

# Mass Incarceration of Low-Income Communities of Color

## Louisiana Parishes

### Introduction

Unknown to many Americans, the United States currently has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. The country incarcerates its citizens at a rate six to ten times greater than that of other industrialized nations. In just thirty years, the number of people being held in prison jumped from 350,000 to 2 million people locked up across the country today. However, the most important factor to note in this tragic reality is that no other country in the world imprisons such a devastating percentage of its racial or ethnic minorities. At current trends, nearly 1 in every 3 African-American men will spend time in prison in their life.

To highlight this racial under caste created within the United States' criminal justice system, I applied a spatial analysis of incarceration rates of parishes throughout Louisiana. While the United States holds the highest incarceration rate in the world, Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the United States. Deserving of its title as "the world's prison capital", the state currently

imprisons 1,619 people per 100,000 residents in comparison the U.S. at 730 prisoners.

I chose to analyze and compare incarceration against three variables: crime type, race/ethnicity, and income level to display the factors that contribute to the United States' growing prison population. Together these factors portray that despite being named the criminal justice system, many groups are disproportionately vulnerable to punishment within our penal system, leaving them perpetually disenfranchised within society.

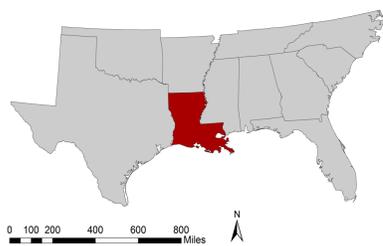


Figure 1: Inset map of Louisiana within the southeastern United States

### Methodology

Data on race/ethnicity and income levels were derived from 2010 Census Data and then joined to the Louisiana Parishes layer. Crime type data was derived from 2010 FBI Uniform Crime Reports and joined to the Louisiana Parishes layer. Since African-Americans make up the majority of racial and ethnic minorities in Louisiana and a vast portion of incarcerated individuals, data on the percentage of African-Americans populations was extracted to compare against incarceration rates across the state. The same was done for white populations to compare how trends differ depending on race. Symbology through graduated colors was used to represent higher populations of each race to display more concentrated areas. Incarceration rates then overlaid race percentages using graduated dot symbols.

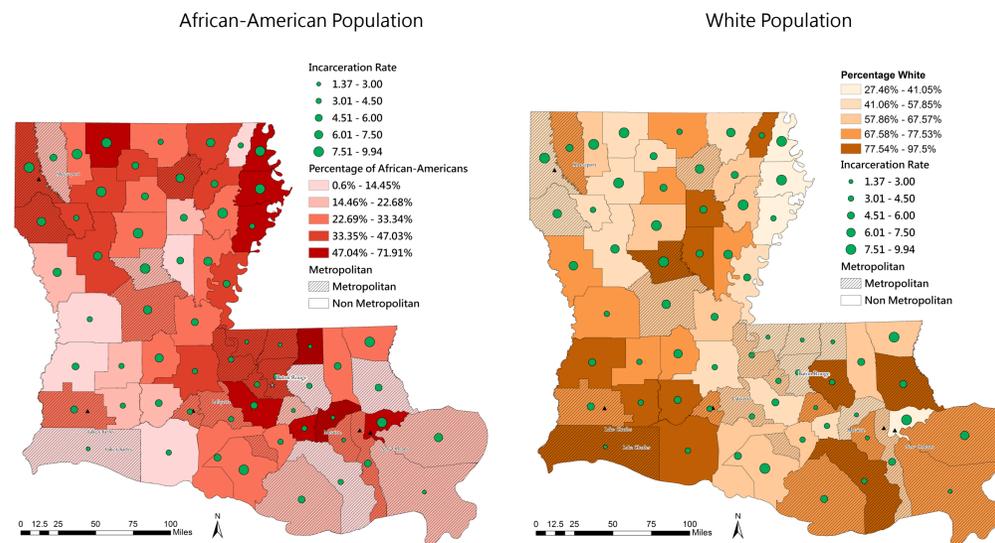
The same symbology and data input methodology was used to display the relationship between income and incarceration. Income was displayed in two separate maps through percentages of the population living below

poverty level and the rate of unemployment across parishes. Poverty level is a strong indicator of income level that can be displayed with graduated colors and unemployment has been known to be a key factor contributing to higher levels of incarceration.

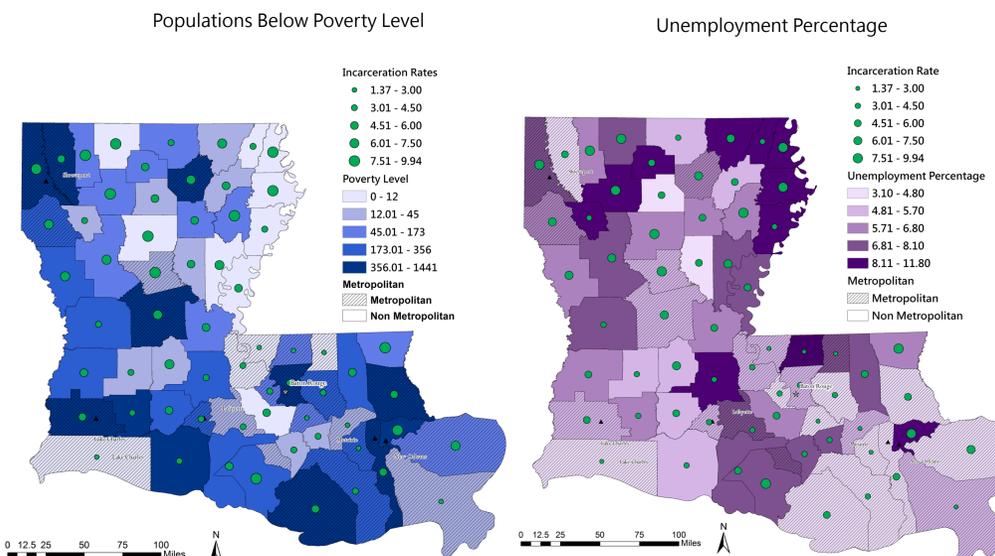
Total crime types were displayed with symbology through graduated colors and also through pie charts. The two major categories of crime: violent and property, were represented in the pie chart and displayed by size based on total amount of crime in each parish. Maps were then created to breakdown the types of crime within the categories of violent and property, and were displayed using the same pie chart symbology.

