the skills to succeed outside of prison without returning to crime. The landscape surrounding a prison building is an extension of the prison's philosophy, and a representation of the prison's punitive or reformatory intentions. Landscape Architects have a lot to offer through the design of rejuvenating green space, whether it is recreational, meditative, productive, or something else entirely. A few prisons have called on Landscape Architects as they update their campuses to provide rehabilitating services for inmates.

Prison abolitionists believe that the structures and policies that support the Prison Industrial Complex need to slowly disappear altogether in order to resolve the dehumanizing effects of the existing institutions. Abolitionists envision alternative ways of responding to criminal behavior and systems, which decentivize crime and incentivize social cohesion. These goals align seamlessly with the intention of Landscape Architects to design spaces for robust social and/or ecological systems. Landscape Architects already contribute to the work of prison abolitionists through thoughtful planning and site design in urban environments. Intentionally responding to subtle urban segregation through design would have a significant impact on the rate at which people of color are incarcerated. Designing spaces that minimize opportunities for crime might also lower the need for correctional facilities. In addition to the explicit use of design as protest, the opportunities for Landscape Architects to use design to address mass incarceration are numerous. Landscape Architects, and all designers of the built environment, should be held responsible to consider the potential social detriments of their work as well as encouraged to advocate against or improve upon designs shown to promote systems of oppression. This responsibility could be instilled further through education focused on social impact design and/or through a social service licensure requirement.

### **Development of Mass Incarceration**

In July of 2015 a Supreme Court ruling reminded courts across the country that the Fair Housing Act of 1968 forbids the new development of housing that perpetuates segregation.<sup>105</sup> This decision highlights the history of oppression via urban planning and housing design that isolated black families from the educational opportunities and jobs that are alternatives to prison. The sequestration of black families and communities to urban ghettos throughout the 20th century was perpetuated by the policies that encouraged mass incarceration and the designs of structures that would isolate individuals convicted of crime.<sup>106</sup>

It is important to understand why and how mass incarceration was developed in order to comprehend why and how designers contributed to it. The National Resource Defense Council says, "the current U.S. rate of incarceration is unprecedented by both historical and comparative standards."<sup>107</sup> The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, over 716 people per 100,000.<sup>108</sup> In 2008 the U.S. had 24.7% of the world's 9.8 millions documented prisoners, and only 5% of the world's total population.<sup>109</sup> "America's incarceration rate is 12 times the rate in Sweden, 8 times the rate in Italy, 7 times the rate in

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<sup>105</sup> Semeuls, 2015

<sup>106</sup> Semeuls, 2015

<sup>107</sup> Travis. Western and Redburn, 2014

<sup>108</sup> Alexander, 2010

<sup>109</sup> Coates, 2015

Canada, 5 times the rate in Australia and 4 times the rate in Poland.”<sup>110</sup> In 2006 the Department of Justice stated that 7.2 million Americans were in prison, on probation, or on parole, meaning 1 in every 32 Americans was under some form of correctional control.<sup>111</sup>

The rate of black men facing some form of correctional control is noticeably higher than the average. Many scholars argue that this is due to the idea of “black criminality,” a form of propaganda that developed to support the terms of slavery by explaining that black people were inherently criminally natured and that they needed to be occupied or under tight control.<sup>112</sup> After the abolition of slavery, Jim Crow laws were developed to continue suppressing black leaders, and the creation of urban ghettos and an industrialized prison system are the contemporary forms of control, which respond to “black criminality.”<sup>113 114</sup>

During Jim Crow, racial control rested openly upon spatial control. State laws and municipal ordinances in the sections of the country where most blacks resided drew approval from federal courts. These statutes mandated segregation in stores, restaurants and public transportation. After 1877, the economically inefficient sharecropping system became dominant in the south, largely as a way of dispersing the black population and diluting the political power African Americans had secured through their collective political participation in the loyalty and union leagues in the era of abolition democracy. Because the plantation system alone could not suppress black activity, white supremacy relied on the prison system as well. Blacks who refused to work under conditions specified by employers could be arrested for having no visible means of support. Those who fled from these unjust conditions could be incarcerated for vagrancy. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues with pithy precision ‘most blacks in southern prisons had committed only one of two crimes- moving or standing still.’<sup>115</sup>

Within the U.S., Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate, holding just under 900 per every 100,000 people in any one of its state or county correctional facilities (Figure 6).<sup>116</sup> In 2000, 1 in 10 black men between the ages of 20 and 40 were incarcerated in Louisiana (Figure 7).<sup>117</sup> In 2010, one third of all 20 to 40 year old black male high school dropouts were imprisoned, while only 13% of white male dropouts were.<sup>118</sup> Many researchers point to policies that increased sentence length to explain these high incarceration rates. Sentences in the U.S. are much longer than in most other countries. While this may explain the total numbers of

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<sup>110</sup> Coates, 2016

<sup>111</sup> Alexander, 2010

<sup>112</sup> Blackmon, 2009

<sup>113</sup> Oshinsky, 1996

<sup>114</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>115</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>116</sup> Rabuy and Kopf, 2015

<sup>117</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>118</sup> Sakala, 2014

incarcerated people, it fails to explain the higher likelihood of people of color, especially black men, to end up in prison, but the politics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century leave little room for confusion.<sup>119</sup>



Figure 6. Prison Policy Institute's graph showing rising incarceration rates<sup>120</sup>

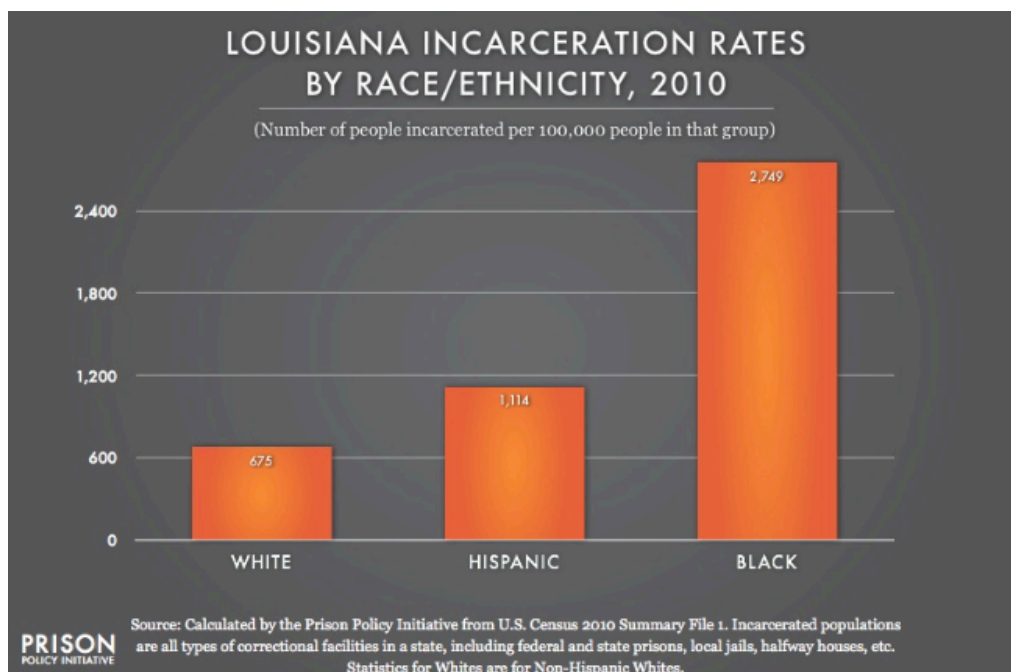


Figure 7. Prison Policy Institute's Graph showing racial imbalances in incarcerated populations in 2010.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Davis, 2002

<sup>120</sup> Rabuy and Kopf, 2015

In 1965 the politician Patrick Moynihan acted on his belief that male unemployment was the biggest detriment to the social mobility of the poor, especially poor, black families. He promoted a guaranteed minimum family income under Richard Nixon's presidency and wrote what was meant to be an internal memo, arguing that black families had endured immense damage from three centuries of racism and systematic oppression.<sup>122</sup> He intended for this argument to result in a policy shift to provide government support to black families, but the report was manipulated by the press highlighting "the failures of family life in the black community... leading to a belief that no amount of government assistance could help black families succeed." Nonetheless Moynihan was able to implement the Family Assistance Plan "designed to economically bolster suffering black families" during the Nixon Administration.<sup>123</sup> Moynihan shared concerns of the growing rates of crime and poverty in lower class neighborhoods with the American public. He recognized that crime and poverty was institutionalized for black families beginning with slavery.<sup>124</sup> His goal was to help those in need, but the public, listening with existing fear of black criminality, misinterpreted his words as caution that black families were not receptive to assistance. This racist public fear motivated tough-on-crime political initiatives in both Nixon and Clinton's administrations.

Many researchers, including Angela Davis, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Bruce Western, Douglas Blackmon, David Oshinsky, Michelle Alexander, Bryan Stevenson and Nils Christie, among others, agree that the issue of mass incarceration and the affects of a criminal record are designed to plague black men more than white. It is impossible to develop structures for incarcerating large masses without first envisioning a large community as more than criminal, in the sense that they are deserving of life, and less than human, in that they are not deserving of comfort or pleasure.<sup>125</sup>

Black people, are the preeminent outlaws of the American Imagination. Black criminality is literally written into the American Constitution- the Fugitive Slave Clause, in Article IV, declares that any 'person held to service or labor who escapes from one state to another could be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due. From America's founding, the pursuit of the right to labor, and the right to live free of whipping and of the sale of one's children were verboten for blacks.<sup>126</sup>

The abolition of legal slavery posed a threat to economic and social systems that white families relied on at the same time that an open labor market increased competition and stripped these families of free or "affordable" labor.<sup>127</sup> In response, white supremacists aimed to maintain authority through adopting systems for legally oppressing free black people. The Jim Crow laws ensured racial segregation in the south through 1965, limited public resources,

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<sup>121</sup> Rabuy and Kopf, 2015

<sup>122</sup> Coates, 2016

<sup>123</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>124</sup> Alexander, 2010

<sup>125</sup> Blackmon, 2009

<sup>126</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>127</sup> Blackmon, 2009

housing, and voting rights, as well as supported lawful arrests of black people for actions that were not considered crimes if committed by white counterparts.<sup>128</sup> The idea of Black Criminality grew from a desire to oppress any threat to white authority during and after slavery.<sup>129</sup>

The systematic idea and fear of black criminality extended from individuals to government authority, which led to attacks on black leadership. During the time that Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King Jr., and Fred Hampton each fought for equal rights and against the oppression of black people, the FBI stalked all four of them.<sup>130</sup> The political war on drugs was born out of the fear of black leadership and criminality. Restricted sales of opiates and cocaine were based on the Harrison Narcotics Act, and were used to continue prosecuting black people at a rate much higher than whites.<sup>131</sup>

Crime and incarceration rates doubled between the 1970s and 80s and again in the 90s, continuing to increase through 2009.<sup>132</sup> Despite falling crime rates from the early 1990s to 2010s, incarceration rates continued to rise.<sup>133</sup> “The incarceration rate rose independent of crime—but not of criminal justice policy.”<sup>134</sup> Policy makers responding to public fears of black criminality believed that a state of mass incarceration would cause crime to decline. Similarly, in Canada a 66% increase in the state prison population between 1993 and 2001 came as a response to black male poverty- this reduced the rate of serious crime by less than 5% and cost 53 billion dollars to taxpayers, an oppositional result to the initiatives intention.<sup>135</sup>

As rates of incarceration increased in the 1970s, ideas of rehabilitation within prisons were replaced by retribution, and ideas of reformation were replaced by punishment.<sup>136</sup> In-prison education all but disappeared and services as simple as air conditioning were removed.<sup>137</sup> The “No Frills Prison Act” aimed to financially reward correctional systems working to prevent luxurious conditions in prisons.<sup>138</sup> Thus prisons became hard places, places where inmates did what they could to survive and left without new professional skills to help free them from recidivism.<sup>139</sup>

In the 80s and 90s the war on drugs perpetuated the public notion of black criminality. Bill Clinton campaigned for presidency and won based on a tough-on-crime platform. Once in office, he quickly signed a bill that offered grants to states that built correctional facilities and cut back on parole as well as zealously pushed the mandatory minimum sentencing effort

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<sup>128</sup> Oshinsky, 1996

<sup>129</sup> Alexander, 2010

<sup>130</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>131</sup> Travis, Western and Redburn, 2014

<sup>132</sup> Alexander, 2010

<sup>133</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>134</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>135</sup> Travis, Western and Redburn, 2014

<sup>136</sup> Blackmon, 2009

<sup>137</sup> Travis, Western and Redburn, 2014

<sup>138</sup> Travis, Western and Redburn, 2014

<sup>139</sup> Alexander, 2010

forward.<sup>140</sup> Mandatory Minimum Sentencing was advertised as a way to counter any discrimination in the courts- if the courts knew the Mandatory Minimum, they would be unable to suggest heavier sentences for marginalized populations.<sup>141</sup> Unfortunately there was strong bias designed into the Mandatory Minimum Sentences- predominantly white crimes had shorter sentences; predominantly black crimes had longer ones.<sup>142</sup>

These policies unfairly affected countless black men and their families, raising a conversation today over the right to reparations for black Americans. Some individual's stories are more severe than others but the sheer number of stories illustrates the compounding impacts of these policies and regulations on black men in the late 1990s as well as the contribution of urban planning and design fields to the development of mass incarceration. Thousands of men who were up for parole during the Clinton era were reshuffled into an endless system of trials. Odell Newton, Robert King, Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox all have particularly insightful stories illustrating the connections between racial oppression, mass incarceration, space and design.

