

Prison geographies: Nine disciplinary approaches

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Abstract

Motivated by a critical concern for state-sanctioned coercion, control, and containment across “free society,” geographers have extended Foucault's concept of “the carceral” to more and increasingly diffuse spaces and processes. In this paper, however, we aim to re-center the prison in the carceral geographies literature, reasserting it as the *sine qua non* of the subfield. In doing so, we organize geographers' analysis of prisons into nine conceptual categories based on this journal's areas of geographical exploration: cultural, development, economic, environment, geographic information systems & quantitative, historical, political, social, and urban. In addition to providing a review of existing prison research in geography, we illustrate the diversity of disciplinary approaches to that most “complete and austere” of institutions.

KEYWORDS

carceral geography, geographical subfields, prison, prison geographies

1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade as “carceral geography” has developed into a distinct and enduring subfield (Moran et al., 2018), scholars have taken a few different approaches in their work: from abolitionist perspectives at one end of the spectrum (Gilmore, 2022; Hamlin, 2023), to calls for increased attention to rehabilitation at the other (Moran, 2013a; Turner, 2013), with a range of theoretical and empirical explorations of prison spaces and carceral conditions found in between (Bloch & Olivares-Pelayo, 2021; Gill et al., 2018; Moran, 2016). One prominent approach taken by critical carceral geographers has been to move beyond prison walls, to explore the downstream

effects of over-policing and incarceration on communities and families that may live far afield from actual prison gates (Boyce et al., 2023; Loyd et al., 2012; Massaro & Boyce, 2021; Turner, 2016).

While carceral geographers have discussed the potential conceptual and political problems and opportunities related to the diffusion of “the carceral” along an ever-elongated continuum (Gill et al., 2018; Hamlin & Speer, 2018; Moran et al., 2018), there has yet to be an examination of how geographers are approaching prisons proper from a diversity of disciplinary perspectives. Therefore, following Foucault (1977/1995) and motivated by a critical concern for state-sanctioned coercion, control, and containment across “free society,” we organize the approaches taken by geographers into nine conceptual categories based on this journal's areas of geographical exploration: that is, cultural, development, economic, environment, geographic information systems (GIS) & quantitative, historical, political, social, and urban. Within each review section below we maintain the prison as the primary unit of analysis, while acknowledging that each of the below cited works overlap with and speak across these named categories. However, for the sake of coherence, we select each corresponding category as less of a silo and more of a context and intellectual lens through which to approach the problem of the penitentiary.

While we see all prisons as equally violent spaces given the very existence of coerced legal confinement and punishment, our review focuses with some exceptions on US prisons given how, for example, prisons in Northern Europe offer far more in the way of immediate creature comforts and opportunities for rehabilitation and structured reentry. As scholars who have personally experienced being jailed as well as subjected to what Sykes (1958) calls “the pains of imprisonment” in the United States (Bloch & Olivares-Pelayo, 2023b), our experiential and intellectual perspective identifies US-based prisons as among the most “complete and austere” sites of state violence in the Global North (Foucault, 1977/1995). In fact, notwithstanding excellent work on non-US prisons in geography (Dirsuweit, 1999; Fontes, 2018; Moran et al., 2012), we limit this review to US-based prisons given the particulars of American hypercarcerality unique in the Global North, as well as given the specific legal and constitutional context in which US prisons operate (Bloch, 2024).

Further, in providing a review of the geographical literature as a means of identifying and exploring the discipline's nine approaches, we limit our reading herein to scholarship that is conservatively and conceptually geographical, by geographers, and/or published in geography and geography-adjacent journals. We no less, however, acknowledge that just as these nine approaches necessarily overlap and co-create knowledge, so too is the sub-field of carceral and prison geographies interdisciplinary as well as reliant on mix-methodologies and a diversity of intellectual approaches.

