



From Nimble NIMBY to Palpable PIMBY: Anti-Blackness in George Deukmejian's California Prison Boom

Jakob Hollenbeck*, Political Science and Economics

ABSTRACT

When California Governor George Deukmejian assumed office in 1983, the state had not added to its twelve prisons in eighteen years. During his two terms, Deukmejian oversaw the construction of eight prisons — a 67% increase in eight years. This paper attempts to locate the impetus of this prison boom by analyzing three siting struggles in southern California. It argues that past scholarship fails to account for the interaction between the state and sited communities. Specifically, state-centered research fails to account for the power of city officials while rural-centered research fails to account for systemic factors. Accordingly, this paper introduces the term Please in Your Back Yard (PIYBY) to examine where and why the state sited a prison and how they tried to convince the community to accept it. PIYBYism complements the existing Not in My Back Yardism (NIMBYism) and Please in My Back Yardism (PIMBYism). The paper analyzes the interaction between the three terms, revealing that ideological, not economic concerns, caused the California prison boom. The prison boom emerged from a tough-on-crime moment — one that was necessarily anti-black. The three siting battles support this conclusion because anti-blackness permeated every group's rhetoric. This paper, then, challenges the subject's prevailing scholarship: politics lies at the base of the prison system. Even if one accepts the economic link, the economy only mattered in that it exacerbated an ongoing political movement that attempted to reassert white supremacy.

INTRODUCTION

When California Governor George Deukmejian assumed office in 1983, the state had not added to its twelve existing prisons in eighteen years. In two terms, however, Deukmejian oversaw the construction of eight prisons — a 67% increase in eight years. This precipitous rise in prisons elicited a dilemma (Skelton 1990). As Larry Boodry, a contributor for Riverside County's *Desert Sun* observed, "Almost everybody wants prisons because almost everybody is against crime. But almost nobody wants prisons in their neighborhood" (Boodry 1990). This paper analyzes the conflict from the perspectives of both the state and the sited community. For the first, this paper examines Please in Your Back Yardism (PIYBYism) — where and why the state sited a prison and

*Jakob Hollenbeck is a second-year student at the University of Oregon studying political science and economics. He is currently working as a writing tutor and as a research assistant for a project that traces the Lost Cause narrative to Confederate prisoner writing. In his free time, he enjoys playing FIFA, hiking, and writing. Please direct correspondence to 2400hjake@gmail.com.

how they tried to convince the community to accept it. Communities reacted to the state's PIYBYism in two ways: with Not in My Back Yardism (NIMBYism) or Please in My Back Yardism (PIMBYism). The former refers to a hyper-localized movement that opposes a change — in this case, prison construction. These movements clashed with pro-prison PIMBY coalitions. In this way, the paper presents a discussion between state and community to discover the prison boom's driver and hurdles.

These discussions arise from Californian siting battles in L.A., Riverside, and Imperial Counties. In each, I chose a local publication (*The Los Angeles Times*, *The Desert Sun*, and *The Calexico Chronicle*, respectively) and analyzed PIYBY attitudes and the clash between NIMBY and PIMBY coalitions. The method encourages a holistic analysis that considers both state and local



concerns and, crucially, the interaction between them.

Figure 1: Map of California counties in which major prison siting battles took place. Pins represent the locations of various publications.

The case studies demonstrate that anti-black ideology directly spurred both PIYBYism and NIMBYism. Anti-blackness, then, drove and hindered the prison boom as it simultaneously led the state to explode the prison population while also ensuring that no community wanted to house the prisoners. Although economic desperation primarily motivated PIMBYism, its supporters, too, adopted anti-blackness. Instead of viewing the prison as a place of black escapees, they viewed them as symbols of law and order. Even though the groups disagreed with one another, anti-blackness underpinned all three.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Many scholars have explained the prison boom over the past decades. This paper qualifies and disputes their findings. The scholarship diverges into two main schools of thought: state demand to lift the state's economy or rural demand to lift the rural economy. These approaches are incomplete because they ignore the interaction between the community and the state; they focus on rhetoric, not discourse. Only by coupling PIYBYism and PIMBY-and-NIMBYism can scholars understand the causes and hurdles of the prison boom. This section will explain both rural-

centered and state-centered economic approaches, show how they fall short, and offer a better-suited ideological frame.

Scholar John Eason approaches the boom from a rural demand perspective. He suggests that prison construction does not reflect an increase in prison populations, pointing out that, although Illinois and Georgia have the same number of prisoners, Georgia has twenty-seven more prisons. Eason argues that rural demand, not overcrowding, caused the prison boom. He contends that state-centered explanations treat city officials as “conduits of surplus labor and land succumbing to neoliberal policies.” City officials, he argues, controlled the siting process, framing prison building as a function of local demand spurred by economic desperation. Multiracial communities, though, also demanded prisons, which Eason uses to challenge the narrative that only white communities demanded and received prisons to spur job growth. Hence, Eason separates prison construction and anti-blackness, arguing that prisons are not a legacy of environmental or structural racism; they reflect rural economic demand due to faltering economies (Eason 2017, 3, 7, 101–104). His rural-centered approach, however, downplays the systemic factors at play. As Dr. Anne Bonds suggests, “This literature rejects the structural racism and ... the racial capitalist system producing ... the demand for prisons in the first place” (Bonds 2018, 1–4). In other words, his work disregards the community’s interaction with the state. The three siting battles demonstrate that all counties featured powerful NIMBY coalitions, discrediting the narrative that rural demand accounts for the proliferation. In reality, rural demand only reacted to changes in the state. Only by understanding those changes can scholars accurately interpret the prison boom.

Ruth Gilmore provides this perspective in *Golden Gulag*. She attributes the growth to carceral Keynesianism — a form of Keynesianism that pours state resources into prison construction to secure the economy. In the post-War era, the California economy relied on Department of Defense spending. The 1969 recession, however, led to a steady decline in military spending, which ravaged California’s economy (Gilmore 2007, 35). In the ensuing decade, childhood poverty increased by 25%, and farmers took 100,000 acres of land out of production yearly. Taxpayers expressed their discontent by reducing taxes, crippling the state’s budget. Consequently, the state had surplus workers, land, and political capital to undertake more projects (Gilmore 1999, 174, 178). Moreover, the successes of the Civil Rights Movement threatened to destabilize the racial hierarchy. Southern farmers, meanwhile, wanted to sell their abandoned land, but there were few buyers. The state solved all three problems by replacing military projects with prisons. It realized its full capacity, employed hundreds of thousands, and tore black people from their communities while farmers sold their land at a premium. Because she applies a Marxist lens, Gilmore privileges the material explanations, arguing that the “economy lies at the base of the prison system” (Gilmore 1999, 178).