Odell Newton was part of the generation that troubled Moynihan, but Odell had a very stable family and it didn't save him from incarceration. Families do not exist independent of their environment and Odell was born in the midst of an era of government back housing discrimination, quarantining black families to neighborhoods and buildings through restrictive covenants, civic associations and redlining curtailing the ability of black people to buy better housing, move to better neighborhoods and build wealth. Confining black people to the same neighborhood ensured that people who were discriminated against tended to be neighbors with people who had little. Thus while an individual in that community might be high-achieving or high earning, his or her ability to increase that achievement was limited.<sup>143</sup>

The Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) grew from the "tough-on-crime" policies, which encouraged the privatization of prisons and the increase in incarceration rates, based on Jim Crow Laws, founded on the idea of black criminality, stemming from old justifications for slavery in the United States. The PIC describes the growing influence of private prisons in politics, the aspects of economy that rely on private prison models, and the large number of inmates required to sustain this influential system.<sup>144</sup> Advocates of the PIC argue that it supports a wide variety of companies and maintains economic efficiency in addressing crime. Activists against the PIC explain that it imprisons people for the sole purpose of generating income opportunities, and that the PIC actually perpetuates the social problems that it claims to address.<sup>145</sup> Professor Angela Davis from the University of California Santa Cruz History of Consciousness Department argues that the PIC acts as a curtain, covering modern-day political

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<sup>140</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>141</sup> Alexander, 2010

<sup>142</sup> Garbus and Stack, 1998

<sup>143</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>144</sup> Davis, 2002

<sup>145</sup> Christie, 1993



discrimination, where “homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.”<sup>146</sup> Davis is among many scholars who articulate the connection between slavery and the prison industrial complex. When slavery was legally abolished, all of the businesses that relied on free/cheap labor suffered and many former slaves were unable to find gainful employment due to severe discrimination. Prisons were a way to corral “unproductive” or “undervalued” members of society and rebrand them as free/cheap labor.<sup>147</sup>

### **The Role of Maximum Security in Mass Incarceration**

As the system of prisons developed in response to the abolition of slavery and fear of black criminality, the designs of prisons, intentionally or not, reflect the designs for slave cabins and quarters. Slave quarters and cellblocks are designed to keep their inhabitants alive with the fewest resource expenditures necessary- dehumanizing the labor force to avoid moral conflicts.<sup>148</sup>

Before the abolition of slavery there was no real prison system. It wasn't until the end of slavery that the prison system took hold. The 13<sup>th</sup> amendment abolished slavery except for those convicted of a crime, and opened the door for mass criminalization. Prisons were built on the South as opposition to Black Reconstruction and as a way to re-enslave Black workers. An extensive prison system was developed in the interest of maintaining the racial and economic relationship of slavery. Louisiana's Angola Prison illustrates this history best. In 1880, this 8000-acre family plantation was purchased by the state and converted into a prison. Slave quarters became cellblocks. Now expanded to 18,000 acres, Angola Plantation is tilled by prisoners working the land, just as slaves did. Prisoners were also leased to private parties, where the conditions were equivalent to slavery. Lending of prisoners phased out after the lessees killed many prisoners, which resulted in the emergence of a chain gang. The chain gangs originated as a part of a massive road development project in the 1890s, and spread throughout the South. Chains were wrapped around the ankles of prisoners, shackling five together while they worked, ate and slept. For over 30 years Blacks were worked at gunpoint, under whips and chains in a public spectacle of slavery and torture. Eventually the brutality and violence associated with chain gang labor in the US gained negative attention worldwide, and the chain gang was abolished by 1960.<sup>149</sup>

Originally a slave plantation on the banks of the Mississippi River, Angola grew into a brutal, privately owned prison that leased out convicts as forced laborers after the Civil War, renamed Louisiana State Penitentiary.<sup>150</sup> The state took over the operation in 1901, expanding it into the

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<sup>146</sup> Davis, 1998

<sup>147</sup> Davis, 1998

<sup>148</sup> Browne, 2007

<sup>149</sup> Browne, 2007

<sup>150</sup> Cohen, 2013

largest prison-farm in the country, aimed at profiting off of the massive amount of free labor.<sup>151</sup> Louisiana State Penitentiary or Angola was widely known as the toughest, bloodiest prisons in the country. The original cellblocks on Angola's prison grounds were the original slave quarters, called Camp A, were turned into cells used to house black inmates.<sup>152</sup> The prison recycled all of the practices employed on the original plantation, offered inmates as subjects for medical experiments and even today continues to practice long-term solitary confinement.<sup>153</sup>

Angola employed nearly every detrimental practice available to punish and control inmates, but other prisons also used the landscapes around them as extensions of punitive control. By siting prisons on brownfields, officials punctuate their beliefs that inmates are less valuable members of society, that subjecting them to dangerous labor or toxins on a daily basis is fair practice and that inmates are undeserving of the luxuries of well designed urban spaces. These sentiments echo the perspectives of the racist urban planning initiatives implemented throughout the 1900s.

Prisons vary in their designs to some degree based on their level of security and luxury. While Louisiana State Penitentiary (or Angola) is a well-known example of an oppressive high-security facility, it is important to note that not all correctional facilities are so harsh. Design standards that hold true across the board from radial designs that reflect the Panopticon to rectilinear designs like warehouses and tiers to designs with common space like highrises and campuses were developed with efficiency and security in mind, rather than rehabilitation or healing (Figure 8). The quality of institutions varies greatly, but if inmates can afford more luxurious conditions, they're more likely to have access to them. This paper, however, focuses on the general population, which is over-crowded and under-served within the PIC, and how the practice of landscape architecture can contribute to advocacy against these environments or improving conditions within them.

One particularly oppressive element of prison design is solitary confinement, sometimes called administrative segregation (ADSEG) or "the hole," CCR, isolation, "the dungeon, which serves as the most limiting version of designed control. Conditions vary slightly from one facility to another but typically ADSEG units are designed to hold individuals for 23 hours per day with minimal contact to other inmates or correctional officers.<sup>154</sup> Inmates serving ADSEG sentences are legally allowed one hour out of their cell for showering and outdoor exercise (in an outdoor solitary unit) per a day and some are placed on restricted diets.<sup>155</sup>

Despite the current use of solitary as a severe punishment it was initially designed with the intentions of reformation through meditation to achieve penance, hence the term penitentiary. In 1790 the Quakers built Walnut Street Jail with the goal of punishing and rehabilitating criminals.<sup>156</sup> Designed with multiple cellblocks, each containing 16 solitary cells, inmates were expected to reconnect with God, through penitence.<sup>157</sup> At the time, it was a

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<sup>151</sup> Oshinsky, 1996

<sup>152</sup> Cohen, 2013

<sup>153</sup> Garbus and Stack, 1998

<sup>154</sup> Ross, 2013

<sup>155</sup> Ross, 2013

<sup>156</sup> King, 1999

<sup>157</sup> Biggs, 2013

progressive idea, institutionalizing the notion that criminals could be rehabilitated, stepping away from public physical abuse. But, wardens and social scientists did not observe the speed at which inmates would lose their sanity due to such strict isolation until after solitary confinement was incorporated in the design of multiple prisons across the country.

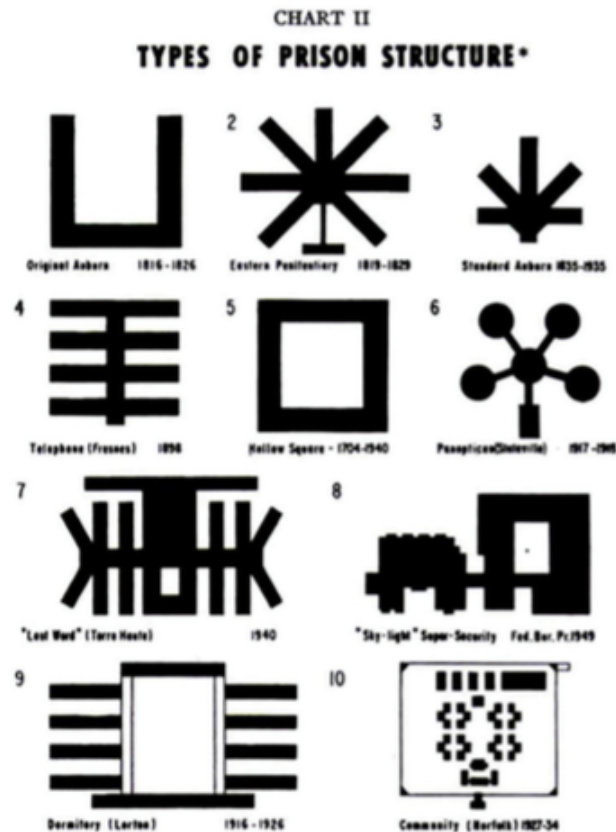


Figure 8. Maximum Security Facility Footprints from Correctional Philosophy and Architecture by Howard Gill.<sup>158</sup>

The opinion and use of solitary confinement wavered throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 1800s the Supreme Court began researching the clinical evidence in Europe of the psychological effects of solitary confinement.<sup>159</sup> In 1890 the U.S. Supreme Court condemned solitary confinement noting that “a considerable number of prisoners fell into a semi-fatuous condition and others became violently insane” although it took almost 100 years more for Eastern State Penitentiary, a totally isolating facility, to close.<sup>160</sup> After 1880, prison designs shifted, focusing more on communal labor with the goal of keeping inmates occupied and keeping institution costs down- one of the early American prisons, Sing Sing in New York State, was built entirely by inmate labor. After the civil rights movement when racist criminal philosophy and tough-on-crime rhetoric combined, solitary confinement designs were reinstituted as punitive tools “used to break the spirits of inmates considered disruptive, violent

<sup>158</sup> Gill, 1962

<sup>159</sup> Ross, 2006

<sup>160</sup> Ross, 2013

or disobedient.”<sup>161</sup> Today, almost all maximum-security prisoners are held in solitary for a large portion of their sentences, and prison structures are designed to accommodate this practice.

Cells vary in design and construction between supermax prisons but are no larger than twelve by seven feet in dimension. At Angola they are only six feet by nine feet. In most cases a cell light remains on 24 hours a day and cell furnishings consist of a bed, a desk and a stool all made of poured concrete and a stainless steel sink and toilet. The economic requirements for these institutions are huge. The annual cost of a supermax cell is \$75,000 whereas an average cell costs \$25,000 in an ordinary state prison.<sup>162</sup> There are two reasons for these costs:

- 1) Supermax prisons depend on high-technology to observe and control inmates, minimizing human contact and the threat of attack to correctional workers by the inmates.
- 2) The correctional officer-to-inmate ratio is also higher which raises labor costs.<sup>163</sup>

Inmates are under strict control in supermax prisons- the lack of human interaction in solitary confinement stimulates, even encourages, any type of psychological issue that an inmate may have suffered from prior to their sentence.<sup>164</sup> The potentially harmful mental conditions inside the supermax prisons have led several corrections and human rights experts and organizations, including Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union, to question whether these facilities are a violation of the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits the state from engaging in cruel and unusual punishment. supermax prison designs have also been criticized for conflicting with the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights- drafted to protect the rights of not only people living in the free world but also those behind bars.<sup>165</sup> Even the U.N.’s Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, insists that the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons has crossed the line between punitive and torturous, stating that more than 15 days of solitary confinement constitutes torture.<sup>166</sup>

Although the effective reach of international human rights standards governing the treatment of prisoners remains uncertain, there seems little doubt that what goes on in a number of Supermax facilities would breach the protections enshrined in these instruments... The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the United States has ratified, for example, has a more extensive ban on ‘torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’ than the Eight Amendment prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment, and requires no demonstration of intent or indifference to the risk of harm, on the part of officials.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Biggs, 2009

<sup>162</sup> Ross, 2006

<sup>163</sup> Ross, 2014

<sup>164</sup> Geunther, 2009

<sup>165</sup> King, 1999

<sup>166</sup> Mandurec, 2015

<sup>167</sup> King 1999

Despite criticism, the impetus to build more supermaxes in the 1990s was so strong that communities were racing to design the most profitable version of a mass incarceration system.<sup>168</sup> The designs and procedures vary, but all of them were created primarily to turn profit, and secondarily to respond to largely white publics' fear of black crime.<sup>169</sup> In 1996 supermax prisons around the country housed 8 to 10% of those behind bars, roughly one hundred thousand individuals—about twice as many as a decade before.<sup>170</sup>

Most states are ostensibly proud of their supermaxes, which were invariably referred to as 'state of the art' institutions. DOC admins highlight their supermaxes technological sophistication, pride in their sheer enormity and expense, but pride most of all in the notion that they had figured it out... finally found a way to beat the inmate. In this sense, the supermax had become symbols, flags flown in victory.<sup>171</sup>

Literature focuses on two reasons for the proliferation of Maximum Security prisons in the United States:

- 1.) As the incarcerated population grew, so did attacks on prison guards. Prison administration and politicians pushed for the design of facilities that would securely house rebellious or violent inmates in response to series of "prison disturbances" in the early 1970s.
- 2.) The policy makers of the 1980s and 1990s saw supermax institutions as a way to expand control over civil disruption. Supermax prisons are part of the prison industrial complex, a network of people and corporations that lobby to expand the prison system.<sup>172</sup>

Mass incarceration resulted in mass prison design and construction; the United States now has at least 64 supermax facilities holding between 80,000 to 100,000 individuals<sup>173</sup> but they were designed when street crime was considered a growing problem. Today, the country has a lower violent-crime rate, and the designs of these structures, particularly of solitary cells, are not only perpetuating cruelty but they may be expensive structures to renovate if incarceration rates continue to decline and prison space is in excess.<sup>174</sup>

The limited resilience of these structures in terms of social evolution is a product of design that failed to focus on human needs. The policies implemented that cemented cycles of poverty and incarceration, and facilitated the construction of these buildings, leave people post-incarceration with low levels of education and skills, who then face future employment discrimination.<sup>175</sup> Policy revisions are imperative to protect people that do not have the resources to protect themselves- state, federal and local government have the ability to change

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<sup>168</sup> Alexander, 2010

<sup>169</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>170</sup> King, 1999

<sup>171</sup> King, 1999

<sup>172</sup> Christie, 1993

<sup>173</sup> Liman Program, 2015

<sup>174</sup> Davis, 2010

<sup>175</sup> Sakala, 2014

limitations on ex-offenders rights to employment, welfare, public housing, educational grants, and student loans.<sup>176</sup> Reversing the structures that deny vulnerable communities access to good jobs, reliable transportation, safe housing, and good schools requires the support of smart policies and the desire of designers to address human needs before succumbing to economic incentives. Landscape Architects can address these issues by using design to promote equal access to urban resources, to rehumanize correctional facilities and by collaborating with ex-offenders in the design of urban areas and prison landscapes.