2 | CULTURAL

Prisoners produce their own subcultural norms, mores, and practices within prison settings (Sykes, 1958). What is conceptualized as “the politics” by incarcerated men, which includes a set of bottom-up enforced rules and regulations for behavior known as “reglas” (Spanish for rules), is referred to as “prisonization” in the social scientific literature. Coined by Clemmer (1940) and applied to understandings of carceral contingent racialization (Bloch & Olivares-Pelayo, 2021), “prisonization” encompasses sub-cultural system of self-government as well as the everyday “micro-politics” of identity formation. As Bloch and Olivares-Pelayo (ibid.) point out, prison culture constitutes a range of both subtle and overt behaviors known as the “convict code,” which includes handling “beef” (conflict) and minding the “Ps and Qs” (social etiquette) to navigating “drama” (gossip and hostilities) as well as abiding by an ethics of conflict and comradery that dictate virtually every aspect of inmate life.

Such sub-cultural self regulation and bottom-up code enforcement is likewise co-constructed with prison staff, which, as Martin and Mitchelson (2009) point out, possesses its own cultural ethos. As Martin and Mitchelson (2009, 461) put it, “prisons appear to be paradigmatic container-spaces: inert walls, bars, and corridors in which people are merely contained, separated from the rest of active, productive society. This depiction ignores,

however, the continual reworking of disciplinary practices within prisons; the mobility of prisoners, guards, and wardens between prisons; and struggles over autonomy between prisoners and staff." Similarly, returning to Foucault (1967/1986), prison (sub)cultures embody and evoke the concept of the heterotopia, or compulsory spaces and crisis-laden practices of identity derived from the imposition of institutional power and prisoner resistance, coercion and defiance, as well as confinement and creative place-making. As Johnson (2013, p. 790) puts it, descriptions of heterotopias, with prisons being a prime example, "attempt to explain principles and features of a range of cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow 'different': disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory and transforming."

The production of place in prison settings is dependent, therefore, on the paradoxical and contradictory conditions of captivity. What emerges is a prison culture in which gang formation and racialization is as imperative for social survival for some as religiosity and educational attainment is for others. Simultaneously, a culture of individuality and personal responsibility becomes embodied and expressed by prisoners as part of what constitutes the emotional geography of prison life in the form of cell decoration, physical fitness, and even methods of literal and metaphorical escape (Baer, 2005; Crewe et al., 2014; Fontes, 2022; Norman & Andrews, 2019; Sibley & Van Hoven, 2009).

3 | DEVELOPMENT

The State of California possesses the third largest prison system in the world as measured by both infrastructure and prisoner population, ranking right behind the Peoples Republic of China and the United States as a whole. That "prison-industrial complex," as Davis (1995, p. 229) points out, is mostly located within the state's Central Valley in which half of the country's fruits, vegetables, and nuts are grown, and "rivals agribusiness as the dominant force in the life of rural California and competes with land developers as the chief seducer of legislators in Sacramento."

Like Davis, Gilmore's (2007) sub-discipline-defining work likewise situates California prison development as part and parcel of the development of the world's fifth largest economy, while dispelling the myth that prisons are boons for local rural economies, thereby inspiring decades of scholarship refuting prison expansionist rhetoric. For Gilmore, California's "prison fix" sought to solve the state's globalization-generated and development-induced economic crisis, while simultaneously providing a physical location to warehouse California's excess labor population and those blamed for its simultaneous social crisis. Coming out of a period of late 20th century prison growth, in the midst of both a period of mass incarceration and what Soja (2014) identifies as "crisis-generated restructuring," prison development outside California, in places like Texas and Arizona, became a flagship enterprise for the nation's full slouch toward 21st century neoliberalization.

Placing prisons within a developmental framework for understanding neoliberalization, Peck (2003a, p. 230) identifies the "social/penal frontier" as "an active zone of neoliberal state-building," to which he attributes the "hollowing out of national welfare settlements, the circulation of decontextualized policy knowledges, products and technologies, the criminalization of urban poverty, the invasive microregulation of black bodies, the privatization of (local) social reproduction and so forth." For Bonds (2009), such intersecting motivations for prison development manifested most vociferously as a spatial politics laid upon rural America, where 60% of new prisons were located between 1992 and 1994. In fact, as Bonds (ibid., 29) writes, "rural communities have provided incentives to lure prison development, including infrastructure upgrades and bond financing. Some towns have financed and built their own prisons, counting on forecasts of increasing prison populations to fill the new cells," all of which are dependent on the simultaneous promotion of neoliberal ideologies, security politics, and larger structures of carcerality operating across punitive society (Herbert & Brown, 2006).

