

[PRINT THIS PAGE](#) [CLOSE WINDOW](#)

MAP MARCH 2009

**SUBSCRIBE
TODAY!***the Atlantic***POLITICS RELIGION BOOKS FOOD
TRAVEL CULTURE FOREIGN POLICY
TECHNOLOGY CURRENT EVENTS
POLLS ENTERTAINMENT HUMOR***The toll of incarceration on one New Orleans neighborhood*

BY LAURA KURGAN

Prison Blocks



Click the image above to view the full map

HURRICANE KATRINA DISPLACED hundreds of thousands of New Orleans residents; as they've returned, their struggles to remake their lives and communities have been well chronicled. But smaller waves of displacement, followed by straggling return, have been washing through the city, largely unremarked, for many years. In 2003, upwards of 12,000 New Orleans-area residents left the city for prison; more than half were expected to return home within three years. This destructive cycle, interrupted by the storm, is slowly reasserting itself.

Nationwide, an estimated two-thirds of the people who leave prison are rearrested within three years. A disproportionate number of them come from a few urban neighborhoods in big cities. Many states spend more than \$1 million a year to incarcerate the residents of single blocks or small neighborhoods.

One such "million-dollar neighborhood" is shown above—a half-square-mile portion of Central City, an impoverished district southwest of the French Quarter. In 2007, 55 people from this neighborhood entered prison; the cost of their incarceration will likely reach about \$2 million.

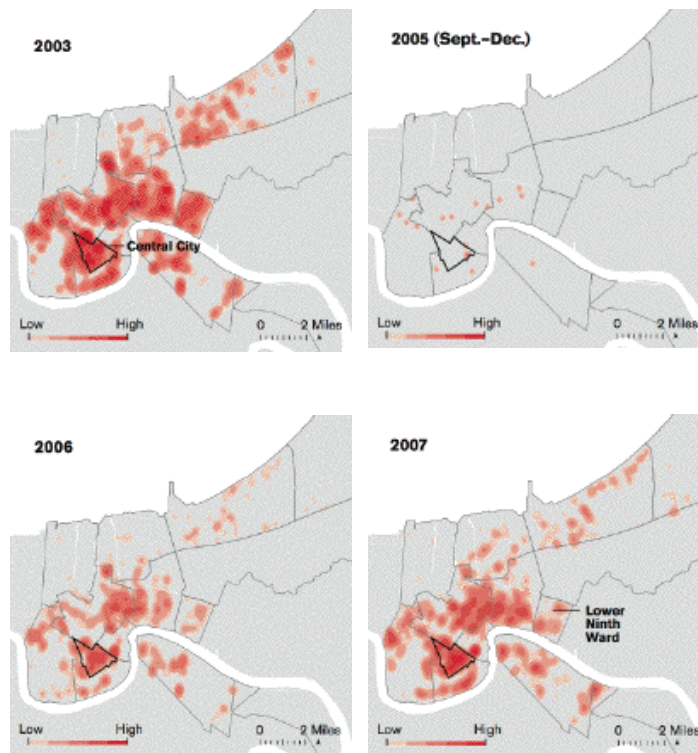
The perpetual migration between prison and a few predictable neighborhoods is not only costly—it also destabilizes

community life. Some New Orleans officials and community groups are now using prison-admission maps like these to explore new investments—block by block—in the social infrastructure of these damaged neighborhoods. Plenty of money is already being spent *on* these neighborhoods, in the form of policing and prison costs; the hope is that by spending more money *in* them, in a highly targeted fashion, the release-and-return-to-prison cycle can eventually be broken.

THE SAME OLD PROBLEM

The maps below show the citywide density of prison admissions in recent years. As of 2007, incarceration rates had not returned to their pre-storm levels, but they had been rising. Incarceration patterns had also shifted, reflecting the uneven return of the population. In the badly damaged Lower Ninth Ward, for example, prison admissions were down by 75 percent, though that's hardly cause for celebration: the district's population had fallen by 85 percent since 2000.

Click a thumbnail below and a larger image will appear in a pop-up window.



Map Source: Spatial Information Design Lab. The author's work builds on a research collaboration with the Justice Mapping Center.

The URL for this page is <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200903/map-new-orleans-prisons>

[PRINT THIS PAGE](#)

[CLOSE WINDOW](#)

SUBSCRIBE TO THE ATLANTIC TODAY!

Take advantage of our great rate to subscribe to a year of The Atlantic Monthly.

Go to the following Web address to sign up today:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/subscribe12>

All material copyright The Atlantic Monthly Group. All rights reserved.