### **Solitary Confinement Advocacy + Design**

Strong designs for the built environment develop as responses to societal needs. The voices that expressed a need to address rising crime rates in the 1980s and 1990s, through rapid production of prison structures with an emphasis on supermax designs, aimed to dehumanize criminals; these politicians neglected the needs of people forced into social and economic situations that led them to crime in favor of protecting the upper middle class, white majority.<sup>177</sup> Prison architects of the 1980s and 1990s focused on designing safe, stark, cost effective facilities, ignoring or neglecting the toll these designs would take on incarcerated people and their communities. This is a common case where the design funders or policy makers have more input than the people who will use the designs, because they have the ability to revoke financial support.

This cycle produces designs that are socially detrimental in one way or another, and temporally static in that they reflect the needs expressed in a certain time period but rarely can evolve to suit the needs of a dynamic society. Supermax prisons *were* a design solution to what the majority of powerful voices viewed as a problem, but *now* a growing body of voices make the case that the PIC, supermax structures and solitary cells are all part of an antiquated system that perpetuates social problems. Activists, artists, and designers are backing a movement that recognizes the injustices inherent to the PIC, with goals ranging from Prison Reformation to Prison Abolition. Design, and particularly landscape architecture, is an intelligent vehicle for advocating progress and protesting injustice.

### **Prison Reformation**

Quakers played an unfortunate role in designing the first versions of solitary confinement, which evolved into Supermax prisons, but they were also the first people to recognize that these designs were mistakes and to advocate against their continued use.<sup>178</sup> Initially William Penn envisioned solitary confinement as a humane alternative to the punishments that were prevalent in the early 1800s. He drafted Pennsylvania's constitution with a "humane penal code, including murder as the only crime punishable by death."<sup>179</sup> Penn encouraged rehabilitation in prisons through labor and solitary confinement, with the intention

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<sup>176</sup> Liman Program, 2015

<sup>177</sup> Coates, 2015

<sup>178</sup> Roberts, 1985

<sup>179</sup> Bryan et al, 2015

of teaching prisoners new skills and offering them a harsh but meditative setting to reconnect with pure intentions.<sup>180</sup>

The Pennsylvania Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (a Quaker organization) coined the term “collective responsibility,” in response to the realization that solitary confinement was a detrimental practice.<sup>181</sup> They envisioned a second reformation of the justice system that would support marginalized people while in prison; in the early-to-mid 1900s these ideas gave way to in-prison education and professional training. Reformations of the prison system incorporated rehabilitation efforts throughout the 1960s, but when politicians preached Tough on Crime rhetoric, large funders backed out of reformatory support.

The Ford Foundation, which provided critical support to address concerns about policing and civil rights in the early 1960s, announced in the middle of the 1980s that it would end its program in criminal justice. Many other philanthropists began to see problems in terms of issues of crime rather than injustice.<sup>182</sup>

Today more and more individuals and advocates argue that the PIC has layered oppression on oppression. Prisons should instead provide educational and professional opportunities for people who have been pushed to the outskirts of society as well as humanely contain individuals who routinely put others at risk. The Open Society Foundations argues that “the withdrawal of direct philanthropic activity concerning the issue (of criminal justice), despite the persistence of some indirect grant making, has left communities without the habits of collaboration and the technical sophistication that they need to work effectively on these issues” but a return of political, nonprofit and celebrity efforts to address these issues is under way.<sup>183</sup>

At the NAACP’s 106<sup>th</sup> national convention, in 2012, President Obama spoke on the reasons for reforming America’s criminal justice system:

Justice is not only the absence of oppression but the presence of opportunity. Justice is giving every child a shot at a great education no matter what zip code they’re born into. Justice is giving everyone willing to work hard the chance at a good job with good wages, no matter what their name is, what their skin color is or where they live.

A growing body of research shows that people of color are more likely to be stopped, frisked, questioned, charged, detained. African Americans are more likely to be arrested. They are more likely to be sentenced to more time for the same crime. And one of the consequences of this is, around one million fathers are behind bars. Around one in nine African American kids has a parent in prison... our nation is being robbed of men and women who could be workers and taxpayers, could be more actively involved

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<sup>180</sup> Roberts, 1985

<sup>181</sup> Bryan et al, 2015

<sup>182</sup> Bryan et al, 2015

<sup>183</sup> Bryan et al, 2015

in their children's lives, could be role models, could be community leaders, and right now they're locked up for a non-violent offense.<sup>184</sup>

Aside from signing the Fair Sentencing Act, instituting a "Smart on Crime" initiative and reducing sentences of currently incarcerated people based on outdated drug laws President Obama's administration has outlined three areas to continue pursuing reform related to the criminal justice system:

- 1.) The Community: early investment in children reduces the need to incarcerate people later in life, one study shows that every dollar spent on preschool saves two in terms of crime reduction.
- 2.) The Courtroom: Mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent crimes prevent the ability of a judge to steer a young person who has made a mistake in a better direction and cost taxpayer money. Investing in alternatives to prison like drug treatment and probation programs would reduce the prison population and the amount of money spent on it.
- 3.) The Cell Block: The current conditions of prisons do not increase the possibility that an inmate will get their life back on track, from overcrowding, gang activity, and rape to the use of solitary confinement prisons perpetuate feelings of hostility, alienation, and violence.<sup>185</sup>

Singer and activist John Legend writes and speaks on prison reform across the country. Reaffirming the notions of President Obama's administration and succinctly describing the goals of the prison reformation movement, Legend says:

For four decades, we have embraced the lie that incarceration makes us safer- that it protects us from 'dangerous' people. Mass incarceration, does not make us safer; it makes us more vulnerable. It destroys communities, wastes resources, separates families, and ruins lives. It is the result of policies that criminalize poverty and make prisons and jails become warehouses for deeply damaged people with little or no access to mental health or substance abuse treatment. Instead, let's invest those resources in our neighbors and family members so they don't end up in the system to begin with, and if they do, so they can get back on their feet.<sup>186</sup>

### **How Can Landscape Architects Contribute to Prison Reformation?**

Landscape Architects interested in contributing to prison reformation efforts have three options, two of which have gained momentum over the last few years. Landscape Architects can tackle the obvious by improving the landscapes surrounding prison facilities- this practice has been documented in prisons across the world to improve the mental and physical health of inmates as well as lower rates of recidivism (Figure 9).<sup>187</sup> Landscape Architects can collaborate with former offenders and current inmates on the design of prison campuses and public spaces

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<sup>184</sup> Hudson, 2015

<sup>185</sup> Hudson, 2015

<sup>186</sup> Legend, 2015

<sup>187</sup> Van der Linden, 2015



that facilitate the re-integration of inmates into free society through programs like *Roots to Re-Entry* in Philadelphia and *Restoration Not Incarceration* in Houston. Landscape Architects are professionals when it comes to what prison reformers call ‘collective impact’ or “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.”<sup>188</sup> Collective impact, like design thinking, is a process that brings various stakeholders together to address a problem, such as mass incarceration.<sup>189</sup> Lastly, Landscape Architects interested in contributing to prison reformation can act as social lobbyists, following in the footsteps of Olmsted; contemporary Landscape Architects can involve themselves in political arenas, using their understanding of how the environment and society affect each other to convince politicians and decision makers to support humane reformations to the PIC.

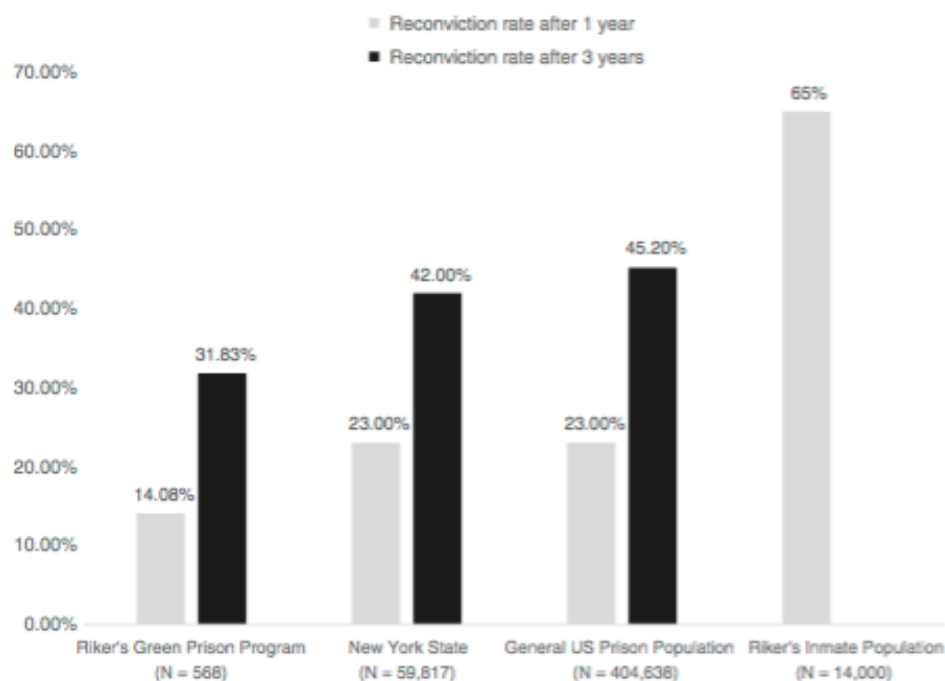


Figure 9. Recidivism rates of Riker’s Green program compared with state, national and prison averages<sup>190</sup>

The design of prison structures and landscapes could benefit from revisions created by a collaborative group of politicians, social scientists, former and current inmates and Landscape Architects. Bringing a variety of voices to the table during the conceptual development phase of design not only combats the potential for a design to have detrimental social impact but also provides an opportunity to incorporate fresh thoughts into the design process. There are two positive impacts that have been recorded for prison landscape reformation, an improvement in

<sup>188</sup> Kania and Kramer, 2014

<sup>189</sup> Bryan et al, 2015

<sup>190</sup> Van Der Linden, 2015

the mental health conditions of inmates and a reduction in recidivism.<sup>191</sup> Two successful examples of this type of collaborative design effort, one in Mitchellville, Iowa and one in Halden, Norway, addressed the need for prisons to offer alternative spaces for decompression, incorporate experiential education into training classes, and utilize vegetation to reduce mental fatigue.

