ONE

Introduction: The Causes and Consequences of the Prison Boom

From its greatest cultural export, blues music, to the production of staple crops like cotton, life in the Mississippi Delta is defined by race and racism, perhaps more than anywhere else in the United States. While Forrest City, Arkansas, is hailed as the birthplace of rhythm and blues singer the Reverend Al Green, it was named to honor a more nefarious association. "Forrest's Town" was named after Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest. Credited with founding the town in 1870, Forrest is best known for starting the most infamous domestic terrorist organization in US history, the Ku Klux Klan. This legacy of racism is still palpable in Forrest City, with the Confederate flag prominently displayed on cars, in the county museum, and at the county fair.

Like many Delta communities, Forrest City faced a shifting economic and social landscape after the fall of Jim Crow. In the late 1980s, its white leadership—the top political brass, including the mayor, the director of the chamber of commerce, the state representative, and a county judge—began meeting to discuss the possibility of bringing a prison to the "Jewel of the Delta." At a distance, many activists would characterize these meetings as the stuff of smoke-filled back rooms, with good ol' boys hatching a white supremacist conspiracy to subjugate African Americans in a neoplantation prison-industrial complex. But there is a complication. If acquiring a prison involves such sinister schemes, why do so many rural communities that push for and receive prisons contain disproportionate numbers of black and Hispanic residents? In Forrest City, black leaders, too, agreed that the arrival of a prison might stop the town's economic slide. This complicates how we normally think about the process of becoming a prison town.

The prison town—a nonmetropolitan municipality that has secured and constructed a prison for a federal, state, or private operator—is a strategic

Map 1.1. US prison proliferation, 1811–2010

site to investigate the intersection of race, spatial disadvantage, and the expansion of the criminal justice system. Forty years ago, there were 511 prison facilities in the United States. Since then we have embarked on an unparalleled expansion, constructing 1,152 new facilities. This dramatic growth in prison building is known as the prison boom (Garland 2001; Western 2006). Many scholars believe the prison boom to be the logical consequence of the annual imprisonment of more than two million Americans. However, this line of thinking cannot explain why some states build more prisons than others. For example, Illinois, Georgia, and Ohio have roughly 50,000 inmates each in state prisons, but the states house their prisoners in different numbers of facilities (from Illinois's fifty-five to Georgia's eighty-two).

Prior to the boom, prison building was not as salient for rural locales because of the relative availability of other large-scale economic development opportunities like factories, mills, or even military bases. In fact, most towns protested the placement of LULUs (Locally Undesirable Land Uses) like prisons for fear of being associated with a stigmatized institution. Starting in the 1970s, this trend shifted in regard to correctional facilities, with some rural towns lobbying to win a prison. Despite the varied motivations that produced this shift, one thing is clear—few scholars have actually examined the impetus for the "demand" for prisons in rural towns or the subsequent impact of these facilities. The journalism and sparse academic

work on this topic frame prison building as a zero-sum game with rural white communities benefiting from the mass imprisonment of poor, urban, black, and Latino communities.

The dominant narrative on prison building also suggests that they are bad for communities—not only the urban communities from which most prisons are believed to draw their populations but also the communities where prisons are built. Moreover, because prisoners are stigmatized and prisons are not aesthetically attractive, many argue that communities should voice NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) and oppose placement. I reveal that prison building is often the best of the last options for town leaders hoping to manage the spoiled identity accompanying the rise of the rural ghetto. By investigating the process of how a town pursued and secured a prison I trace elite decision making, revealing the multiple, and often conflicting, factors in prison placement.

Prison building is often portrayed as a dichotomous decision for communities. On one hand, prisons present the potential for economic development. On the other, prisons are believed to stigmatize rural places. By describing the process that culminated in the placement of the Forrest City Federal Correctional Facility (FCFCF), we can begin to understand the multiple social, political, and economic shifts that drove the United States to triple prison construction in just over thirty years. Forrest City's campaign to win a prison helps explain how rural communities get from NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) to PIMBY (Please in My Backyard). This study also complicates the iconic imagery of rural southern communities (for example, quaint/gentle and backward/violent) by unearthing the complex networks and nuanced negotiations undertaken by local elites in acquiring a federal prison. Not only do I chronicle the political process of prison placement, but I also use local perceptions to show the good, bad, and ugly sides of prison impact.