Some scholars, however, have weakened the connection between the economy and prison construction. Hagan and coauthors, for instance, dispute the connection between abandoned farmland and prison siting. They point out that acres taken out of production did not predict a siting as farmers removed acreage across the state, not just the Southland where prison construction occurred. And while the average county lost 9.8% of farmland from 1982 to 1987,

prison counties only lost 5.3%. Moreover, their data demonstrates that the prison boom outlasted the farming crisis, weakening the connection even more. From 1978 to 1997, they find that cropland decreased by 3.9% in prison counties and 5.6 % in others — a vast decrease from the 5.3% and 9.8% of the previous decade (Hagan et al 2015, 96–97). Gilmore’s analysis cherry-picks one siting battle — a case study that this paper will demonstrate was outside of the norm.

This paper argues that, contrary to Gilmore’s claims, politics lies at the base of the prison system. Even if one accepts the economic link, the economy only mattered in that it exacerbated an ongoing anti-black political moment. The prison boom emerged from a tough-on-crime movement — one that was necessarily anti-black. Anti-blackness has always featured the myth of black criminality. Planters invented the racial trope to cast the slave system as beneficial to both slaves and their masters. The white people who wrote the first fugitive slave narratives, for instance, always ended with the former slave expressing remorse for their escape. Without their white patriarchs, they “plung[ed] into the chaos of their own selfish appetites” (Andrews and Mason 2008, 7). When abolition threatened black subjugation, white supremacists once again used the logic of black criminality to rationalize black codes and vagrancy laws. As one Philadelphia newspaper put it, the laws were necessary to keep slaves from “burden[ing] society” (Anderson 2017, 20). Though free on paper, conceptions of black criminality allowed whites to reestablish “slavery by another name” (Blackmon 2008). This long history has inextricably intertwined blackness and criminality.

When the successes of the Civil Rights Movement again promised to bring about racial equality, Michelle Alexander highlights that racial conservatives once again employed the tool of black criminality to reassert white supremacy — this time, without using explicitly racial language. In this new lexicon, “criminality” stands in for “blackness,” masking Jim Crow’s evolution into mass incarceration. Richard Nixon used this tough-on-crime rhetoric to transform the Republican Party by attracting economically and racially insecure Democrats (Anderson 2017, 102). He denigrated black culture rather than skin, but the result was the same: they restored the inferiority of the black man as the white man’s “fixed star” (Baldwin 1962). This fearmongering worked. In the early 1980s, a record number of Americans said they felt unsafe to walk alone in their neighborhood at night, thought there was more crime than the previous year, and had the least amount of confidence in the police to protect them (Gallup). The public’s fears translated into law-and-order policies, which quintupled the prison population from 350,000 in 1972 to over 2,000,000 in 2012. While Nixon first declared the war on drugs, Reagan transformed his rhetorical devise into an actual war. He championed draconian mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses, gave massive cash grants to police departments who prioritized the war on drugs, and provided police departments with a deluge of military equipment. He justified all this through an intense media campaign that coaxed the media to cover the crime “epidemic.” Sensationalized stories ensued, depicting dangerous drug-addicted black men. Though the phrasing had changed, “criminal” and “black” remained synonymous in the American consciousness (Alexander 2012, 6, 10, 74, 105).

These trends took place in California, too. California’s large Latinx population, though, demands examining the intersection between anti-blackness and anti-Latinx sentiment. African

American media studies scholar Travis Dixon demonstrated that the L.A. local news was 2.5 times more likely to portray black felons and 1.9 times more likely to portray Latinx felons compared to white felons. In L.A., however, Latinx people accounted for 47% of felony arrests compared to 25% for black people and 23% for white people. Moreover, even though black people committed 25% of the county's felonies, they accounted for 44% of felons on the local news. The reverse was true for Latinx and white people (Dixon, Linz 2000). The news ingrained the image of dangerous black and Latinx peoples but especially spotlighted black crime.

Moreover, local polling data demonstrates that Californians were tougher on crime than the rest of the country. In 1981 poll, for instance, 91% of Californians said that criminal danger was higher than a year ago compared to 54% of the national population (U.C. Field Poll 1981). Moreover, 90% of respondents disagreed that the crime problem was overstated (U.C. Field Poll 1981). They isolated the city as the driver of this crime wave as demonstrated by the 69% of polled Californians who thought crime was higher in the city — an admission that paralleled the media's portrayal of crime as an urban, black problem (U.C. Field Poll 1982).

The populace's attitude toward crime meant that in the 1982 gubernatorial election, George Deukmejian entered fertile political soil as he ran against L.A.'s first black mayor, Tom Bradley. Deukmejian exploited his opponent's race for political gain. He even had to fire one of his top campaign staff for insinuating that Deukmejian would win because his opponent was black. Deukmejian attacked Bradley in colorblind language, too, spotlighting his criticism of police who shot unarmed black men. Deukmejian cast this concern as "anti-police" and "soft on crime." In the end, his staffer's prophecy materialized: Deukmejian won by a margin of less than 1% (Hagan et al. 2015). Polling from three years later, reveals that 1-2% of respondents said they disliked Bradley because he was black (U.C. Polling 1985). Hence, scholars attribute Bradley's loss to the "Bradley effect": voters' refusal to vote for a black man (Hagan et al. 2015).

Deukmejian's coded racism translated into racist policies. The Californian legislature explicitly demarcated the change when it, for the first time, stipulated that "Punishment for criminal behavior is the primary purpose of incarceration" (Rowland 1988, 25). This new attitude precipitated harsher laws that reclassified misdemeanors as felonies, causing the prison population to more than triple in ten years.

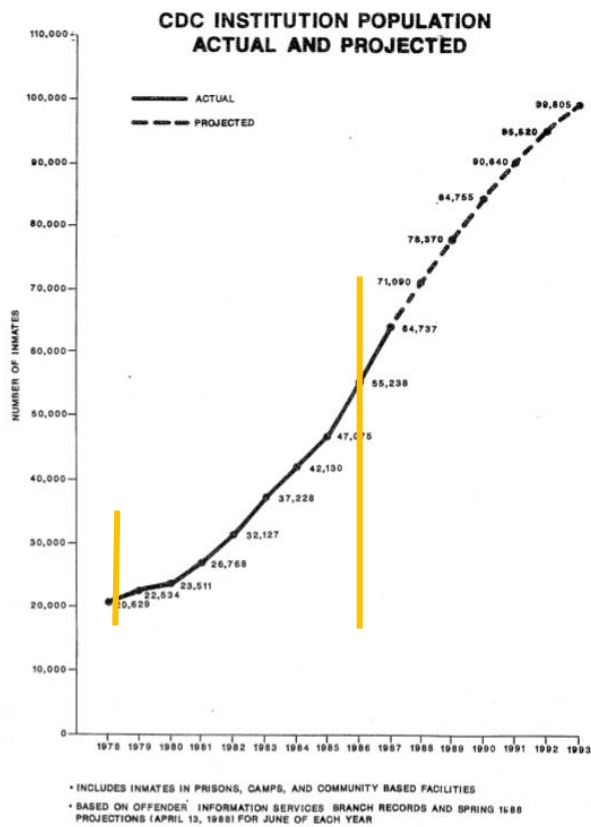


Figure 2: California prison population from 1978 to 1987. The dashed line from 1988 to 1993 shows the projected prison population based on the five-year master plan. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/113034NCJRS>

Consequently, prisons were at 120-330% capacity throughout the decade with the average system-wide overcrowding resting at 176% in 1987. The prison infrastructure could not keep pace. Health services, for example, hovered at 300% capacity. The state needed the new beds to accommodate “increases in the inmate population.” Though Eason tried to decouple prison construction from prison populations, in California, the magnitude of the increase necessitated prisons as the destitute conditions caused prisoners to riot and assault guards (Rowland 1988, 28, 40).