Professor of Landscape Architect, Julie Stevens, and her students at Iowa State University recognized the need to and the challenges of successfully designing a rehabilitating prison environment. Through collaboration with the Iowa Department of Corrections, students developed a masterplan for the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women that maintains security and fosters contemplation and education (Figure 10 and Figure 11). The IDOC requested a planting plan from students that would facilitate a calm environment, students returned a masterplan complete with an outdoor classroom and decompression deck, based off of therapeutic design principles for healthcare settings, Kaplan's model of environmental preference and input directly from offenders and prison staff.<sup>192</sup>

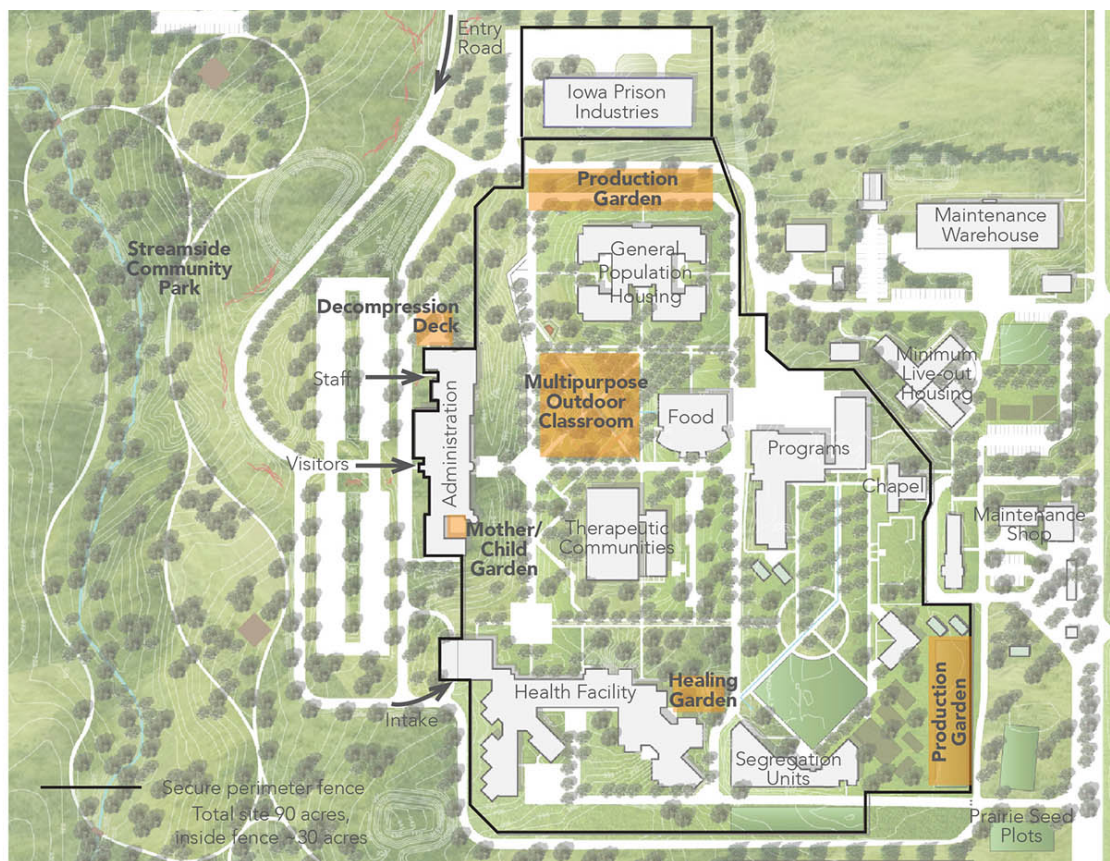


Figure 10. ICIW Masterplan designed by students at Iowa State University under professor Julie Stevens instruction<sup>193</sup>

<sup>191</sup> Van Der Linden, 2015

<sup>192</sup> Stevens, 2015

<sup>193</sup> Stevens, 2015



Figure 11. Perspective of ICIW mounded lawn, designed by students at Iowa State University under professor Julie Stevens instruction<sup>194</sup>

Halden Prison in Halden, Norway is a high-security prison that was designed by prison officials, architects, artists and psychologists with the intention of ‘making sentences as meaningful, enlightening and rehabilitating’ as possible.<sup>195</sup> It serves as a precedent for the reformation of prison design and programming, utilizing both the interior of the structures and exterior landscape to facilitate rehabilitation (Figure 12 and Figure 13).



Figure 12. Cell at Halden Prison, designed to mimic a small apartment to lower re-entry stress post incarceration<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Stevens, 2015

<sup>195</sup> Benko, 2015

<sup>196</sup> Benko, 2015





Figure 13. Landscape at Halden Prison, designed to soften the aesthetic of the concrete and steel fences and provide a natural space for reflection.<sup>197</sup>

Landscape Architects can also contribute to lowering recidivism rates by mentoring, hiring and collaborating with ex-offenders. Imagine spending years confined by some form of correctional control, only to be released and face employment discrimination with a criminal record. The unsuccessful re-entry of ex-offenders post incarceration resulting in recidivism is a major driver for mass incarceration. Organizations like *Restoration Not Incarceration* in Houston, Texas and *Roots to Re-entry* in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania aim to address this issue by combining social work with ecological restoration and horticulture training.

Restoration not Incarceration was founded in 2010 to pair “serious restoration ecology with licensed social work” allowing “prairies and people to restore each other.”<sup>198</sup> The effort applies nature and clinical psychosocial work to address the mental and physical health of homeless and previously incarcerated juveniles and simultaneously works to protect the endangered coastal prairie that spans the Louisiana and Texas coasts. The program was piloted at Esteban Park in Houston, Texas involving homeless and ex-offender juveniles in research, design and construction of the site and facilitating personal and group psychosocial work through intimate connections to nature (Figure 14 and Figure 15).<sup>199</sup>

Other organizations provide opportunities for Landscape Architects to share their knowledge and skills with formerly incarcerated people. Roots to Re-entry, a subset of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, similarly focuses on helping formerly incarcerated people develop skills for meaningful work in the green industry. Roots to Re-entry’s emphasis focuses more on job-readiness than Restoration Not Incarceration emphasis on mental health, but is

<sup>197</sup> Benko, 2015

<sup>198</sup> Great Plains Restoration Council, 2016

<sup>199</sup> Gray, Coates and Hetherington, 2013

nonetheless an easy way for Landscape Architects to contribute to a society with lower rates of recidivism, and thus lower rates of incarceration. Oregon's Department of Corrections works with the organization Lettuce Grow to build gardens on prison campuses and graduate inmates from Master Gardener programs.



Figure 14. Esteban Park Masterplan, from the Great Plains Restoration Council<sup>200</sup>



Figure 15. Jarid Manos, Founder of The Great Plains Restoration Society with one of the program participants constructing Esteban Park<sup>201</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Great Plains Restoration Council, 2016

<sup>201</sup> Great Plains Restoration Council, 2016

Landscape Architects can also affect prison reformation efforts by lobbying for improvements based on their understanding of the reciprocal effects of people and environments on one another. Lobbying against urban, environmental racism would benefit the communities that face the highest incarceration rates.<sup>202</sup> Lobbying for improved transportation and green infrastructure in neighborhoods that are under-served, would lead to equitable opportunities for people from different neighborhoods.<sup>203</sup> Perhaps, most significantly, lobbying against the design and construction of systems that implicitly and explicitly dehumanize and torture people, would lead to vast improvements to correctional facilities.<sup>204</sup>

### **Prison Abolition and Grounded Justice**

Prison abolitionists differ from reformers in that they believe that the current PIC is so strongly tied to oppressive systems that it needs to be entirely abolished for justice to prevail. Abolitionists do not generally believe that immediately deconstructing prison structures is a solution but rather they aspire to a criminal justice ethic that aims to decarcerate the country gradually, until the structures lose their relevance.<sup>205</sup> Abolitionist believe that the goals of criminal law- namely deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation and retribution could be pursued by other means than criminal law enforcement. Criminal law enforcement is usually defended by the need to address violent criminals but grounded or preventative justice aims to replace criminal law with reinvestment in social welfare and projects that “prevent the design of spaces and products that create opportunities for offending, developing and greening urban spaces, creating both safe harbors for individuals at risk of fleeing violence and alternative livelihoods for persons subject to criminal law enforcement.”<sup>206</sup>

Professor Angela Davis’ succinctly explains the goals of prison abolition in her book *Are Prisons Obsolete*:

The prison functions ideologically as an abstract site unto which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. It relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and increasingly, global capitalism...Positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we should try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment- demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all and a justice system based on reparations and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> LAM Staff, 2015

<sup>203</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>204</sup> Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility, 2016

<sup>205</sup> McLeod, 2015

<sup>206</sup> McLeod, 2015

<sup>207</sup> Davis, 2010

## How Can Landscape Architects Contribute to Prison Abolition?

One of the main goals of prison abolition is to examine the social and physical landscape that sends people to prison and enable design innovations that limit opportunities for crime, like better lighting in public spaces. Many crimes can be addressed through punitive control or through “using infrastructural and design-focused preventative interventions.”<sup>208</sup> Focusing specifically on the physical landscapes that facilitate criminal behavior brings a challenging conversation around gentrification to the table. Urban designers including Landscape Architects can address vacancy or blight but this may result in a degree of upgrading that outprices current residents leading to gentrification and displacement. As discussed earlier, urban redevelopment and greening in New Orleans had clear connections to the displacement of black families after Hurricane Katrina- the relocation of these families into limited resource neighborhoods is a way of, intentionally or not, continuing to suppress the success of historically marginalized people.<sup>209</sup> Urban Designers have to carefully consider the impact of their work on all of the people that are affected by it, from the clients and politicians to the displaced and incarcerated, and use their design tool-belt to intentionally combat systems of oppression if they aim to design urban environments that benefit all classes and reduce the potential for criminal behavior.

## Design and Refusal to Design as Protest

Landscape Architects can design urban spaces that tangentially affect incarceration rates or use design as protest to directly affect incarceration rates. Project for Public Spaces and Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility both developed from a coalition of designers who believed in the socially progressive potential of their respective professions. Project for Public Spaces is dedicated to helping people “create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities.”<sup>210</sup> While their work does not directly address the issue of mass incarceration, the creation of meaningful, functional and safe public spaces would minimize crime, thereby affecting incarceration rates, as discussed earlier.

The struggle to balance morality with economy in design has led many designers to entirely reevaluate their contributions to social progress. The organization Architects, Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR) actively petitions against the design of spaces for cruel or unusual punishment, stating:

The United Nations bodies determined that long term solitary isolation is a form of torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment prohibited by international law, and made special reference to the United States use of supermax prisons and juvenile solitary confinement as violations. All international human rights bodies have also long included abolition of the death penalty as a necessary ultimate step in realizing human rights. AIA’s code of ethics already includes the statement ‘members should uphold human rights in all of their professional endeavors, but this standard is unenforceable without reference to international human rights standards. Adding enforceable

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<sup>208</sup> McLeod, 2015

<sup>209</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>210</sup> Project for Public Spaces, 2016



language to the AIA code can help redress the problems caused by buildings that embody human rights violations.

ADPSR is asking the American Institute of Architects to amend its code of ethics and professional conduct to prohibit the design of spaces for killing, torture, and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In the United States, this comprises the design of execution chambers, super maximum security prisons, where solitary confinement is an intolerable form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and solitary confinement facilities for juveniles and the mentally ill. As people of conscience and as a profession dedicated to improving the built environment for all people, we cannot participate in the design of spaces that violate human life and dignity. Participating in the development of buildings designed for killing, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is fundamentally incompatible with professional practice that respects the standards of decency and human rights. AIA has the opportunity to lead our profession in upholding human rights.<sup>211</sup>

Along these lines, The National Association of Minority Architects held their conference in New Orleans in the fall of 2015. The theme of the conference was “RISE: Social Justice by Design” with one of the conference workshops, hosted by Next City and Blights Out, focusing on the use of design as protest. The workshop brought community activists, community members, designers and architects together to brainstorm physical, spatial, artistic and digital “public space interventions for 21<sup>st</sup> century protests.”<sup>212</sup>

The conference reminded members to support diversity within design professions and social justice by designing in and for the communities where they work. Design and architecture of the built environment facilitates the social well-being of many communities but commonly barricades the social development and progress of disadvantaged communities. The workshop stemmed from the idea that designed interventions “make a lasting impact that cannot be fully realized without the same socio-economic and socio-cultural considerations that we lend our visions to in protest.”<sup>213</sup>

### **Herman’s House**

Through story telling all designers can find inspiration for site design that facilitates public education, as is the case with the New Orleans based project, Herman’s House. Herman Wallace was sentenced to Angola in 1971 for armed robbery. In prison he established the Angola Chapter of the Black Panther Party with Ronald Ainsworth, Albert Woodfox and Gerald Bryant.<sup>214</sup> The group advocated to improve conditions in the rough prison but the administration profited from the way things were and viewed these men as a threat.<sup>215</sup> Many advocates believe that the political tension between these men and prison officials led to their conviction as murderers of a prison guard in 1972, and their subsequent long-term sentences to

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<sup>211</sup> Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility, 2016

<sup>212</sup> Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility, 2016

<sup>213</sup> Brown, 2015

<sup>214</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>215</sup> Garbus and Stack, 1998



solitary confinement.<sup>216</sup> Herman's House was a project aimed at advocating against mass incarceration and the use of solitary confinement based off of a design exercise between Herman Wallace and artist Jackie Sumell.<sup>217</sup>

Social welfare and political struggle are difficult to separate in African American history: from vigilance committees who assisted fugitive slaves to mutual aid societies in the south. The national Black Panther Party grew out of a series of social services; black families were not receiving the public support they needed to succeed, so they organized systems to take care of one another.<sup>218</sup> Their initiative to feed kids breakfast before school was the beginning of the free and reduced lunch program that prevails across the country today.<sup>219</sup> The intertwining of charity and politics often leads to contention as it threatens existing standards. Political contention often leads to political violence, as was the case with the Black Panther Party.<sup>220</sup> What began as a system of social services to make up for absence of state provisions turned into a militant defense of equality for the black community.