Now, as prison expansion slows, developers remain intent on finding alternative geographical solutions to the decades-long deleterious effects of deindustrialization, globalization, and neoliberalization. Similar to research looking at development-minded architectural remedies for populating post-austerity landscapes with new "signature" prisons (Moran, Gill, & Conlon, 2016; Moran, Turner, & Jewkes, 2016), prison building as a salve for rural

economics must be studied with knowledge of how the social/penal frontier of rural America has been gutted of its small-scale, independent, and indigenous enterprises (Che, 2005).

4 | ECONOMIC

Running prisons, not counting for externalities, is a more than \$80B per year business in America. Rationalized as an investment in safety and security, geographers have shown how continued prison investment “underscores the ways in which local economic development is produced through and productive of relations of race, status, and privilege” (Bonds, 2013, p. 1390). More broadly and understood as part of a neoliberal economic milieu, Peck (2003b, p. 226) places prisons in the context of “new forms of statecraft” in which “carceralization” and new-build prisons can be thought of as “the epicentral institutions of these neoliberalized times.”

A related line of inquiry for economic geographers is the privatization of state punishment, examining multifarious ways private capital has encroached on the government's mandate to house convicted felons (Story, 2019). And yet, the fixation on private industry is at risk of overlooking the fact that 90% of carceral functions are paid for by public funds. However egregious it may seem for private corporations to profit off the caging of human beings, it is the public sector punishment system that deserves continued and increased attention (Gilmore, 2017), while also highlighting, as Bonds (2013, p. 1391) puts it, “the centrality of race-class formations in economic practices.” An emphasis on public-private correctional economics can be supported by a deeper examination on the contract work that maintains daily life inside prison: commissary, phone calls, medical services and education are all part of “public” sector corrections, but are maintained by private corporations.

In addition to these licit economics and their expansion, geographers can investigate the illicit economies that overlap wider narratives about crime in America. As a microcosm of ordinary life, prisons contain robust economies based on smuggling contraband, even in this technologically sophisticated and seemingly all-encompassing security environment. Experience inside prisons reveals the complicated commingling of licit and illicit economies within prison units, highlighting how almost every licit dollar spent inside a prison has also been part of the underground illicit prisoner economy, whether through gambling, protection rackets, the narcotics trade, or bartering and borrowing food with interest.

Overall, the growth of the public-private prison industrial complex is particularly evident when examining the contemporary context, contours, and economics of immigrant arrest and captivity in the U.S (Conlon & Hiemstra, 2014, 2016; Martin, 2021). Research in this area has looked at the immigrant prison pipeline in terms of upstream mobility, militarism, and legal mandates to imprison migrants, particularly along the US/Mexico border and within the 100-mile “border zone” (Boyce, 2023; see also Coleman & Kocher, 2011; Hiemstra, 2014; Moran, Gill, & Conlon, 2016; Moran, Turner, & Jewkes, 2016; Mountz et al., 2013).

5 | ENVIRONMENT

Comprising more than 1100 state operated facilities, over 100 federal sites, and 411 private penitentiaries located in all 50 states, the US prison system maintains a massive environmental as well as socio-economic footprint. Prison complexes are energy-intensive sites akin to hospitals and military bases, with an increased environmental reach owing to its vertically disintegrated supplier network and 24-h workforce and constant (over)population of captives.