The overcrowding crisis led to three features of the state’s PIYBYism. First, the state argued that they *had* to build the prisons to avoid a crisis. Opposing prisons was politically costly, too, as anti-prison legislators were labeled soft-on-crime, homogenizing politicians’ positions. In the context of this paper, then, the “state” represents both the governor and the legislature as virtually no legislators who did not represent prison communities opposed prison construction. Second, the state needed to build the prisons as quickly as possible, so they sought sites that reduced transport costs and offered community acceptance. These two goals quickly conflicted, though, as the ideal urban areas resisted the most. The state tried to solve the conflict by siting the prisons in predominantly Latinx areas because the Latinx communities lacked the political power to resist. Lastly, the state also chose how to convince a community to accept a prison, leading to the third pillar of PIYBYism: the state spoke of prisons as burdens in urban settings and boons in

rural ones. This discrepancy reflects the populace's view of crime as an urban, non-white problem. In the name of fairness, prison proponents argued, the urban, Latinx communities had to house the scum they created. In rural areas, they changed rhetorical strategies, painting prisons as invisible economic engines. The contradictory strategies demonstrate that the state did not care about how the prison affected the community, only that the community would accept it.

To the state's dismay, most communities vehemently opposed prison construction for two reasons: fears of community corruption and political exploitation. Communities viewed criminals as toxic waste and wanted prisons far away from population centers as a result. The second fear reflected a sense of powerlessness to resist the unloading of the state's society's ills. All communities desired to feel empowered during the siting process. If neglected, these resentments culminated into impassioned opposition — an attempt to reclaim agency. Crucially, though, the second tenant depends on the first because communities only felt exploited because they viewed the prisoners as waste. In two of the counties, PIMBY coalitions emerged. Although they seemed to move past their anti-blackness, they merely channeled it into different forms. Eason argues that PIMBY groups predicated their argument on the prison's economic stimulus, but he overlooks that PIMBY groups also wanted to punish criminals. Prisons became symbols of law and order — of black subjugation. Anti-blackness, thus, never left PIMBY groups; it just took another form.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY CAST STUDY (1982 - 1992)

By 1982, the state's prison population had increased by 30% in four years, causing the state to plan sites in Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Joaquin Counties (Wolinsky 1987). The move infuriated the rural communities as they saw the sitings as "just another example of urban residents trying to dump on the desert" (Kaplan, Gladstone 1991). Their representatives authored a bill that prohibited the new prisons from accepting prisoners until L.A. built theirs (Wolinsky 1987). They wanted Los Angeles, the producer of California's crime, to shoulder its share of the burden. The newly elected governor, George Deukmejian, concurred and sited the prison in East L.A., a mile outside Boyle Heights, California's historic Latinx capital.

The state's case for the siting initially contained a kernel of a sensible argument, but as the political battle wore on and patience dwindled, the state revealed the punitive intention of the siting. *The Los Angeles Times* first mentioned the prison in an editorial that supported the site. They highlighted that 34% of the state's prisoners came from Los Angeles, not to advocate for the prison as a punishment, but to emphasize the benefit of having a prison near the criminals' homes. Longer distances from the city increased transport costs and meant that fewer families could visit. Moreover, the state "desperately need[ed] prisons" as the system operated at 151% capacity (*Los Angeles Times* 1985). The argument displayed two out of the three tenants of PIYBYism; they underscored the urgency of prison construction and the ideal nature of an urban site without parochially imposing the prison on the community.

To the East L.A. community, the site was far from sensible. They pointed out that the area contained three county jails that housed more than 11,000 people within four miles (Olmo 1986).

Assemblywoman Gloria Molina characterized prison siting as an “unfair social burden,” later lamenting that East L.A. was “being made a dumping ground for prisoners” (Wolinsky 1986). A fear of blackness underpinned the community’s fears of prisoners; the use of “social burden” conveys the community’s anxiety of accepting degenerate black criminals. In what would later become explicit, the Assemblywoman cast prisoners as toxic waste that, through some unnamed mechanism, would radiate into the community. The opposition later built their case, but their initial lack of rational arguments demonstrates that opposition arose from a place of fear, not fact. As Robert Carter, Jr., a member of the state’s Board of Prisons, put it, the opposition “fail[ed] to mention what [the] negatives are.” As a result, the community’s later arguments represent post-hoc justifications for what they instinctually opposed.

Over the coming years, the opposition explained that prisons corrupted the community in two ways: prison escapes and corruption of their children. The Californian populace had very little faith in a prison’s ability to isolate its prisoners largely due to Kevin Cooper’s 1983 prison escape and subsequent murder of four residents. The media’s portrayal of the crime mirrored the national trend of sensationalizing black deviance. The mother of one victim even complained that, “the media continues to sensationalize a vicious crime” (Carter 1985). *The Times* on its own dedicated hundreds of articles to the one crime.² They referred to the incident either as a “massacre” or an “Ax-murder,” underscoring the depravity of Kevin Cooper. The media’s fixation on the one crime made prison escapes seem inevitable, propelling prison escapes to the top NIMBY concern. One East L.A. mother lamented, “It’s terrible. There will just be a lot of escaped convicts... The kids won’t be secure playing outside.” Even though prison escapes were extremely rare, the community envisioned an invasion of black criminals hellbent on inflicting pain on the community (Krier 1986). The state, according to the opposition, had to remove prisoners from society to end the terror. Even if the prisoners did not escape, though, they argued that their very presence damaged the community. As opposition leader Berta Saavedra suggested, “Children need role models and different things to consider in their neighborhood besides a prison” (Wolinsky 1986). The prison *itself* would corrupt children. They never explained, however, how children’s exposure to prisoners precipitated their subsequent undoing. The prisoners were so morally debased that their mere existence corrupted society. Thus, the same force that led to mass incarceration produced mass opposition to prison sitings.

In 1986, the Californian Assembly disregarded the opposition and overwhelmingly backed the East L.A. prison siting. Their justifications for the decision highlight the state’s sense of crisis. The chair of the Assembly Public Safety Committee stated, “There is no such thing as a perfect site for a prison ... there will always be a substantial number of people who oppose the location.” Lawmakers believed that if they listened to every community’s concerns, they would never build prisons. This inaction was unthinkable because, as Democratic Assemblyman Richard Katz explained, “You can’t be tough on crime if you won’t put the prisoners away.” The anti-black political climate pushed the state to adopt tough-on-crime policies, but the state failed to build enough prisons to accommodate the surge in prisoners. One community’s opposition paled in comparison to the logistical and political nightmare of arresting criminals without the ability to take them off the streets (Wolinsky 1986).