Similar religious beliefs and social concerns inspire the varied activity of Christian faith-based family planning programs, right to life political action committees and abortion clinic bombers. Similar social and political grievance motivated African-American mutual assistance committees, the non-violent protest movement inspired by Martin Luther King Jr and the armed resistance of the Black Panther Party. Viewed in light, it is not difficult to imagine charitable service provisions simply as another means of addressing the same problems that violent activities intend to address.<sup>221</sup>

The philosophy of non-violence in the 1960s was viewed by some as untenable due to police brutality- this perspective on top of centuries of oppression led to a Black Power ethic reliant on self-preservation and determination.<sup>222</sup> Groups organized in the early 1960s to implement social welfare programs in limited resource neighborhoods that resulted from segregationist urban planning. Oakland, California was a prime location for the development of Black Power ethics from social welfare to political violence (Figure 16).<sup>223</sup> The city transformed from a majority white area to a majority black area in the 1960s.<sup>224</sup> Integration was seemingly inevitable but public administration feared the changes in black social mobility and aimed to implement stronger social control through policing. This "social control" manifested as discriminatory practices that victimized black communities vying for success.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>217</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>218</sup> Pope and Flanigan, 2013

<sup>219</sup> Nelson, 2016

<sup>220</sup> Pope and Flanigan, 2013

<sup>221</sup> Pope and Flanigan, 2013

<sup>222</sup> Pope and Flanigan, 2013

<sup>223</sup> Nelson, 2016

<sup>224</sup> Green, 2015

<sup>225</sup> Pope and Flanigan, 2013

In 1966 Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton founded the Black Panther Party in Oakland.<sup>226</sup> The ideology that shaped the organization grew from class and racial consciousness as well as a belief that non-violence was an inadequate political strategy to address the needs of the Black Community. These founders were concerned with police harassment in the Black community and were driven to take up arms as advocated by the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, the body of work left by Malcolm X, and the stance of Robert Williams.<sup>227</sup>

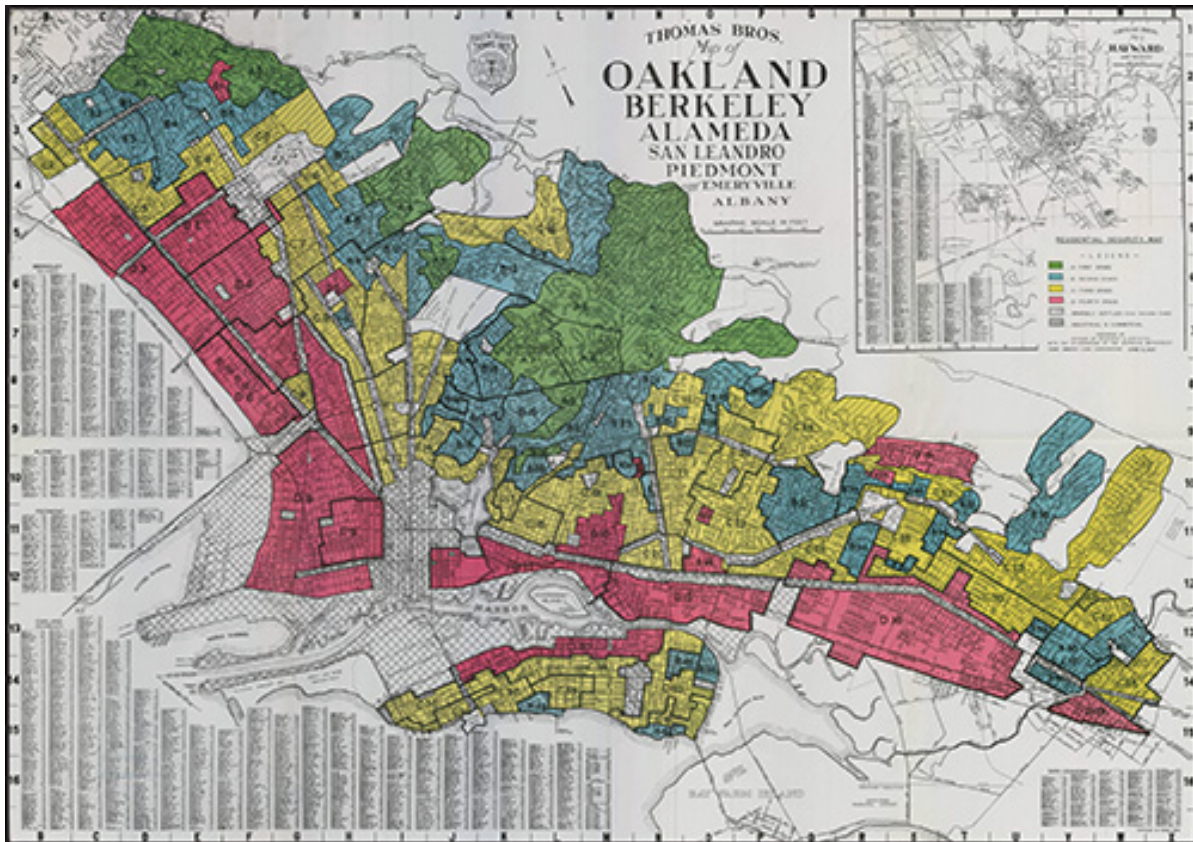


Figure 16. Map from 1937 of available residential security in Oakland, California illustrating the “redlining” that encouraged white flight to city suburbs and the settling of black families throughout the 50s and 60s into the urban core, the neighborhoods painted red. This transition in urban ethnicity led to a removal of city resources from the center of the city and hence the development of the Black Panther Party.<sup>228</sup>

The assassination of Malcolm X coupled with limited opportunities, local government suppression of Black political participation and police harassment tipped the Black Panther Party’s balance from an emphasis on social welfare to social warfare.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>226</sup> Nelson, 2016

<sup>227</sup> Pope and Flanigan, 2013

<sup>228</sup> Green, 2015

<sup>229</sup> Nelson, 2016

In 1973 Robert King, Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox, already imprisoned for robbery, were convicted of the murder of a prison guard without any physical evidence linking them to the crime.<sup>230</sup> They worked to create rule within the prison, fighting against continued segregation, systematic corruption and abuse by security on this 18,000 acre “former” slave plantation through mostly peaceful, non-violent protests. Their involvement advocating for improvements at Angola and starting a local chapter of the Black Panther Party, attracted the attention of politicians. So prison officials began punishing inmates who were seen as rebellious leaders, drawing attention to the dehumanizing practices prevalent throughout the prison.<sup>231</sup>

After their murder conviction they were each placed in solitary confinement, where King served 29 years, Wallace served 41 years and Woodfox served nearly 43 years.<sup>232</sup> All three men had alibis stating they were nowhere near the scene of the murder when it occurred and all three men fought for justice while held in solitary (King in particular, was at an entirely separate facility on the day of the murder, but remained in solitary for under investigation for 29 years).<sup>233</sup> They filed a civil lawsuit challenging the inhumane practice of long-term solitary confinement- the case detailed unconstitutional cruel and unusual treatment and systematic “due process violations” at the hands of Louisiana officials, contributing to Woodfox’s eventual freedom but not his legal innocence.<sup>234</sup>

Artist-activist Jackie Sumell met Robert King at a conference in California in 2001, shortly after he was released, while she was studying for her Master of Fine Arts at Stanford. King shared his story with Sumell, and when she asked what she could do for the still imprisoned Wallace and Woodfox, King told her to write them a letter. Sumell’s exchange with Wallace developed into a friendship and project that gave him something to focus on beyond solitary confinement and helped her share his story. He later reflected on the project, saying that it was one of the best decisions he had ever made.<sup>235</sup>

In 2003, Sumell asked Wallace in a letter “What kind of house does a man who has lived in a 6 x 9 foot box for over a year dream of?” This led to their collaborative design of his dream home (Figure 17).<sup>236</sup> Sumell visualized and modeled the home that Wallace described in order to share his story with a wider audience (Figure 18, Figure 19, Figure 20, Figure 21). In his letters, Wallace is detailed and thoughtful about the design of his dream home from material choices to layout- most of his decisions are in some way related to the decades he spent confined to a his small concrete room. Wallace returns to dreams of gardening and metaphors of the freedom he envisions in a lush, green environment so the home includes large flower beds. Wallace focused on his belief in black power, so a black panther is tiled into the bottom of his pool. Deeply affected by his time as a prisoner, Wallace feared for his safety, so the home includes extensive security features.

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<sup>230</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>231</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>232</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>233</sup> Sumell, 2016

<sup>234</sup> Cole, 2016

<sup>235</sup> Cole, 2016

<sup>236</sup> Sumell, 2012



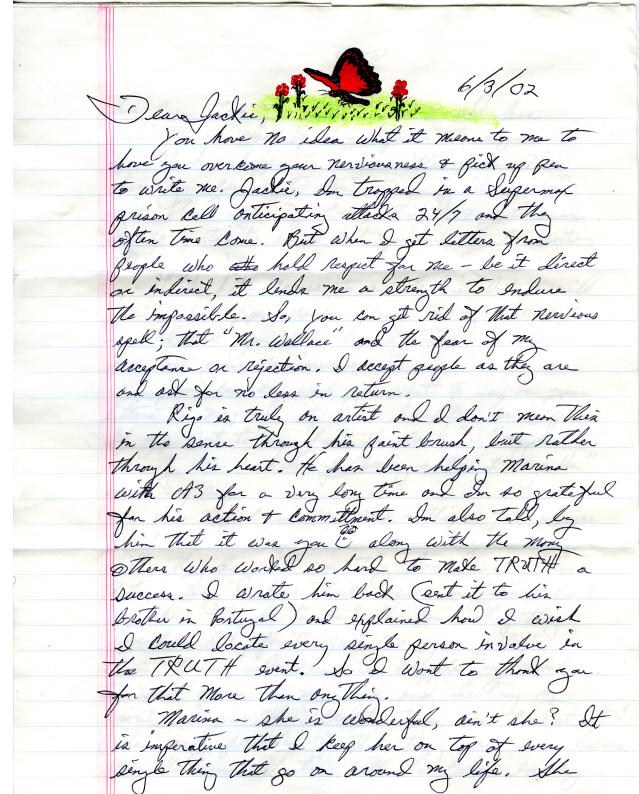


Figure 17. Letters from Herman Wallace to Jackie Sumell<sup>237</sup>



Figure 18. To-scale Model of Herman Wallace's Cell and scaled model of Herman's House<sup>238</sup>

Sumell's use of design as advocacy evolved into an incredibly meaningful exercise for Wallace, an Emmy award-winning documentary, an education for countless individuals who saw and supported the project and the plan for a community center in Wallace's hometown,

<sup>237</sup> Sumell, 2016

<sup>238</sup> Sumell, 2012

New Orleans, based off of the designs for his dream house.<sup>239</sup> At Herman's request the home is designed with large flower beds at Herman's request, This project exemplified the intersection of design and advocacy or protest, and laid the foundation for a landscape-based effort to continue advocating against the marginalization and the mass incarceration of black people in the United States, the Solitary Gardens in New Orleans. These projects serve as modes of communication, vehicles for sharing stories, building awareness, raising empathy and facilitating change. While they do not directly transform prison infrastructure their value exists in building public support for changing cruel policies and practices. The public landscape is an ideal canvas for employing design as protest.

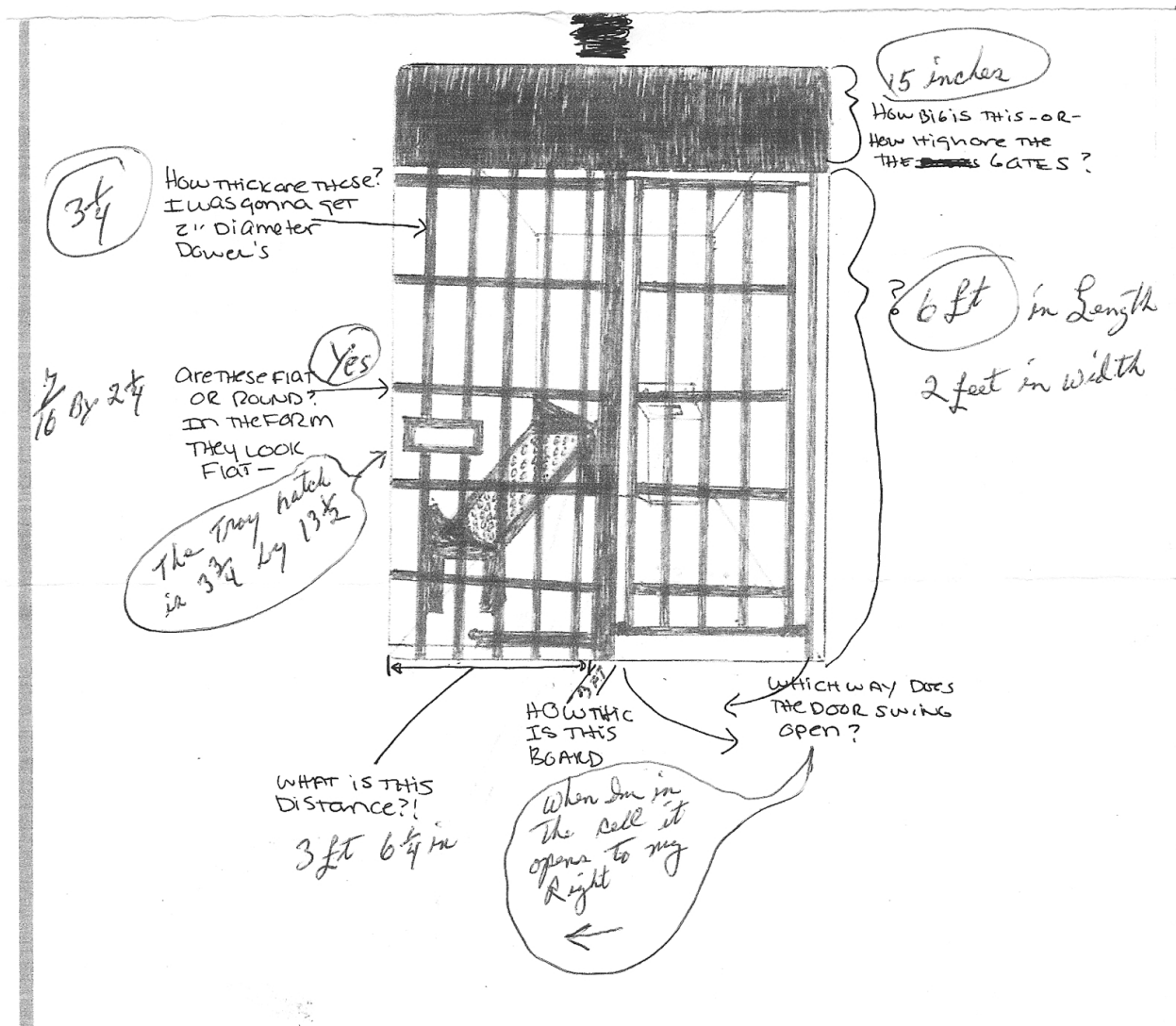


Figure 19. Jackie's questions about Herman's cell's dimensions with responses from Herman<sup>240</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>240</sup> Sumell, 2016