Geographers have looked at the development of prisons and other state-sanctioned detention facilities given their placement in water depleted environments throughout the US South-West, far from pre-existing infrastructure in rural areas across the US South, or altogether placed on toxic lands in the North-West (Pellow, 2019; Ybarra, 2021). Likewise, geographers have highlighted how the “racial environmental state” relies on prisons as

sites of degradation in California's Central Valley (Miyake, 2021). Removed from their larger geographical context, and as research by Moran and Jewkes (2014) shows, attention from the US Department of Justice (DOJ) and National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has been paid to the "greening" of prison spaces from a design and architectural perspective. Calling for zero-net energy and increased resource efficiency for all new federal buildings by 2030, the DOJ and NIC have implemented the "Strategic Sustainability Performance Plan" and the "Greening of Corrections" initiatives, respectively. As both plans promote a "greening process" by way of "empowering sustainable change by bringing nature, science, and environmental education into prisons," thereby placing much of the onus for sustainability on imprisoned populations (Sustainability, 2023). For Jewkes and Moran (2015, p. 451), such approaches to environmental effects of the prison industrial complex reveal a paradox, suggesting that "it may be the penal complex, rather than the environment, which is being 'sustained.'"

Since the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate harm inflicted on prisoners vis-a-vis carceral retrenchment (Schliehe et al., 2022), followed by record breaking heat waves across the United States, "environmental" concerns may be shifting from "greening" prison buildings to providing life sustaining technologies such as increased mental health care and air-conditioning. Colucci et al. (2023) identify what they call "carceral climates," speaking to the inequities of prisoner-experienced thermal vulnerability, which includes heat as well as cold exposure and other deadly environmental pressures. Focusing on health as an environmental outcome. Placed within a health geographies perspective, Bloch and Olivares-Pelayo (2023a) speak to the built environmental effect of enclosure and state violence contributing to what they call the "somatic carceral experience."

Touching on each of the above approaches to prisons as sites of environmental degradation and negative health outcomes, but with a focus on harm-reduction, rehabilitation and wellbeing, geographers have likewise expressed a concern for the interior environmental condition for captives, with research on the effects of green-spaces (Moran et al., 2020), waterscapes (Jewkes et al., 2020), gardens and gardening (Hazelett, 2023), and the keeping of birds, dogs and other "pets" within prison spaces (Moran, 2015; Morin, 2016).

6 | GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS & QUANTITATIVE

Due to the paucity of work on prisons by scholars employing GIS, a discussion of the uses of GIS and other geo-spatial techniques is prescriptive rather than descriptive. While quantitative methods and data have been used to identify aspects of surveillance and security from a carceral perspective (Dobson & Fisher, 2007), uses of quantitative data have yet to inform a distinct approach to the subfield of carceral or prison geographies. That said, there are certainly opportunities for a GIS-oriented prison geographies as well as a quantitative approach that moves beyond identifying broader security state apparatuses, calculating demographic realities, and counting bodies.

For example, as Moran (2017) writes, geographers have long turned to map making and other visual technologies and quantitative data to make sense of prison place-making and land-use. In this way, the geographical approach to prisons from a visual perspective is via the remote sensing and photographic capture of prison architectures such as the "prison map" project discussed by Kindynis (2014) (see www.prisonmap.com) in addition to an equally innovative use of prison space produced for aerial imaging by the street artist JR in 2019 (see www.jr-art.net/projects/tehachapi).

But it is the emergent discourse on "critical cartography" and "counter geographies" that has the most promise for increased studies of prisons and prisoners by GIS scholars and those relying on quantitative data and representation (Crampton & Krygier, 2018). Employed as part of an otherwise qualitative analysis of narratives concerning prison geographies, critical and counter cartography and mix-methods approaches can help fill the extant methodological gap (Kwan & Ding, 2008). Future studies of prison geographies can likewise utilize the work of Jefferson (2018a, 2018b) as a model for how to visualize the carceral landscape (see also Gil et al., 2018). In Jefferson's work it is practices and patterns of criminalization and concomitant racialization at the supply-side of the prison pipeline that are revealed when space is geo-coded and represented as visual quantitative data.