The Assembly's move infuriated the East L.A. community, who felt that "the entire community opposed [it]" (Wolinsky 1986). The community's powerlessness in the face of the Assembly evoked bitter memories of postwar urban "renewal" when, in the 1950s, L.A. undertook hazardous projects in East L.A. to bring prosperity to white communities. City planners of the time viewed cities as living organisms, which were diseased by communities of color. As a result, cities nationwide used projects as a pretext to decimate communities of color (Rothstein 2017). L.A. city planners, for example, dissected East L.A. with five highways and cleared Latinx housing to make way for high rises (Olmo 1986). The community's lack of political power forced them to watch helplessly as the government displaced over 10,000 people and polluted their community (Sahagun 1989). The East L.A. community drew many parallels to the 1950s during the siting process. They viewed the mandated hearings and environmental reports as the state's attempts to mollify concerns without changing their behavior. They accused the state of downplaying its interest in the site to hinder the community from mobilizing sooner (Salazar 1985). The state did, in fact, change the site from a reception center to an actual prison late in the process (Boyer and Hernandez 1986). Furthermore, the state designated L.A. as the only site that did not require a full environmental report (Wolinsky 1987). Their desire to build prisons as quickly as possible painted prison construction as another form of the environmental racism that the community experienced in the 1950s.

This feeling of helplessness evoked visceral reactions. Michael Woo, a city councilman, argued that the state "was picking on a low-income area" (Boyer and Hernandez 1986). Assemblyman Joseph Montoya sharpened Woo's language, calling the siting "political rape" (Wolinsky 1986). The invocation of rape highlights their acute sense of powerlessness. Former opponents of the site, including Richard Polanco, an Assemblyman representing East L.A., voted for the prison (Boyer and Hernandez 1986). Democratic Assemblymen explained that these reversals represented "political realities" and that the "Democrats [did] not want to be in the position of trying to hold [prison construction] up" (Wolinsky 1986). Polanco's reversal only heightened the perception of their second-class citizenship; even their own representatives abandoned their interests. The community's anger at Polanco was palpable. One East L.A. college student even declared that "What Polanco has done to this community is totally unforgivable. I'd much rather forgive a rapist" (Boyer and Hernandez 1986). The fact that this "political rape" could outweigh actual rape in the mind of this student encapsulates the intensity of the East L.A. opposition. Polanco perfectly symbolized the community's frustration. Even the representative for whom many explicitly voted because he opposed the prison had acquiesced to the state. There was no winning; politicians always said one thing and did another. Politics acted as a rationalizing façade that allowed the state to oppress East L.A. This rage translated into intense mobilization. As Lucy Ramos, a spokesperson for an opposition group, explained, "In the old days if the government said 'Move on' people moved on. It's not that way anymore. There is a limit to how much junk they can dump on a community" (1989). The community saw the prison siting as a continuation of a decades-long struggle, one they could now win.

A month later, they did just that. After applying intense pressure, the community compelled their representatives in the Assembly to use a parliamentary procedure that rendered

the now fifty-four pro-prison votes useless (Wolinsky 1986). As the state faced more setbacks, their rhetoric grew vitriolic. They now weaponized the fact that 38% of the state's convicts hailed from L.A. to imply that the East L.A. community had to accept the prisoners they produced. Governor Deukmejian highlighted the issue in his 1987 State of the State address. To rapturous applause, he declared, "Thirty-eight percent of state prison inmates come from Los Angeles, and yet the county has no state prison. In the name of fairness, it is time to change that fact" (Deukmejian 1987). The state now emphasized the fairness, not the convenience, of the site. He furthered that they could not delay because the state needed to "put more dangerous criminals behind bars and relieve the overcrowd[ing]" (Deukmejian 1987).

In this way, the state villainized the East L.A. community to justify the community's exploitation. Chicano scholar Rodolfo Acuna wrote that the state portrayed the community as "gang-infested and...mostly populated by 'illegal aliens'" (Acuna 1989). Dan Walters, a prison advocate working for *The Times*, exemplified Acuna's observation, arguing that the state should force L.A. to take responsibility for "the inmates it produces in such abundance" (Walters 1990). The notion that a community can "produce" crime speaks to the perceived cultural or racial degeneracy of Latinx people. According to those like Walters, even those in East L.A. who did not commit a crime contributed to the crime wave by fostering a deviant culture. The community's refusal to own up to the crime they produced was further proof of the community's degeneracy.

The *Times* further demonized the community with a bizarre editorial titled "Jobless Turnkeys Punished by Delay in Prison Opening." It followed Danny Garcia, a Vietnam war veteran and East L.A. resident, highlighting his pain due to the community's resistance. The author, Bob Baker, repeatedly characterized Garcia as a "lawman." In dramatic prose, Baker explained that Garcia's great-great-great-grandfather's choice to serve in the Civil War inspired his "patriotic fervor." He narrated Garcia's "burning desire to be a cop" and his disappointment when he discovered he was too short to serve. Then, he applied to become a prison guard and got accepted. The only problem? The prison fight delayed his employment, making the "lawman" suffer while the community resisted. Their struggle did not represent his beliefs as someone who "is as deeply rooted to East L.A. as anyone." The account contains insidious undertones. It valorizes law and order, reinforcing the "need" of the state to remove people of color from their communities. By extension, then, Baker labeled the East L.A. residents as pro-crime. The narrative attempts to elicit sympathy for a small portion of East L.A. by spotlighting a pro-prison Latino, one of the 'good ones.' Denigrating the Latinx community, thus, became a core pro-prison strategy (Baker 1987).

The state's desperation to build the East L.A. prison began to outweigh their anger because the 1982 law meant that two already built prisons would go unused until East L.A. complied (Wolinsky 1987). Consequently, in 1987, prison advocates passed an "equal pain" bill that mandated a prison in Republican Lancaster in addition to Democratic East L.A. (Wolinsky 1987). The law represented the state's attempt to ease perceptions of political exploitation by demonstrating that the siting process was not personal. The language of "equal pain" reveals that lawmakers saw prisons as evils to remove a greater evil from the streets. Someone *had* to shoulder

the burden. The producers of this evil were the natural first choice, but the political reality forced Republicans to burden their own constituents.

Perplexingly, though, pro-prison advocates sometimes spoke of prisons as economically beneficial. In his editorial titled “Hypocrisy and Illogic From L.A.,” Dan Walters encapsulated his own hypocrisy and illogic within two sentences. He wrote, “As Deukmejian pointed out in January, ‘A prison is an economic boom to the economy’ ... But regardless it is a matter of simple equity that Los Angeles houses its fair share of inmates it produces in such abundance” (Walters 1990). The crime-producing community had to enjoy the benefits of the crime they produced? The state’s embrace of both positive and negative conceptions of prisons demonstrates that they did not care about the effect of the prison. They only wanted to build prisons, causing them to try different strategies until one worked. In the end, no strategy could mollify East L.A. In 1992, Wilson allowed the Lancaster prison to open without East L.A.