Figure 20. Sumell's Rendering of Herman's House<sup>241</sup>



Figure 21. Architect's Model of Herman's House derived from Sumell's work<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Sumell, 2012

<sup>242</sup> Barraveld, 2012

## CHAPTER 4 | SOLITARY GARDENS: LANDSCAPE DESIGN AS ADVOCACY

So many individuals who could genuinely benefit from the use of design as advocacy or protest have experienced oppression instead. Designing the elements of the built environment with the deliberate intention to dehumanize individuals and communities has had a range of unfortunate to deadly results that require a deliberate antidote. Part of this antidote is realized in the work of Landscape Architects who strive for rehumanizing, social impact design.

Landscape architects, planners and other land-use professionals can play an important role in disconnecting the nation's racial regimes from their spatial grounding. Environmental designers must begin consciously to write and draw the under-represented and the disenfranchised into their schemes and plans rather than ignoring or excluding such groups. They must also work actively to diversify the fields of practice in order to challenge white dominance in design and decision-making. These efforts need to go beyond the kinds of tokenistic community participation to surrender actual decision-making power to community groups.<sup>243</sup>

### Project Philosophy

Slavery did not end in 1865; it evolved. The 13<sup>th</sup> amendment includes an exception to the abolition of slavery for those 'duly convicted of a crime'. U.S. prisons are filled with people of color 'duly convicted of a crime' at a rate 8 times higher than whites. Of the 2.2 million incarcerated persons in prison today, more than 80,000 are subjected to indefinite solitary confinement, the practice of isolating a prisoner for 23 hours per day in a 6' x 9' cell. Solitary confinement has been defined as torture by the ACLU and human rights watchdogs across the world. The effects of solitary confinement on health are grave: Paranoia, alienation, atrophied imagination and dehumanization. These symptoms of our society's imprisoned consciousness are mirrored in the psychosocial and physical well being of oppressed communities throughout our nation. In a society whose imagination is crippled by personal and collective trauma, it is important to illustrate not only what is wrong with this system of injustice, but also what is possible.<sup>244</sup>

People serving indefinite solitary sentences are limited by tight steel and concrete barriers, intended to suppress individual identity, providing only the physical resources necessary to keep a heart beating, but none of the resources necessary to keep a person's consciousness or spirit alive. Separated from the original intention of solitary cells (penance, meditation and reformation), these barriers represent the harshest form of social control, the most direct form of design articulating that the lives stunted behind these bars, doors or walls do not matter.

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<sup>243</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>244</sup> SOLITARY GARDENS, 2016

Public parks on the other hand have always been designed with the intention to provide the natural resources that are absent from urban design but necessary to enjoy life: plant life, fresh air, space to move and interact with other people. Frederick Law Olmsted enabled the development of landscape architecture as a profession through his articulation and illustration of public park provisions within an urban framework.<sup>245</sup> However these public park provisions are often reserved as luxury for upper classes and in such cases they tangentially support elements of oppressive urban planning (one example of this discussed later is Louis Armstrong Park in New Orleans).<sup>246</sup>

The Solitary Gardens are a public art project and park, located at 2600 Andry St. in New Orleans Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, founded in the effort to build Herman's House. Solitary Gardens was designed to provide a space for learning about and advocating against the use of solitary confinement- envisioning alternatives to the social landscape plagued by mass incarceration.<sup>247</sup> Solitary Gardens fosters communication between persons subjected to indefinite solitary confinement and volunteer communities by utilizing community gardening principles, an educational curriculum and art-based intervention.<sup>248</sup> The design of the park illustrates the intentions of the prison abolition movement, plants intentionally overcome prison architectures on site as a metaphor of human ability to triumph over systems of oppression. "This project cultivates a space for both nurturing and regenerating our natural capacity for commiseration with our fellow human beings. The ecological and social footprint of the Solitary Gardens aims to counterbalance that of the prison complex."<sup>249</sup>

The design of Solitary Gardens aims to illustrate three tensions between designed environments and the complex social issues related to mass incarceration:

- 1) The freedom associated with public parks with the constraint inherent to solitary confinement and prison landscapes
- 2) The absence of public parks (and their provisions) in a historically low-income, black neighborhood with the surplus of city-owned vacant land in the neighborhood.
- 3) The use of landscape architecture as a rehumanizing device for telling the stories of marginalized people.

The masses of literature focused on the community and health benefits of common green space as well as the attraction to and use of public parks by community members serve as undeniable evidence that these spaces have positive social impact.<sup>250</sup> Olmsted envisioned Central Park as a space for the working class to rest and reconnect with nature and combat the harshness of urban life. It is difficult to think of a public park that does not share these intentions. Solitary confinement, on the other end of the design spectrum, aims to completely isolate an individual from any of the benefits associated with common green space, despite the widely accepted use of public parks as rehabilitating spaces for urban community members.

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<sup>245</sup> Schleper, 2009

<sup>246</sup> Lipsitz, 2007

<sup>247</sup> SOLITARY GARDENS, 2016

<sup>248</sup> SOLITARY GARDENS, 2016

<sup>249</sup> SOLITARY GARDENS, 2016

<sup>250</sup> Lee and Maheswaran, 2011



The park provisions that act as rehabilitating services are not solely limited for individuals in solitary confinement, they are restricted by varying degrees to all incarcerated people, individuals on parole and people living in under-valued neighborhoods (who are more often than not people of color or new immigrants). An examination of the access points to many public parks shows a physical barrier between the park and adjacent under-valued neighborhoods.<sup>251</sup>

Louis Armstrong Park in New Orleans provides an example of the common practice of limiting public park access to people of color or low-income neighborhoods. The park was originally created in the 1960s after Federal Urban Renewal Funds leveled eight blocks of Tremé, a historically black neighborhood, in order to create a cultural complex.<sup>252</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, one of the homes leveled belonged to Albert Woodfox's family.<sup>253</sup> It was designed as a lower cost solution when funding was lost for the complex.<sup>254</sup> It contains Congo Square, an area where slaves and free black people historically congregated on Sundays, and is named after Louis Armstrong, a black musician who hailed from New Orleans. Ironically, residents of the adjacent, historically black neighborhood, Tremé, are limited access to the park by a tall iron fence.<sup>255</sup> A simple analysis of vacant land and green space in the city further exemplifies the lack of access to green space in low income and black neighborhoods despite an abundance of land available for the construction of public parks.<sup>256</sup>

"Every designer cannot be of the people they are designing for, but they can be compelled to step outside of themselves."<sup>257</sup> Landscape Architects have the ability to collect stories revolving around these issues and incorporate the histories, voices and needs of marginalized people into their designs. Solitary Gardens aims to accomplish this on multiple levels, through sculptural raised beds designed by people serving solitary sentences to reflect their experience within solitary confinement, through the location of the site in a historically black community and across the street from a new public high school which will likely serve a majority of black students, through collaborative design of the site itself with neighbors and community groups, and through the creation of a space that tells the stories of people oppressed by the prison industrial complex and activates people outside of prison to advocate on behalf of the voices stifled behind bars.<sup>258</sup>

These tiers of collaborative design behind the construction of Solitary Gardens facilitate a number of benefits to collaborators and site visitors. The most tangible benefit of the design process is the collaboration between the incarcerated designer and the outside volunteer- this interaction is an opportunity for the incarcerated individual to not only exercise creativity and communication, but also have a concrete impact outside of their cell and an opportunity to join a movement advocating against the system that oppresses them. The relief of this interaction is

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<sup>251</sup> Scott, 2014

<sup>252</sup> Estrade, 2003

<sup>253</sup> Sumell, 2016

<sup>254</sup> Estrade, 2003

<sup>255</sup> Estrade, 2003

<sup>256</sup> Dai, 2011

<sup>257</sup> Zewde, 2016

<sup>258</sup> Zewde, 2016

a visceral education for the volunteer who installs the incarcerated person's design and a distinct education for anyone viewing the sculptural memorial, touching on both the individual designer's story as well as the deep impact of mass incarceration. Lastly, the collaboration with neighbors and community members on the design of the park results in an activated space, charged with the opinions and desires of people affected by discriminatory urban planning.

### **Project Overview**

The corner of Law and Andry Sts. in the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> ward was selected by the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority as the site for the installation of Solitary Gardens because of the abundance of vacant land in the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> ward, the history of the marginalized neighborhood and the proximity of the site to the new Martin Luther King Jr High School (Figure 22). The site turned out to be an even more valuable location because of the neighbors and local organizations that took interest in the development of a meaningful, relevant art project and park nearby.



Figure 22. Location of Solitary Gardens in Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, adjacent to the new MLK High School

Solitary Gardens is connected to Bayou Bienville on the north by one rental and three more vacant lots. The family in the rental has enthusiastically supported the activity next door and local firm Eskew Dumez Ripple partnered with the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority and local community organization Sankofa to develop an extension of the park space into the adjacent vacant lots. To the east and west of Solitary Gardens various neighbors and gardeners have offered suggestions and support. The southern border mirroring the new Martin Luther

King Jr High school inspired a written curriculum utilizing the sculptural Solitary Garden beds to address the tensions between design and mass incarceration, mass incarceration and public green space, human nature and the built environment.

Solitary Gardens has three layers of advocacy that depend on landscape architecture: the design of the raised beds, the design of the site itself and the design of the curriculum which is based on perma-culture, prison abolition and anti-solitary advocacy.

Ten raised gardens beds are designed, based on drawings done by incarcerated people to emulate the lived constraints of a person held in solitary confinement. 6'x9' in dimension, they model the footprint of a typical cell. A gate or door affixed to the short side of the cell reticulates the vertical limits of a person contained in solitary (Figure 23). Furniture or components delineated on the surface of the raised bed illustrate the horizontal limits of the immovable concrete furniture contained within a solitary cell (Figure 24). The negative or immovable space within the cell is not formally designed, it is available for collaborative curation between an incarcerated individual and a local volunteer (Figure 25). Through letters, phone calls and potentially in-person visits, the two will curate the interior of a cell-bed so that it speaks to the experience or desires of the incarcerated person. The variability of the potential curations for the interior of these spaces lends itself to the narrative of the site, Each of these incarcerated people have their own history, their own experience, their own lives, each garden bed then becomes a portrait of the human being reduced to the inhuman conditions of isolation. Collectively the cell-beds aim to rehumanize the individual dehumanized by decades of systematic oppression.