7 | HISTORICAL

Before the Federal Prison System was created by Congress as part of the 1891 “Three Prisons Act,” public prisons grew up in pre-Revolutionary New England and were modeled after the British prison system. After the Revolutionary War, as the United States colonized westward, so too did it establish sites of legal confinement and punishment in the early 19th century, some of which are still in operation today (e.g. San Quentin State Prison established in 1852). By the late 19th century, Western US states possessed prison populations that were almost half foreign-born laborers, compared to older New England and Southern State prisons that incarcerated impoverished Black people at three times the rate of White people. Historico-geographical approaches to the study of prisons have elucidated the changes endured as well as instigated by prisoners in such institutional spaces over the past century as prison populations grew exponentially and in tandem with prison development (Morin and Moran, 2015).

Influencing geographers' approach to the concept of “the carceral,” it has been the work of Foucault that has provided such a rich historical geography of the prison as a legal construct and social concept embedded in place. And in fact it is his geographical metaphor of the “carceral archipelago” that represents the reach and expanse of carcerality more broadly. As an institution, Foucault points out, the prison is in theory the epitome of total social and corporeal control by relying on surveillance as well as the strict disciplining of the deviant and resistant body. In a US context, the modern-day prison serves as the institutional locus for the legal containment of racialized and impoverished people deemed useless, unworthy, or unwanted as free humans.

Foucault's foundational work looking at the role prisons play within the 19th Century development of liberal Western democracies and their transition from punishment as spectacle to punishment as captivity has been built upon by geographers writing historical geographies of the role prisons play in maintaining race and class subjugation. From this more contemporary perspective and place-based analysis, such discussions of the American prison have considered the historical origins of policing (as “slave patrols”) and other carceral institutions (e.g. parochial and public schools) that were formed to service the needs of white enslavers for whom chattel slavery was the lynchpin of settler colonial economic power. For Gilmore (2002, p. 20), prisons are simply and specifically “large-scale, coercive institutions... established to control freedmen in the postbellum South,” while McKittrick (2011, p. 955) identifies the US prison as an extension of the plantation, providing “the spatial management of race,” in part by circumventing the 13th Amendment's prohibition against slavery through the legal sanctioning of involuntary servitude of inmates. Such historical understandings of the role played by prisons posit state-sanctioned captivity as inextricably tied to racial capitalism and racial banishment (Pelot-Hobbs, 2023; Roy, 2019).

8 | POLITICAL

Geographers have long sought to understand the political foundations upon which a structure like the prison industrial complex stands (Mitchelson, 2023). In addition to explicating the origins, organization, and insidious manifestations of state power, geographers have examined what Harvey (2000) calls “the banality of geographical evils” through the Foucauldian concept of governmentality (Huxley, 2008). Geographers have evoked Foucault's concept of the all-pervasive politics of modernity through an analysis of prisons and other “substantive geographies” and spaces of state power, including workhouses, camps, schools, and asylums (Philo, 1992; see also Driver, 1985). Such approaches, however, are macro in scale and theoretical in orientation. What has remained missing from the political geographical literature until recently is an analysis of its most deadly function: that is, the prison's power to instantly end life through the legal imposition of capital punishment.

While the evils of prison detention, including solitary confinement, life in prison, and what Gilmore (2007, p. 28) identifies as “vulnerability to premature death,” are oft-conjured in the geographical literature (Asoni, 2022; Herbert, 2019; Story, 2015), the political mandate to immediately end life positions prisons in their starkest contrast from the rest of the carceral political landscape. In fact, we point out, capital punishment is the apotheosis

of American law and politics. As held in *Gregg v Georgia* (1976), the Supreme Court found that the administration of death as a penalty for particular crimes did not violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against "cruel and unusual punishment," nor did induced death as punishment violate the 14th Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection under the law." Likewise, "involuntary servitude" while awaiting death and otherwise serving a prison sentence has been found by courts to be a legal exception to the 13th Amendment's prohibition against slavery. As Cassidy et al. (2020) argue, it is such "punitive labor geographies" in prison spaces that advance our understanding of state-sanctioned punishment through the imposition of unfree and precarious work.