The history of East L.A. contradicts and confirms scholars’ popular narratives. The rural demand model falls short because rural communities *opposed* prisons, and the state sited prisons in urban, not rural areas. It does, however, reveal the power that community officials wielded — power with which Gilmore failed to engage. The urban siting also undermines Gilmore because she argued that the state’s end goal was to make use of surplus labor, land, and political capital. The East L.A. case study, however, demonstrates that the state was more reactionary. They expended political capital to force an urban community to accept a prison — a senseless pursuit if the end goal was to use excess farmland. Gilmore asserts that East L.A.’s opposition caused “Landowners from the agricultural valleys [to] sp[y] an opportunity to unload sinking assets” (Gilmore 1990). She contradicts herself as she highlights that the prison boom preceded economic concerns. And, as Hagan and his coauthors demonstrated, these economic arguments were not nearly as strong as Gilmore claimed. Moreover, the battle lasted *ten* years, the lion’s share of the prison boom. If economic concerns dictated the prison boom, then why didn’t the state abandon the urban location over the course of the decade? In reality, politicians reacted to a mandate from voters to incarcerate more people. Political, not economic, motivations primarily drove the prison boom.

The siting struggle, however, confirms Alexander’s thesis. Anti-blackness permeated the process as the East L.A. community feared black criminals, causing their potential presence to engender mass opposition. The community’s perceptions of environmental racism presupposed the toxicity of black prisoners, complicating the question of environmental racism. When examining the state’s role in mass incarceration, many have criticized Alexander for overlooking the connection between mass incarceration and Latinx people (Kilgore 2015). In the East L.A. siting battle, even though the community viewed themselves as separate from the crime wave, the PIYBYists clearly viewed Latinx people as part of it. Some may be tempted to argue that the state’s treatment of Latinx people points to a larger pattern of white supremacy rather than anti-blackness, but one must recognize that race denotes a position of power, not skin color. After all, blackness has never been a concrete category; it has always shifted to meet the goals of the white supremacist state (Lowndes and HoSang 2019). In California, the state still followed the national anti-black movement to undercut the Civil Rights Movement, but they transposed a tool of anti-

blackness — the casting of a subjugated people as criminal — onto Latinx people. It racially targeted Boyle Heights and justified the decision by villainizing the community. Confusingly, though, they sometimes presented prisons as an economic boon. This contradiction further complicates the question of environmental racism because unlike the 1950s' urban renewal, the actual effects of the prison were unclear. What is clear, however, is that the state attempted to build prisons quickly, leading them to site prisons in historically marginalized communities to circumvent the required processes. In all, anti-black laws ballooned the prison population, necessitating mass prison construction. To build prisons as quickly as possible, the state used anti-black categorizations of criminality to justify siting the prison in a historically Latinx community — evidence of political, not economic, concerns.

RIVERSIDE CASE STUDY (1982 - 1986)

The Riverside siting supports the paper's analysis of East L.A. as the two share many similarities: they occurred contemporarily, the state sited the prison in a Chicano stronghold with a history of activism (Coachella), and the community vehemently resisted. But the Riverside County siting battle is also worth examining for all the reasons it differed: it occurred in a rural area, featured a PIMBY coalition, and revealed the opinions of farmers. A year after the 1982 mandate, the state named potential sites in Beaumont and Coachella (Holland 1983). Beaumont's immediate opposition made Coachella the frontrunner. The state approached Coachella much differently than East L.A., though. Unlike trying to convince the community to accept its vermin, they told the community that their fears were "born of ignorance" (Holland 1984). The state sent officials to local meetings to convince the public of a prison's economic benefits, promising a \$100 million increase in payroll taxes and five hundred new jobs (Holland 1984). They also painted prisons as invisible, trying to dispel the public's perception of frequent escapes. Rural sitings forced the state to adopt this approach because, as the polling demonstrates, Californians viewed the crimewave as an urban problem.

The strategy convinced some like community member Frank Duran, who highlighted that Coachella's residents had an average income of \$4,400 and that "prison jobs would raise that figure" (Love 1984). Duran, one of the few PIMBY voices, tied economics to prison support. The majority of people, however, derided the state's potential benefits (Holland 1984). Their NIMBYism mirrored East L.A.'s fears of community corruption and political exploitation. Like the East L.A. population, Coachella residents incessantly cited Kevin Cooper's escape.³ When the prisoners inevitably escaped, the residents feared, they would have free reign to destroy the community because the prison was "too close to major population centers" (*Desert Sun* 1984). Like the East L.A. community, NIMBY translated into Not in Anyone's Back Yard. In fact, the NIMBY group suggested an abandoned mining town as an alternative. That way, if the prisoners escaped, the community would not have to worry about them "mixing up with our people" as a resident put it in a thinly veiled reference to racial mixing (Holland 1984).

Opponents of the siting argued that this "mixing up" process happened even without escapes. The rural location meant that prisoners' families would relocate. Former school superintendent, Bobby Duke, referred to the process as an "influx of an undesirable element" (Holland 1984).

Nadine Radovicz, a member of a different prison community, explained, “That’s what makes me the most nervous... Let’s face it. That’s usually not a good cycle of life” (Krier 1986). Radovicz’s bluntness highlights that rural Latinx communities viewed urban, black people as degenerate. Their “cycle of life” made the black man’s descent into crime inevitable, destroying the community in the process. Anti-blackness, thus, caused NIMBY groups to fear both prisoners and their families.

The NIMBY group explained East L.A.’s vague notion of community corruption, introducing the stigma of being a “prison town.” Boodry explained that he worked in Joliet, Illinois, one of the most famous prisons town in the country. Despite Joliet’s other attractions, people only knew it as “where the prison is” (Boodry 1984). Many Coachella residents expressed this fear of becoming the prison town (Holland 1984). They viewed themselves as a tourist town, a conception that the prison would upend. Patricia Larson, the head of the prison opposition, decried, “If there’s a riot at the prison, the dateline won’t be in Coachella, it’ll be Palm Springs” (*Desert Sun* 1984). The mention of Palm Springs highlights the county’s racial tension as the largely impoverished, Latinx Coachella already felt insecure competing against rich, white Palm Springs. Being associated with dangerous black criminals would further discourage tourism. Prisons, thus, affect how the world views a town and how a town views itself. Coachella resisted so fervently because their identity depended on it.

Again, perceptions of political exploitation heightened this resistance. In Coachella, Latinx people accounted for the vast majority of the population, and it was the only town in the county with majority Latinx representation (Borders 1983). Like in East L.A., their leaders charged that the state treated white-led Beaumont differently than Coachella. State officials told Beaumont of the potential siting before Coachella, allowing Beaumont to pass a resolution against the siting months before Coachella knew (Holland 1983). Moreover, Coachella residents complained that the state failed to publicize their hearings (Love 1984). Just like the East L.A. opposition groups, they accused the state of merely going through the mandated motions. These feelings of exploitation exacerbated the community’s resistance. Larson declared, “They’re waiting for us to go to sleep, and then hoping the opposition will go away” (*Desert Sun* 1984). The state did not care about their interests, but the community knew that through fierce opposition, they could make them care.