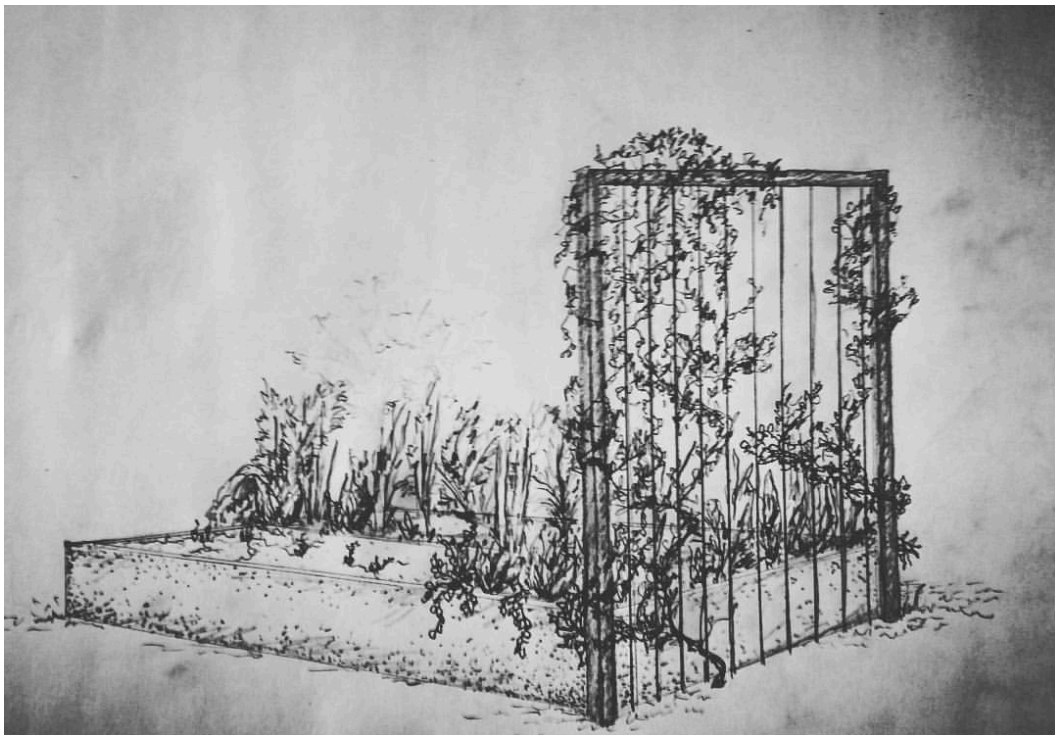


Figure 23. Sketch of cell-bed, illustrating a landscape overcoming concrete and steel<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Phillips, 2016

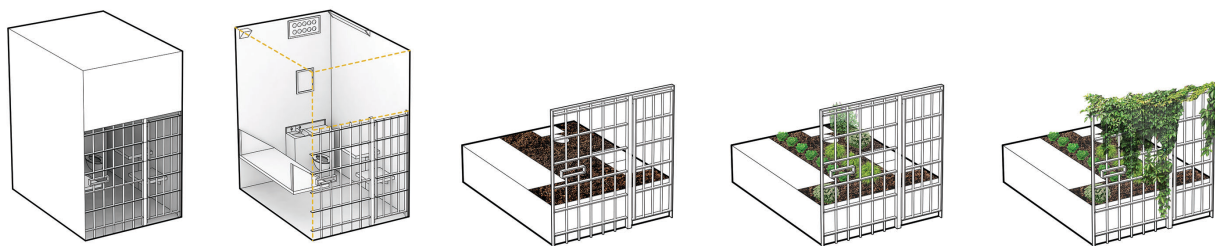


Figure 24. Development of cell-bed design from solitary cell<sup>260</sup>



Figure 25. Still from animated model of Solitary Gardens, showing the tier of cell-beds<sup>261</sup>

Albert Woodfox, a political prisoner at Louisiana State Penitentiary (one of the Angola 3) was the first inmate to curate a prototype garden bed with Jackie Sumell (Figure 26). The bed he designed is located in a community kids' garden on North Robertson St. in New Orleans. After learning about the location of the cell-bed, Woodfox said "Well, its for the kids, I don't want them to go hungry, so we have to make sure there is food in the garden beds that they can take home and eat." Woodfox's cell-bed has been used to grow food and share his story for two years. On February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016, after nearly 43 years in solitary confinement, Woodfox was released and plans to stay involved with this raised bed and the kids his collaborating artist/activist and good friend, Sumell takes care of.<sup>262</sup>

<sup>260</sup> Devin, 2013

<sup>261</sup> Phillips, 2016

<sup>262</sup> Sumell, 2016





Figure 26. Albert Woodfox's solitary garden bed<sup>263</sup>

The actual site aims to share these stories, create an inviting and comfortable space for conversation, reflection, meditation and advocacy (Figure 27 and Figure 28). Softness is carefully and delicately crafted into the landscape with wildflowers, green walls and shaded seating. The vegetation aims to further illustrate the harsh impact of the tiers and coopt the original intentions of solitary confinement: encouraging meditation, contemplation, advocacy and effective alternatives to incarceration. The design of the site respects the seriousness and permanence of these stories through the use of hard materials and rectilinear arrangement of the cells and simultaneously softens the character of the space through the plant materials selected and arrangement of the plants- a soft border of wildflowers suggests a landscape that evolves, that becomes more colorful, resilient and self-sustaining over time- two green screens not only provide reflective privacy on the interior of the site, but serve as a permeated backdrop for the cells. The vegetation aims to remind visitors to the site of transformation, to use the lessons taught in gardening and permaculture surrounding resilience, impermanence and cycles of live. The plants are intended to overcome the concrete and steel solitary structures as a metaphor for a growing collective conscious and changed perspective towards the structures that currently confine people. Shade trees and picnic tables weight the corners of the site, rooting the design's intentions into the physical landscape and explanatory signage guides visitors through the stories built into the site. Two main entrances facilitate movement through the site and a third connects the site to the adjacent gardens designed by EDR, NORA and Sankofa intended to celebrate the broad history of the neighborhood (Figure 28 and Figure 29). A path meandering through the site ushers pedestrians through the experience of change, hope, possibility and inspiration, centering on the voices of incarcerated people through imprinted quotes, images and statistics.

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<sup>263</sup> Sumell, 2015



Figure 27. Solitary Gardens Plan View and Perspective<sup>264</sup>



Figure 28. Solitary Gardens Perspective from MLK Highschool<sup>265</sup>

<sup>264</sup> Phillips, 2015

<sup>265</sup> Phillips, 2015





Figure 29. Perspective of adjacent lots<sup>266</sup>

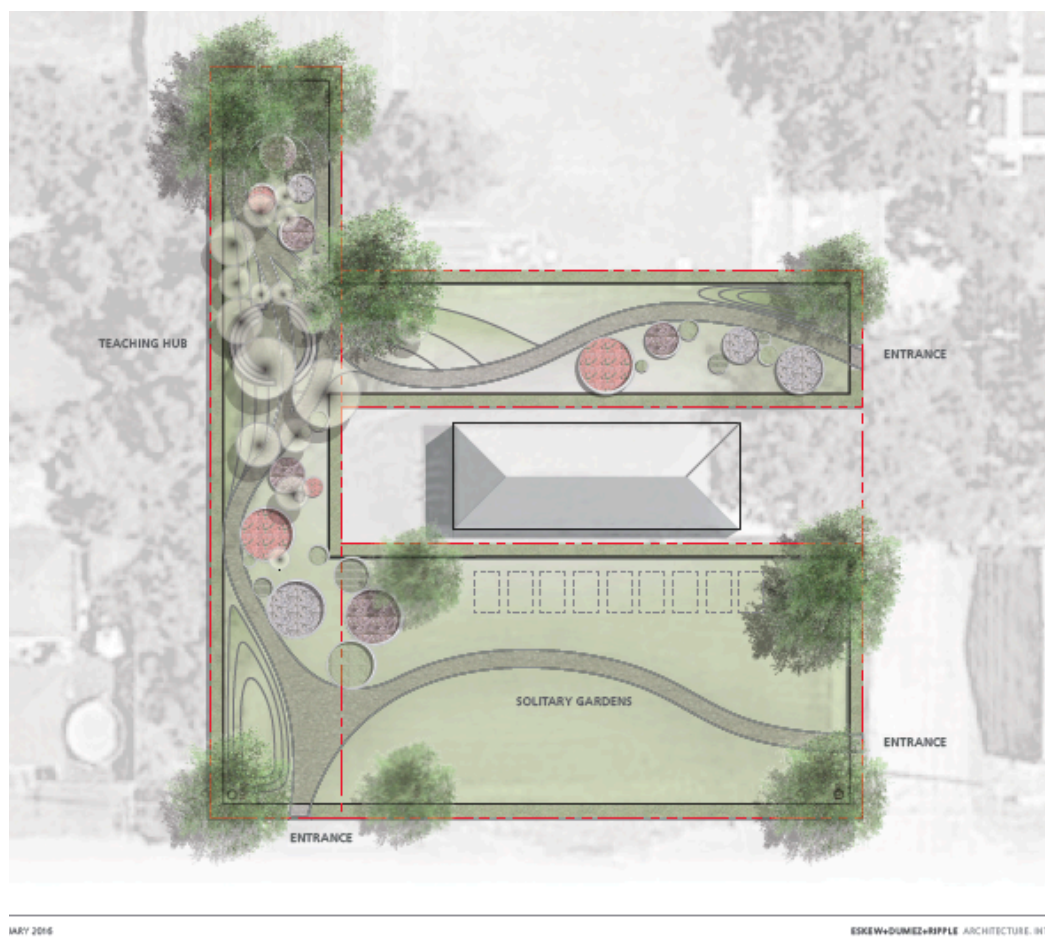


Figure 30. Plan View of design for adjacent lot<sup>267</sup>

<sup>266</sup> Eskew, Dumez + Ripple, 2015

## Integrating Education in Site Programming

Solitary Gardens imagines a landscape without prisons and provides a space where people can “collectively create alternatives to incarceration.”<sup>268</sup> The two major goals of the site are to create portraits of the human being who has been reduced to a simple Department of Corrections # and educate people about the injustices of mass incarceration. The site and the collaborative design process for the cell-beds, which privileges prisoners experiences over those of prison architects, inspired the development of a communication platform and curriculum. The curriculum will engage the cell-bed as a classroom and target the principles that drove the site design: from environmental and racial justice to the evolution of slavery into mass incarceration, the manipulated design and use of solitary confinement as social control and the more recent growth of a movement to advocate against continued reliance on these systems (Figure 30).

The curriculum will use the physical garden beds as a classroom to illustrate personal and systemic biases that allow for mass incarceration, over sentencing and a society subconsciously driven by revenge. The curriculum will not only benefit those building the beds, but those incarcerated. Anchored in prison abolition, permaculture and transformative justice it will define and expose “food apartheid” and develop creative tools for its eradication. The curriculum intends to illustrate the intersection of food apartheid and mass incarceration. Incarcerated populations will be empowered through practical urban farming and permaculture curriculum that could serve them during a time of release. Non-incarcerated populations will be empowered by prison abolition curriculum that could serve incarcerated persons a time of release. This curriculum will capitalize on a critical learning moment in this nation’s history-- the entry of prisons into mainstream consciousness. The curriculum hosted on SolitaryGardens.org will open a multifaceted window on the Prison-Industrial-Complex and allow anyone to look through it. Of immediate importance, the curriculum holistically targets the intersection of food justice, urban farming, prison abolition, and self-sustenance deconstructing.<sup>269</sup>

The garden, situated across the street from the new MLK High School, the largest High School in Orleans Parish, is designed to encourage educational use on an individual and an organized level. Initial conversations with organizers for MLK High School encouraged the development of the Solitary Gardens curriculum in time for the school’s opening, so as to engage high school classes in conversations around the School-to-Prison pipeline (Figure 31). The curriculum is site specific only in relation to a cell-bed, so the curriculum will be relevant anywhere that a cell-bed is constructed. After the success of the site in New Orleans, Solitary Gardens can be built in other locations and the progress of all the beds will be centrally located on an online platform (Figure 32). The online platform provides a window into the histories, and personalities of those forced to endure inhumane conditions- ultimately providing a critical lens on the practice of solitary accompanied by key tools for discussion and activism.

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<sup>267</sup> Eskew +Dumez+Ripple 2015

<sup>268</sup> SOLITARY GARDENS, 2016

<sup>269</sup> Sumell, 2016



<b>K-6 Curriculum</b>	Fall			Winter		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	1 Race + Racism		Colomb	Food Systems + Labor		Cornell
	2 Slavery		PBS	Vulnerable Social Communities		Service
	3 PIC		NPR	School to Prison Pipeline		ACLU
	4 Fairness + Reparations		Toleran	Vulnerable Communities in Prison		Create
<b>7-12 Curriculum</b>	Fall			Winter		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	1 Slavery + PIC History		NPR	Prison Farms + Low Income Food Stores		The Far
	2 Jim Crow		The New	Prison Conditions		Voices
	3 The War on Drugs		The New	School to Prison Pipeline		ACLU
	4 Racial Disparities in the Justice System		Just Me	Prison Label/ Convicted Identity		Innocer
<b>Advanced Curriculum</b>	Fall			Winter		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	1 Slavery, PIC, Jim Crow			Immigration, Prison Farms + Food Access		
	2 The War on Drugs as a driving force			Minorities in the PIC		
	3 Racial disparities in the justice system			Prison Label/Convicted ID		
	4 Plantation to Prison Economy			Social Control + Theory		
<b>Incarcerated Curriculum</b>	Fall			Winter		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	1 Soil Prep			Storage +Preservation		
	2 Planting			Planning		
	3 Compost + Soil Nutrients			Landscape Design		
	4 Harvesting + Seed Collection			Ag Orgs Hiring Previously Incarcerated		
	Spring			Summer		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	Food Access + Desserts		FoodCo	Soul Food History		Michael
	"Radical" Social Movements		Radical	Healthy Food and Culture		Food fo
	Generating Ideas		Zinn Ed	Network of Oppressive Systems		Create
	Implementing Ideas		Create	Local Stories		Create
	Spring			Summer		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	Food Desserts, Neighborhood disinvestment		AFL-CIO	Urban Farming + Self Sustaining Communiti		Urban A
	Prison Reform		The Na	Food as Medicine		Dr. Jack
	Prison Abolition		Critical	Cultivating/shifting Power		Social TI
	Restorative + Transformative Justice		Restora	Liberation and Sustainability		NCAT
	Spring			Summer		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	Mass Incarceration's Affect on Outside Community			Soul Food + Health Food: History, Assumptions + Im		
	Prison Reform			Power in Justice + Food Systems		
	Prison Abolition			Accountability in trades + Collective Action		
	Restorative + Transformative Justice			Movement/Business/Grant Plan Foundations		
	Spring			Summer		
	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Source</b>
	Soil Prep			Water Management		
	Planting			Insects + Bugs		
	Market Skills			Integrated Animal Husbandry		
	Harvesting + Plant Maintenance			Open Session		

Figure 31. Early Draft of Solitary Gardens Curriculum

Landscape Architects lend a deep understanding of the affects of site designs, urban planning and regional decision making to the ways in which individual people and communities are celebrated, supported, forgotten or oppressed. Social issues, like mass incarceration, provide opportunities for Landscape Architects to offer skills to projects and sites that rehumanize marginalized people, populations and environments. While still under construction, Solitary Gardens serves as an example of a multitude of ways that designers can consider, address and affect social change: through serious consideration of relevant social issues, through collaboration with marginalized people and populations, through story-telling advocacy and through design intended to educate. As designers and creators of built environments, it is imperative that Landscape Architects consider the social impact of their work and the potential to support a marginalized community through the design process. Collaboration with vulnerable community members, site neighbors and organizations combined with research into the issues relevant to a community leads to design that tells the stories of local people and histories, and advocates for their success.