Concerning the administration of death in prison spaces, Colucci (2020, p. 11) has issued a recent corrective to the discipline's silence on capital punishment as a political practice, pointing out that it "continues to exist while geographers remain largely silent in addressing it directly." In making his impassioned call for increased attention to the spaces, temporalities, and politics of what he defamiliarizes as the "practice of a sovereign authority materially executing a penalty of death," Colucci calls on scholars working within the subdisciplines of legal and carceral geographies to attune themselves to this most absolute political and exclusively prison-based violence (see also Inwood, 2015).

Notwithstanding the prison's most deleterious acts of violence carried out in the name of punishment, geographers have researched prisons as bureaucratic spaces and "troubling institutions at the nexus of care and control" (Disney & Schliehe, 2019), which includes tracing the known carceral archipelago far afield from US domestic territory (Mountz, 2015), where extraordinary rendition and indeterminant detention reigns as a form of violent displacement and (im)mobility as punishment (D'Arcus, 2014; Loyd et al., 2012).

Finally, similar to work cited above that tracks the reach of the prison into, across, and far afield from free society, thereby reifying the carceral continuum, geographers have looked at indeterminate detention and conventional imprisonment both for families of current prisoners as well as for formerly incarcerated people who face harsh socio-economic realities waiting in the shadows of the post-incarceration housing and employment landscapes (Boyce, 2020; Peck & Theodore, 2008).

9 | SOCIAL

Notwithstanding functionalist perspectives of prisons as sites of reform and rehabilitation in addition to discipline and punishment, they are first and foremost designed to capture, cordon, and control individuals. It is out of its accumulation, maintenance, and manipulation of populations that social structures unique to prison environments grow (Philo, 2001). In addition to prison administrators recognizing a range of inmate demographics and institutional roles — from identifying race and nationality to gender identity and Security Threat Group status — there exist the unofficial though no less consequential roles played by "shot callers," "soldiers," "made" STGs (gang members), and "lames" that constitute the prison social ecosystem. There are also the identified "snitches" and other inmates who request protective custody, in addition to rule breakers who are remanded to Security Housing Units. Each social status corresponds to the spatial navigation of every facet of prison life, including at what tables one can sit in the chow hall and where one may sleep as per racialized bunk assignments, to the use of recreation stations and spaces of worship and hygiene.

Looking at the complex and convoluted social life of prisoners, we have relied on lived experience to provide autoethnographic data about otherwise unexamined spaces kept obscured behind prison gates (Bloch & Olivares-Pelayo, 2023b). Their work focuses on competing social mandates for integration as determined by top-down administrative orders and bottom-up codes of respectable prisoner behavior that are violently enforced by shot callers and soldiers. As they point out, such competing social pressures are in constant, unrelenting tension, resolved at various levels of intensity depending on factors such as level of prison security, number of STGs present in a given population, the intensity of contraband and narcotics trafficking that takes place inside a prison unit, and the overarching ethos of securitization present at the particular prison faculty.

In addition to the social stratification and pains of prison life, the secondary effects of incarceration ripple throughout society, impacting the families, communities, and children of those whom we incarcerate. This toll that incarceration takes on society is experienced disproportionately by impoverished people and communities of color that are burdened with secondary prisonization that manifests across “free” society. A thorough examination of the free society-prison nexus must continue to identify these effects as well as map the many access points that link the two social worlds, from the exchange of mail and the distribution of commissary, to the role played by employees and guards in the trafficking of contraband as they move freely into and out of controlled space. Nexus points can continue to be identified through analyses of prisoner contact in visitation rooms, during conjugal visits, as well as via the reentry and recidivism process navigated by formerly incarcerated people (Moran, 2013b). As geographers have already illustrated (Gill et al., 2018), prisoners inhabit a paramount location on the carceral continuum, which is constituted by a corporeal network and circuitry that includes the rest of the social body from which prison cannot be amputated.