This distrust of the government reflected Coachella’s central role in Cesar Chavez’s United Farm Workers (UFW) resistance. From the 1960s onward, UFW clashed with the exploitative agribusiness protected by then-governor Ronald Reagan. Chavez summed up the community’s orientation towards the state, declaring that UFW had “no trust in Reagan” (Holmes 2010). The city hosted rallies and promoted UFW boycotts (Mahr 1988). These experiences not only entrenched the community’s distrust of the government but also engendered successful mobilization strategies. They distributed the following petition, for example, and in one year, collected 21,000 signatures (*Desert Sun* 1984).

STOP THE PRISON

FACT: THE CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS IS IN THE FINAL STAGES OF ITS PLANS TO BUILD A 1700 PRISONER FACILITY IN OUR AREA THIS YEAR.

FACT: OVER TWENTY (20) LOCATIONS HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED, AND THERE ARE ONLY FOUR (4) FINAL SITES NOW BEING CONSIDERED BY THE STATE. TWO OF THESE SITES ARE IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY.

FACT: THIS PRISON WILL HOUSE 1500 MEDIUM SECURITY, LEVEL III PRISONERS AND 200 MINIMUM SECURITY, LEVEL I PRISONERS. THE 200 MINIMUM SECURITY PRISONERS WILL BE WORKING OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE PRISON.

WE MUST ACT NOW TO STOP THE PRISON FROM BEING BUILT IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY. COMMUNITY OPPOSITION OF THE PRISON CAN AND WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE. PLEASE RETURN THE FORM BELOW AT ONCE. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL 325-8171.

STOP THE PRISON

 AUTHORIZED THE USE OF MY NAME ENDORSING THE COMMITTEE TO STOP THE PRISON. SEND IMMEDIATELY TO 559 S. PALM CANYON DR. PALM SPRINGS 92262

(Please Print)

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

This is a paid political advertisement. PAID FOR BY THE COMMITTEE TO STOP THE PRISON. ROY WILLIAM CARVER, TREASURER, 559 S. PALM CANYON DRIVE, PALM SPRINGS, CA. 92262

Figure 3: Petition to stop the prison, June 18, 1984. California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside.
<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=DS19840616.2.82.3&srpos=1&e=-----en--20--1-tx-txIN-stop+the+prison+-----1.>

The petition demonstrates the power of the prison stigma. It never mentions any harms of the prison, only that the Coachella siting was likely and that two hundred prisoners will work outside the prison (Committee to Stop the Prison 1984). The petition evokes fears that the prison walls could not keep out the black invasion; they would escape and “mix up” with the town. As Eason suggested, the prison stigma caused towns to oppose prisons by default. Poverty, though, made rural areas care less about their fear of black people and more about their wallets. Although Coachella was largely destitute, its identity as a tourist-town caused them to view prisons as antithetical to their economic interests, and their anti-black ideology worked in tandem with their economic concerns as a result.

In July of 1984, Blythe, a town of 7,000 people on the Arizona border, expressed interest in the prison. On the surface, the community presented a purely economic argument. City manager Dick Milkovich explained that Blythe could “use the economic impact.” But the PIMBY group viewed the prison as more than an economic engine; they viewed it as a monument to law and order. Milkovich expounded, “Blythe attracts many undesirable transients and they would be less likely to visit with a prison” (Love 1984). While the NIMBY group in Coachella thought the prison would attract black people, the PIMBY group in Blythe thought it would repel them. Though Blythe officials privileged the economic argument, the fact that they channeled anti-blackness to support their argument highlights the power of the ideology.

Blythe forced the state to choose between siting the prison in the obstinate Coachella or much further from California's coastal cities. Senator Presley, a guiding figure in the prison boom, explained that Blythe's remoteness made the prison extremely expensive. Moreover, the proximity to the Arizona border meant that the prison's economic stimulus would trickle into the neighboring state. On the other hand, he explained, "Corrections would much prefer to locate it in a community where they are wanted rather than where they have to fight their way in" (Love 1984). A prolonged political battle would delay the construction of critically needed beds. In the end, they chose to site the prison in Blythe. In Riverside County, when the state explicitly considered both economic and political factors, it privileged the political ones.

Gilmore would argue that the decision reflected the farmers' destitution. She would be wrong. The state chose sites with "prime farmland," according to Steve Quesenberry, a soil conservationist with the US. Department of Agriculture. The leaseholder of a site grew asparagus on the land, employing hundreds (Love 1984). The purchase of farmland was state-driven as the landowner sold it not because the land was no longer profitable, but because the state offered more profit. Moreover, farmers in Blythe created a NIMBY coalition called Stop the Prison Committee. They argued that the prison would deplete the town's dwindling water supply and waste productive farmland. At the same time, they reiterated past NIMBY groups' racial concerns, contending that the prison would "attract an undesirable element, raise the crime rate, scare off winter visitors, and destroy the rural, small-town atmosphere" (*Los Angeles Times* 1986). They attributed this process to the literal toxicity of prisoners as their picket signs read, "Today. A prison. Tomorrow. Nuclear Waste" (Love 1984). The signs make East L.A.'s insinuations explicit. Prisoners were radioactive and would destroy the idyllic "small-town atmosphere." Like the other NIMBY groups, the Blythe farmers felt politically exploited. They were not residents of the city and held no political power as a result (Love 1984). Protesters held another sign that read, "Sold Out by City Hall," perfectly encapsulating the two sides of the NIMBY coin (Love 1984). Without political power, the farmers, whose district controlled the water, refused to sell it to the state (Hussar 1985).

The move infuriated Californian officials because they were racing against the clock. Presley admitted that the site was far from perfect but reminded onlookers that they "had to locate it somewhere" (Love 1984). He later clarified that the state "hoped to get the prison started before summer — a time when potential prison riots are likely to occur," again demonstrating that California's overcrowding crisis led to prison construction (Hussar 1985). The state overcame the farmers' antics by siting the prison outside of the farmers' jurisdiction in an abandoned desert seventeen miles from Blythe (Ramirez 1986). The town officials celebrated, declaring that "a renaissance is at hand for the town." The siting appeased NIMBY attitudes, too, because as one community member pointed out, "Escapees would probably die in the desert before they reached the town" (*Desert Sun* 1986). That way, less mixing could occur. The siting enabled the state to build the prison and the local economy to grow while isolating prisoners from the town.

The Riverside siting battle underscores this paper's analysis of Gilmore and Eason. First, it heavily undermines Gilmore's thesis. The initial siting was on productive farmland that the renter still used. The final site did not take abandoned farmland off agricultural giants' hands; they

settled in the desert. In fact, the city officials clashed with the community's agribusiness, supporting Hagan's statistical analysis. Second, it confirms Eason's portrayal of the strength of local communities. In one county, three communities successfully expelled a prison. The power of a community to resist, however, does not prove a community's power to demand. The state obviously wielded this power as they mandated the prisons *before* any PIMBYism ever existed. They explicitly wanted to build prisons to avoid the collapse of the prison system. Hence, the state's PIYBYism stemmed from anti-black ideology, not any economic concerns. This anti-blackness also worked against the state because the Californian populace's anti-blackness led to extensive NIMBYism. Economic desperation allowed certain towns to overlook the fear of neighboring black criminals by channeling their anti-blackness into new forms. Examining the interaction between the state and the chosen community demonstrates that ideology, not economics, drove PIYBYism while ideology and economics clashed to determine the community's response.