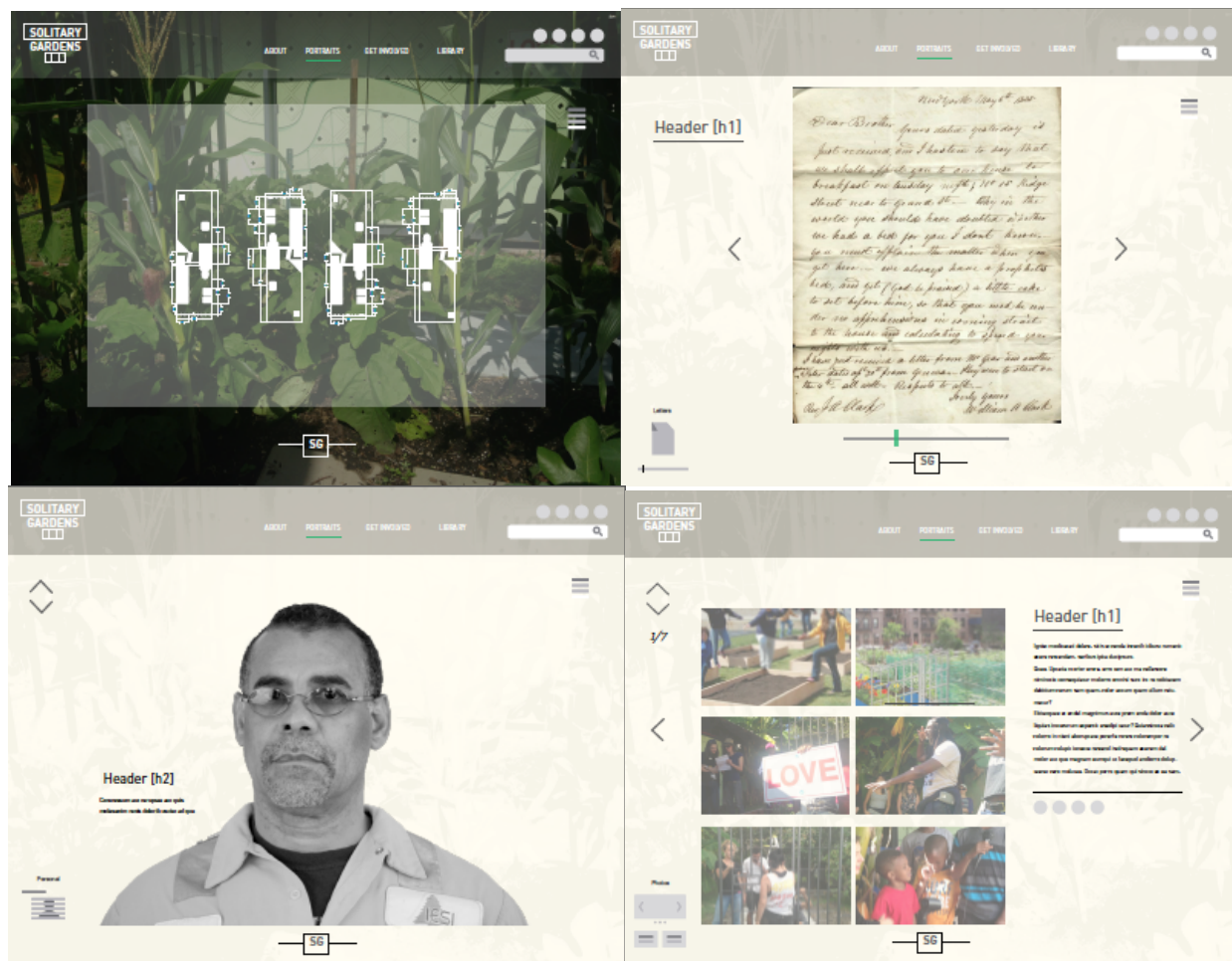


Figure 32. Online Communication Platform Design<sup>270</sup>

<sup>270</sup> Morrison, 2016

## CHAPTER 5 | CONCLUSION

*Do not let your discipline discipline you, remember that in addition to being the doctor, the lawyer, the artist, the designer- you are a citizen.* -Howard Zinn

Landscape Architects have a unique set of skills, which qualify them to tackle not only ecological, physical and aesthetic issues but social issues as well. Mass Incarceration is used in this paper as a lens for examining the potential role of Landscape Architects in responding to social issues employing a variety of methods at individual, site/campus, neighborhood and urban scales. Urban planning decisions made in the United States by Landscape Architects and other designers of the built environment throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries undoubtedly contributed to racial stratification in urban areas. Policies established during Jim Crow, redlining in the 30s and 40s and the War on Drugs in the 80s and 90s were all based on the same public fear of inherent *black criminality*. Neighborhoods were zoned and regulated, and prisons were designed and constructed in response to these policies and fears.

It is important to note here that these decisions were not solely made by Landscape Architects but also by politicians and lenders and enforced by the racist majority. It is also important to note that while Landscape Architects made some decisions that had facilitated urban racial segregation and displacement of marginalized people, they also made decisions that hugely benefitted the public. This paper aimed to describe the complexity of landscape architecture's role in perpetuating mass incarceration, highlight the socially progressive work of some Landscape Architects and argue that Landscape Architects are positioned well to contribute to prison reformation and/or abolition work.

Investigating Landscape Architecture's contributions to and absence from the Prison Industrial Complex leads to a number of questions for further examination:

- 1) What does the future hold for Landscape Architects? Can their tools be consistently utilized for social justice and a more inclusive/equitable society?
- 2) If design tends to serve as a response to popular trends and opinions, can Landscape Architects lead socially progressive pursuits or is their impact greater in response to popular movements?
- 3) What are the best practices for navigating between the needs of various site stakeholders? How can Landscape Architects effectively articulate the needs of marginalized communities when collaborating with empowered ones?
- 4) What is the economic feasibility of pursuing social impact design professionally? Is it more feasible for Landscape Architects to pursue social impact design as academics or in their off-hours?
- 5) Can the impact of green infrastructure on the mental and physical well being of inmates be quantified in order to support the work of landscape architects in prison reformation?

Based on the research conducted for this paper, further investigation into these questions will likely yield conclusions in favor of the use of landscape architecture for furthering social impact design, particularly in addressing the detriments of the PIC.

Spatial design plays a role in the Prison Industrial Complex on multiple scales, providing Landscape Architects with opportunities to address mass incarceration from at least four different angles:

### **From Urban Design/Planning**

Urban planning decisions that historically relegated people of color to “ghettos” and “slums” and currently gentrify urban areas to the point of local displacement, cement the inability of marginalized people to progress away from systems of oppression placed on their community. Landscape Architects can utilize collaborative design processes that aim to mitigate the neighborhood-to-prison pipeline that exists in many American cities when working in urban environments. While Landscape Architects often facilitate urban renewal efforts-and these efforts often result in gentrification leading to the displacement or isolation of local, marginalized people- their work does not have to support harmful social institutions.

Through collaborative design Landscape Architects can work to strengthen struggling neighborhoods based on the needs of the people living within them rather than on the desires of incoming populations. There are two challenges to consider in this approach: finding funding to work on designs for marginalized neighborhoods and building trust to engage community members in design collaboration can both be time consuming. However, even if Landscape Architects only maintain awareness of relevant social issues and the potential for their urban designs to have negative social impacts, they can work to extend the positive impacts of their designs into the communities that need them most. Access to safe, public parks and transportation networks increase the ability of individuals in any neighborhood, but especially marginalized ones, to thrive in an urban environment thereby reducing the potential for individuals to be incarcerated.

Solitary Gardens aimed to employ ideas from the local community and incarcerated people to a location that will be convenient for local high school students to engage with. Ideally the collaborative efforts that led to the design of this site and its location, across the street from MLK High School, will obtain the interest of students who realize the connections between urban inequalities and the school-to-prison pipeline. These students will have access to a unique education that empowers them as vanguards of change in their own lives and communities.

### **Within the Prison Environment**

Landscape Architects can also position themselves to reform prison landscapes and campuses with health and well-being driving the designs. Prison landscapes are an extension of the ideology of the institution- they range from punitive and sterile to rehabilitating and creative. Access to green space has been shown in research on health facilities to improve the well-being of patients, so the application of this research to prison campuses/landscapes will likely yield similar results. Prison landscape design opens the door for collaboration with inmates and the design of structures and spaces, which will facilitate job training and counseling. Recidivism has already been recorded as a benefit of redesigning prison campuses as rehabilitative environments.

This work comes with challenges too: the willingness of prison administrators to experiment with landscape design varies from institution to institution, the designs have to

consider safety and security of the inmates and guards as well as offer spaces for rehabilitation services and mental rejuvenation, and because of the unfortunate use of agriculture as torture on some prison campuses, inmates and administrators might associate the implementation of a garden as a punitive tool rather than a rehabilitative one. Collaboration plays a role here too, conversations with administration and inmates can lead to transformed ideas about gardens and green infrastructure, from punitive spaces into rehabilitating ones.

### **Through work with Ex-Offenders**

Recidivism is one of the main drivers of mass incarceration. Inmates spend months to years in prison without developing new professional skills and when they are released they face even more extreme job and housing discrimination than they may have before their arrest due to their criminal records. This cycle places them in desperate situations where they often end up back in prison. Landscape Architects can choose to work collaboratively with ex-offenders to design spaces that speak to their experiences and even share professional skills to help the ex-offenders with re-entry. Organizations like Restoration not Incarceration and Roots of Re-entry provide the framework for Landscape Architects to mentor ex-offenders and address relevant ecological issues. Collaboratively designing with ex-offenders not only results in skills-training for the ex-offender but in the generation of design concepts that respond to the ex-offenders' experiences.

### **Using Design or Refusal to Design as Protest**

The use of and refusal to design as protest is a growing discussion within all professions dealing with the built environment. Landscape architecture is a particularly well-suited field for protest because of the public nature of many sites. In addition to pursuing inclusive design approaches, shifting the carceral landscape towards healing and reformation, and working directly with those affected by incarceration, Landscape Architects can apply their expertise to prison reform, lobbying against the design and construction of inhumane systems and structures. Becoming experienced in the psychological affects of environment, Landscape Architects can lobby efforts for the design and construction of humane systems of control, that trump those exclusively designed to punish. Landscape Architects can design urban spaces with consideration of marginalized people, improve prison landscapes to facilitate rehabilitation programs and work collaboratively with ex-offenders to garner fresh design ideas and help them with re-entry. Further more they can incorporate stories and opportunities for educating future site users about particular social issues.

By working collaboratively with populations most excluded from conversations of design, Solitary Gardens successfully accomplishes many of these goals. Using landscape architecture as a tool abjectly against mass incarceration and solitary confinement Solitary Gardens facilitates collaboration with incarcerated people to tell their stories through landscape installations, but Solitary Gardens is just the tip of the iceberg of potential that exists for Landscape Architects in social pursuits.

This paper focused entirely on the role of Landscape Architecture as a contributor and an antidote to mass incarceration, but the application of collaborative design processes has potential to benefit a wide variety of issues. Beginning with Olmsted, Landscape Architects have

strived to respond to social issues. As a profession that boasts major successes and failures in the social arena, it is time for Landscape Architects to exercise their ability to pursue social equality, recognizing the needs of all communities, especially marginalized ones and work to repair social environments. The time is ripe for Landscape Architects to learn from past decisions, intentionally incorporate marginalized voices into the design process, further socially conscious pursuits, and realize *Tikkun Olam* in all of their efforts.

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## VITA

Abigail Phillips is a master of landscape architecture candidate at Louisiana State University, graduating May 2016. She has over five years of social justice work experience, a lifelong affinity for art and design, and an educational foundation in sociology, environmental policy and agriculture. Through work with at-risk and street youth in Tacoma, Washington, she recognized the toll that urban environments take on people if sites are designed without social and cultural sensitivity. Building school gardens in Jackson, Mississippi, she saw the extreme positive results of engaging people in appropriately-designed, functional and beautiful outdoor spaces. She became fascinated by the impact of place on people, driven to pursue a career in socially and ecologically responsible design while simultaneously encouraging other designers to do the same. Currently, her studies focus on social impact design and she serves as the landscape designer for Solitary Gardens New Orleans-striving to find creative ways to apply her experience in design to her passion for people and the environment.