10 | URBAN

Critical urban geographers have long identified cities as the proving grounds for discriminatory policing practices and constitutional circumvention in a range of everyday carceral places (Bloch, 2024), from schools and public housing projects to civilly enjoined “gang” neighborhoods and other hyper-surveilled spaces (Bloch, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a; Hamlin, 2020; Ramírez, 2020; Shabazz, 2015). Relatedly, carceral geographers typically situate their work within urban environments, identifying racialized policing at the supply side of the prison pipeline (Jefferson, 2017), or what Hawthorne (2019, p. 7) identifies as a “racialized continuum of control that stretches from the ghetto to the prison” (see also Derickson, 2017; Loyd & Bonds, 2018).

For Story (2016, p. 259), it is at the scale of so-called “million dollar blocks” — a figure denoting the amount of state money poured into incarcerating people clustered on particular blocks in a handful of US cities — that we can see the “social and racial control functions of the prison” manifested in and across urban space. In fact, as Story (2016, p. 258) puts it, “theorizing the contemporary city and the prison together has thus proven to be an immensely fruitful approach from which to decipher the productive as well as destructive logics of prison expansion over the past 4 decades” — a timeframe that denotes the beginning of an era known as mass incarceration.

Building on Herbert's (2009, 583) assertion that “despite the manifold geographical conditions and consequences of practices of incarceration... the geographical literature on prisons is scant,” and adding their own observation that “urban geographers have written very little about prisons,” Mitchelson (2012) examines the relationship between urban environments and prisons in term of forced population migration and the distance traveled for imprisoned people. Relying on existing carceral geographies literature, Mitchelson (ibid.) shows that the intensive movement of captives far from home not only depletes neighborhoods on the supply side, but also drains economic and emotional resources for urban-based households. While the carceral geographies literature has taken full form since Herbert's and Mitchelson's proclamations, it remains true that prisons and prisoners remain in the shadows of the carceral and prison geographies literature that focuses on practices of state-sanctioned carcerality and the carceral continuum wrought by racial capitalism.

Because the urban is already so thoroughly conceived as a carceral environment, replete with practices of criminalization ranging from civil nuisance enforcement to eviction and displacement by gentrification (Bloch, 2022b; Bloch & Meyer, 2019, 2023), putting the racialized reality of street-level policing into conversation with a prison geographies subfield will rely on continued analysis of the carceral continuum in a way that does not marginalize that “complete and austere” space of the penitentiary. As Hamlin (2020, 589) puts it, research on how incarceration transcends prison borders, with “concrete effects for heavily impacted urban neighborhoods,” can be done without “diluting the particular severities of the prison, as the apotheosis of our punitive social institutions.” In short, urban-based carceral scholars cannot lose focus of the very institution that enables and necessitates

continued over-policing practices and the innovative imposition of legal strategies that conspire to fill prisons beyond capacity.

11 | CONCLUSION

Scholarship from each of the disciplinary approaches relied on in this article has used prisons as a lens through which to understand as well as critique larger-scale structures of state power. As the literature cited in this article shows, prisons provide that perfect lens for such analysis. No other spaces possess the legal authority to confine, condemn, and even end life like prisons do.

In making this apparent, we have organized our reading of the prison geographies literature into nine categories that comprise the dominant approaches taken by scholars in the discipline. While we have purposefully placed particular geographical scholarship within each category — cultural, development, economic, environment & society, GIS & quantitative, historical, political, social, and urban — we acknowledge the overlap, complexity, and not-so-easy-to-categorize approaches that make prison geographies such a critical and expansive subfield that speaks to broader issues of power and carcerality across society. We also acknowledge the glaring absences in this review: namely the omission of excellent geographical scholarship on prisons coming out of sociology, criminology and penology, as well as other disciplines that forward a socio-spatial understanding of prison life and death.

Finally, we encourage increased attention paid to the literature that are advancing carceral and prison geographies by focusing on the critical realities addressed in abolitionist literature, with the use of legal geographical frameworks, that center the expansion of immigrant imprisonment, as well as work that highlights spaces of imprisonment outside of a US context and in which hypercarcerality and punishment is growing exponentially.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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