IMPERIAL COUNTY CASE STUDY (1986-1990)

The Imperial County siting reinforces the patterns of NIMBY-and-PIMBYism. This time, however, the state knew the causes of NIMBYism and touted the prison's benefits to an economically depressed community with no tourism industry. They also stressed the prison's isolation, assuaging any fears of black infiltration and instead, presented the prison as a way to punish black people. Like in Blythe, the town-dwelling communities supported the prison while the farmers opposed it. In Imperial County, however, two communities desired the prison — one white and one Latinx. The battle between the two PIMBY coalitions revealed that when politicians viewed a prison as a political favor, they diverted the supposed economic benefits to white communities.

The state initially selected the Mount Signal site, a stretch of land nestling the Mexican border near Calexico (*Calexico Chronicle* 1988). Due to Mexican immigration, the southern end of the county was disproportionately poor and Latinx. Unlike the previous two sites, Calexico had no history of Chicano activism, contributing to a more favorable view of the state. The *Calexico Chronicle* voiced the community's support of the site. Their articles demonstrate that, like in Riverside, race plagued the county's politics (Steppling 1989). Attitudes towards the site fell along racial lines with Latinx proponents and white opponents. The Latinx population formed the coalition dubbed "Jobs, Opportunities, Business, Stability" (JOBS) to emphasize the prison's economic stimulus while whites formed Southerners Totally Against Mount Signal (STAMP).

In Imperial County, the state exploited their knowledge that economic desperation engendered PIMBYism. They promised that, "the economic benefits [of the prison] would loom large." They fomented fears of forgoing economic opportunities by highlighting other counties' inhabitants who were "delighted to tell [them] all about the advantages brought by the prison" (*Calexico Chronicle* 1986). The committee asserted that a prison would revitalize the county's floundering economy. In a later hearing, the speaker, Sam Sharp elaborated that each prisoner came with a price-tag. Because the census treats prisoners as "members of the community," the prisoners would inflate the county's population, translating to a \$300,000 annual tax break (*Calexico*

Chronicle 1988). The tax breaks, however, are a zero-sum game; by uprooting black men from their communities, they effectively transferred subsidies from black-urban spaces to rural ones. Moreover, they created rural prison jobs by removing black men from their urban employment. Accordingly, the potential benefits to Calexico represented a transfer of wealth from poor urban areas to poor rural ones.

The report and hearing also addressed the community's fears of black people. The researchers explored the "problem" of prison families who relocated from the city, explaining that less than 1% of families did so. In doing so, they attempted to mollify fears that new prison families would "stress the welfare state," a common trope surrounding black families. The anxieties of changing demographics precipitated fears of declining safety. The report assuaged these concerns, finding that "prison communities have lower crime rates than non-prison communities." The researchers assured Imperial County that urban black families and prisoners would not infiltrate their community (*Calexico Chronicle* 1986). In the hearing, Sharp emphasized the invisibility of the prison while also satisfying the community's urge to punish criminals. Responding to community concerns of parole release, Sharp emphasized that the prison staff escorted parolees to the bus station, after which they had a limited time to report back to their place of arrest. The prisoners would have no opportunity to "mix up" with the community. He then discussed the prison's security features, which ensured the area's safety at the cost of prisoners' livelihoods. The new protocols prohibited community-building activities, such as communal eating. They demeaned them by handcuffing them before letting them exit their cells and by "scrutinizing" them in the shower (*Calexico Chronicle* 1988). Overall, he underscored that the procedures created an "isolated citizenry as far as the prisoner is concerned" (*Calexico Chronicle* 1988). The state knew that it had to change the community's expression of anti-blackness. They wanted the town to view the prison as a place of inescapable punishment. The forum demonstrated that, though the community welcomed the prison's economic stimulus, they did not extend the hospitality to its prisoners. The community sought to bar the black people from their towns while reaping the pecuniary benefits of the "isolated citizenry." It confirms that the battle between NIMBY and PIMBY attitudes was one between fears of anti-blackness and desire for economic vibrancy. It also suggests a top-down demand as the state felt compelled to print propaganda to convince the community.

Southern white farmers did not accept the state's reasoning. Instead, they formed STAMP to oppose the Mount Signal Site and support locating the prison in Calipatria, a town in the far Northern stretch of the county (*Calexico Chronicle* 1989). They waged their campaign through the *Imperial Valley Press*, which only archived volumes from 1998 onwards, meaning that all of the information in this paper comes through the biased *Calexico Chronicle*. Nevertheless, the publication's perception of STAMP highlights the conflict between Latinx and white people. The *Chronicle* almost exclusively referred to the movement as representing "a couple Anglo farmers," only once revealing that the group had over a thousand members (Steppling 1989). In the *Chronicle's* telling, these farmers only followed their "self-interest" and "the weirdest reasons," such as that the prison would "mar [their] view of the sunset" (Legaspi 1989). In later issues, they

elaborated on STAMP's "bogus" arguments, such as "farm land loss, heavy use of streets, [and] congestion" (*Calexico Chronicle* 1989).

In the likeliest case, the farmers knew that the prison would not benefit them because they had no need for prison work and would not have enjoyed increased sales. Instead, the prison would waste precious resources. By advocating for the prison siting in Calipatria, they could enrich the county through tax breaks and the increased taxable income while avoiding the prison stigma.

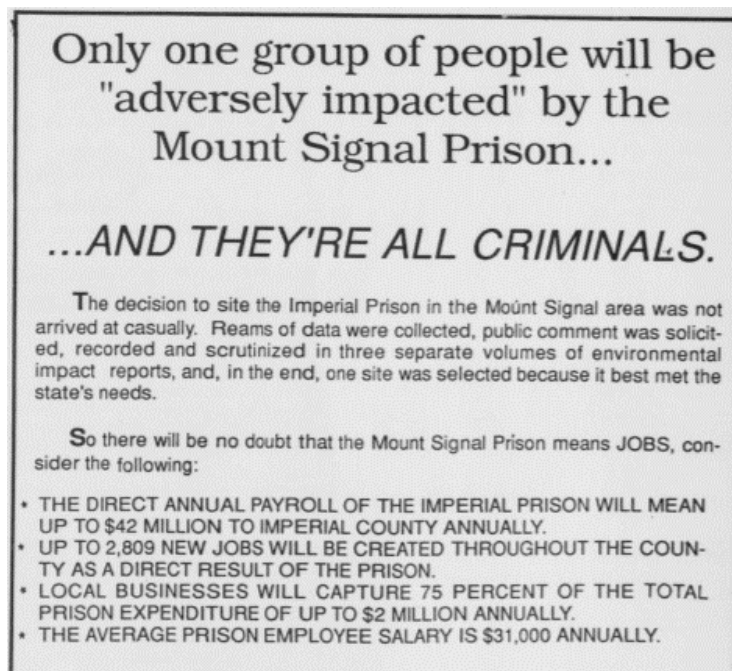


Figure 4: Advertisement paid for by JOBS in the *Calexico Chronicle*, April 13, 1989. California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside.