Overlaid on each map is an important layer indicating the metropolitan and nonmetropolitan parishes of the Louisiana. This layer helps the eye gauge how higher density parishes can impact the level of incarceration, and the total amount of crimes and crime types.

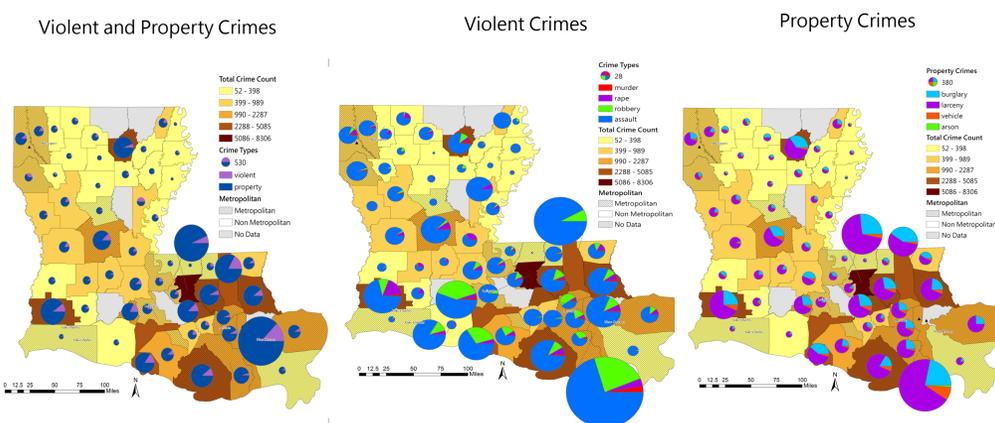
### Race and Incarceration



### Income and Incarceration



### Crime Types



### Results & Findings

In the race to incarceration comparison, there was a moderate to strong correlation between parishes with high percentages of African-American populations and high rates of incarceration. Especially, in northern and northeastern Louisiana, where African-Americans consistently make up 33-72% of the population, the incarceration rates are consistently high. However, some outliers in the data are located in the parishes surrounding the capital, Baton Rouge. The data is less correlated in about four parishes northwest of the capital where the percentage of African Americans is high but incarceration rates are on the lower end. The map of percentage of white populations and incarceration rates shows similar results. Most parishes except those around the capital are consistent with the trend that white individuals are incarcerated at a significantly lower rate than African-Americans.

The results of the income to incarceration comparison did not have as strong of a correlation to one another. In the analysis of populations below the poverty level, there were several communities in northeastern Louisiana

that had low numbers of people living below the poverty level but high incarceration rates. In most parishes with high poverty levels, the incarceration rates consistently range from 6-9%. However with variability among the parishes, the correlation remains weak. Comparison of unemployment percentages and incarceration however, displayed a much stronger correlation. Most every parish with an unemployment rate of 8-11%, with the exception of 2 parishes, all had an incarceration rate of 6% or higher.

Overlaying every map was an indicator of metropolitan and non metropolitan parishes. An interesting result of the crime types analysis was a strong trend that metropolitan parishes had much higher counts of crime. Property crimes were more prevalent across the state and violent crimes are higher in metropolitan parishes. In the breakdown of violent crimes, assault makes up a majority of the crimes and robbery crimes are much higher in metropolitan parishes. Finally, in the breakdown of property crimes, larceny makes up a majority of the crimes and burglary is much higher in metropolitan parishes.

### Conclusion

The major findings of this spatial analysis of incarceration, race, income and crime type across parishes in Louisiana identify trends that 1) African-American communities are more vulnerable to incarceration 2) income is a contributing factor to higher rates of incarceration and 3) crime counts, especially property crimes are higher in metropolitan parishes. However, the major limitations of my project were the lack of specificity with the data on race/ethnicity and income and the gaps in some of the crime type data. Possible further research to improve the results of this spatial analysis would be to display the percentages of all different races, beyond African-American and White, on the same

map through point/dot data. Therefore, the location of individuals of different ethnicities would show a more exact display of how neighborhoods of color are incarcerated at a significantly higher rate. Next, specific tiers of income level would display a more exact correlation between income and incarceration. Finally, more complete data on crime type would further the findings of this spatial analysis. The war on drugs has been an instrumental factor in the recent spike in incarceration rates. To further this research, specific data on drug offenses, particularly in communities of color, would highlight how and why the mass incarceration among communities of color has grown so much in recent decades.