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=CC19890406.2.29.2&srpos>

The vast majority of the southern population, however, desperately needed jobs. They viewed STAMPS' movement as a betrayal of their region to benefit the county's whites at the cost of its Latinx population.

STAMP's movement led to the creation of Calexico's JOBS, which celebrated the prisons' economic benefits while denigrating criminals (*Calexico Chronicle* 1989). In an advertisement displayed in multiple issues, the coalition declared that "Only one group of people will be 'adversely affected' by the Mount Signal Prison ... AND THEY'RE ALL CRIMINALS" (JOBS 1989). It then listed all of the economic vitality that the prison would bring.

JOBS appropriated STAMP's language of "adversely impacted," not only to assuage concerns of the prison's presence, but also to highlight the harm that would come to prisoners. Consequently, JOBS *itself* explicitly viewed the economic prosperity of the area at the expense of prisoners. The group muddles common narrative that authors such as Gilmore present; Latinx communities, too, coveted the benefits of prison construction. In this way, the driving force behind prison proliferation was anti-black attitudes, not just pro-white ones.

The *Chronicle* expressed that the southern county's economic desperation justified the Mount Signal site. John Stepling, the editor of the publication, tellingly described the area as "our Bagdad," referencing an abandoned town to their north. Councilman Victor Legaspi concurred, writing that everyone knew the Southern end of the county was "poor and depressed" (Legaspi 1989). The Southern coalition viewed the prison as their only path to prosperity because, as the councilman explained, "exploitation of our Southern neighbors" cut wages for local citizens. Prisons, however, could not hire undocumented workers. Legaspi concluded that the prison would cause the economy of the whole county to "grow tremendously" (Legaspi 1989). To them, prison siting reflected the need of the surrounding area. In this way, the Southern county treated prisons as any other public works project. Unlike infrastructure investment, however, the profits that JOBS sought necessitated black suffering. Prison construction, then, represented the rural counties' attempts to alleviate their suffering by exacerbating the suffering of urban, black communities.

In the end, the state selected the Calipatria site, promising a second prison at the Mount Signal within the year. In a piece titled "SUE SUE SUE ... battle cry for Calexico," the *Chronicle* excoriated the decision, disclosing that JOBS intended to sue the Chamber of Commerce, the State of California, the CDC, and STAMP for acting without authority. The desperate move reflected the town's collective sense of indignation due to the fact that the Calipatria siting would cause the economic benefits to leak to nearby counties (*Calexico Chronicle* 1989). The *Chronicle* blamed the change of heart on their lack of political sway and financial backing, demonstrating that they viewed prisons as a political favor to spur economic growth. The director of the CDC, James Rowland, attributed the change to STAMP's pressure — pressure that Calexico believed reflected the size of their checkbooks, not their movement. Victor Legaspi concurred and lamented that "the losers in this case are not only Southend, but also, integrity." He continued sardonically, "How sad that hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent towards the selection of the best site ... only to have them renege on their findings. (Oh well, it's only taxpayer's money!)" (Legaspi 1989). Editor Stepling furthered, "such is life in the big city of Sacramento," alluding to the political clout of agribusiness in California and the political representation of the northern part of the county. To add insult to injury, the CDC reneged on their promise to site the second prison at Mount Signal, leading Stepling to exclaim, "It is blatantly a result of influence and accommodation to the power structure" (Stepling 1990). Four years of hope culminated into nothing. After hiring a special lobbyist and reimbursing all of CDC officials' plane and hotel costs, the town felt used (*Calexico Chronicle* 1990).

The Imperial County siting encapsulates key themes of this paper. It cements that, contrary to Gilmore's thesis, the agribusiness often opposed the prison boom. Anti-blackness elicited Calexico's fear of black migration and their view of the prison as a punitive institution. Only when communities combined anti-blackness with economic desperation did PIMBY groups emerge. Rural demand for prisons entered late in the prison boom, undermining Eason's argument. Only in Imperial County did sections within the county fight for placement near their neighborhoods. Here, politicians were happy to provide for their constituents as they enabled tough-on-crime

policies. Race factored into the narrative again as politicians overlooked the Latinx community's desires, instead capitulating to the will of white constituents.

CONCLUSION

By examining how the state and community communicated, this paper has challenged economic-based explanations for the prison boom. Gilmore's thesis explains none of the three examined siting battles. The state tried to site prisons in urban areas, but when it begrudgingly turned to rural ones, agribusiness heavily *resisted*. The state's crisis was primarily political, not economic. Though Eason correctly highlights that economic desperation drove rural demand, this happened much later in the California prison boom and only after the state propagandized the prison's benefits. Moreover, he willingly overlooks rural racism and their use of law-and-order rhetoric.

Anti-blackness underpins PIYBY, NIMBY, and PIMBY coalitions. The state's PIYBYism repeatedly invoked a "need" to remove criminals from the streets to fight "criminal terror." In reality, the state used prisons to curb black advancement, exploding the prison population far beyond capacity. The state privileged ideological, not economic, concerns. This anti-black ideology ensured that few wanted this "terror" in their backyard. NIMBY coalitions, too, viewed prisons as brimming with black filth. The constant allusions to pollution, trash, ills, and nuclear waste demonstrate that anti-blackness was the basis of NIMBYism. On the surface, PIMBY coalitions seem to escape the pull of anti-blackness as they lobbied for economic benefits, but they intertwined economic benefits with black subjugation.

These economic benefits did not materialize. Last year, *The Desert Sun* published a story about Blythe, asking "Can marijuana save this 'dying' town on the California-Arizona border?" (DiPierro, 2018). Unlike what the city officials thought in the 1980s, a renaissance was not at hand for Blythe. The town still struggles because the state used the prison to fix a political, not an economic, problem. Blythe's search for a miracle elixir has now brought them to marijuana, meaning that many of the town's five thousand inmates do time for a now legal crime — one that the surrounding community uses to soothe their economic woes. In the 1980s, Blythe listened to the state and accepted thousands of prisoners for profit. Now, the town will profit off the plant that put many of the prisoners there in the first place. In perhaps the best suiting metaphor, black men convicted of minor drug possession will be surrounded by fields of marijuana growing in the desert to fix a problem that the prison could not.

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NOTES

¹ All sources found through California Digital Newspaper Collection and the *L.A. Times* Archive.

² See <https://search.proquest.com/hnplatimes/results/96C6CB6FC5A14D6EPQ/2?accountid=14698#scrollTo> for endless coverage of the Chino Incident.

³ See: Carl Love, "Coachella council opposes state prison siting proposal," *Desert Sun*, June 20, 1984; Holland, "Four possible prison sites"; Love, "Turnout for prison hearing."