Thinking about the Prison Boom

The term "prison proliferation" refers to the widespread construction of prison facilities throughout the United States. To date, we have constructed 1,663 prisons, employing on average 231 individuals with annual profits exceeding $40 billion, at a cost of over $20,000 annually to house each inmate. There are many ways we can think about the causes and consequences of prison proliferation. The sociology of punishment seeks to explain how punishment affects society (Garland 2001). A segment of this research agenda describes a prison-industrial complex (PIC). The PIC perspective is

central to discourse on prison building. Eric Schlosser (1998) defines the PIC as "a set of bureaucratic, political, and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment, regardless of the actual need" (54). His work has influenced a number of writers who refer to the PIC as an institutional dynamic in which vested economic interests actively promote prison construction and a punitive system of criminal justice. This theory can be summarized by the following empirical claims:[1] (1) politicians exploit crime legislation to secure votes; (2) private companies seek profits by serving or operating prisons; and (3) rural town leaders use prisons for economic development. From the PIC perspective, the growth of prisons in rural communities suggests that prisons are solely a strategy for economic development.[2]

Because white towns are believed to derive economic benefit from the imprisonment of black men through prison job creation, this exploitation has a racial dimension:

> The ultimate policy irony at the heart of America's passion for prisons can be summarized by what I call "correctional Keynesianism"; the prison construction boom fed by the rising "market" of Black offenders is a job and tax-base creator for predominantly White communities that are generally far removed from urban minority concentrations. Those communities, often recently hollowed out by the de-industrializing family farm-destroying gales of the "free market" system, have become part of a prison-industrial lobby that presses for harsher sentences and tougher laws, seeking to protect their economic base even as crime rates continue to fall. (Street 2002, 36)

Street's commentary demonstrates how prison towns are believed to reify racial and economic stratification by punishing and incarcerating poor black and brown urban dwellers. Many scholars and journalists view the PIC's extension of the "peculiar institution" of racism as an oppressive catalyst generating jobs, capital investments, political power, and community pride in white rural prison towns (Schlosser 1998; King, Mauer, and Huling 2003). At the same time, the destructive apparatus of the PIC drives concentrated disadvantage in the hyperghetto by depriving communities of young black men in their prime years of employment and familial responsibility (Braman 2001; Clear 2001; Smith and Hattery 2008). Others claim the PIC reshapes the labor pool along racial lines, cordoning off blacks from the mainstream labor market (Smith and Hattery 2009).

Scholars assert that the ghetto "underclass" or "surplus population" (Darity 1983) was ripe for mass imprisonment. A journalist finds "most of America's huge prison population is Black or brown, and many of America's

prisons are located in very White rural areas" (Tilove 2002). In some instances, blacks comprise nearly 80 percent of a state's prison population, while whites make up 90 percent of corrections officers (Wacquant 2001). In this view, the growth of the penal population redistributes economic resources, as the black underclass creates jobs for poor whites.

Other critics have found more overtly sinister goals in the PIC. These scholars and activists believe the prison boom intentionally produces racial and economic inequality for exploitation by private corporations,[3] citing as evidence the growth of private prisons from 7 to roughly 12 percent of total prisons.[4] However, because states operate most US prisons (roughly 83 percent[5]), this extreme position does not hold; in fact, state-level characteristics are important predictors of prison placement. Furthermore, because prisons are primarily constructed by state legislatures, each state acts as a sorting mechanism for prison building. If we take the PIC account to be generally correct, two conclusions follow. First, the prison town is a space that exacerbates racial and economic inequality, driving the expansion of the criminal justice system by "demanding" increased prison construction. Second, the archetypical prison town is a space dominated by unemployed and impoverished whites. While the local context is important, larger social and political forces based on regional and state variations help to shape the context of punishment.

Even before beginning this study of Forrest City, I had identified evidence that challenged these bedrock assumptions of the prison-industrial complex.[6] Prison placement does not result in disadvantage in rural communities as much as it is caused by racial and economic exploitation in rural communities (Eason 2010). Moreover, prison towns are diverse. They vary by size, region, socioeconomic status (SES), and racial composition (Eason 2010). Many prisons are built in micropolitan towns with populations ranging from 10,000 to 50,000. During the height of the prison boom, most prisons were built in southern towns with higher percentages of blacks and Latinos, and lower unemployment, than the average small town (Eason 2010). In fact, the average rural southern town was twelve times more likely to receive a prison than a midwestern or northeastern town. The characteristics of prison towns also vary across periods of the prison boom. This is not surprising, given the demographic shifts in rural communities over the past forty years. In addition, roughly a third of all corrections officers nationally are black or Latino (Ward 2006).

These findings complicate the PIC perspective in several ways. First, the role of disadvantage is paradoxical. In contrast to the PIC theory's central argument that rural prison placement is a windfall for towns and causes
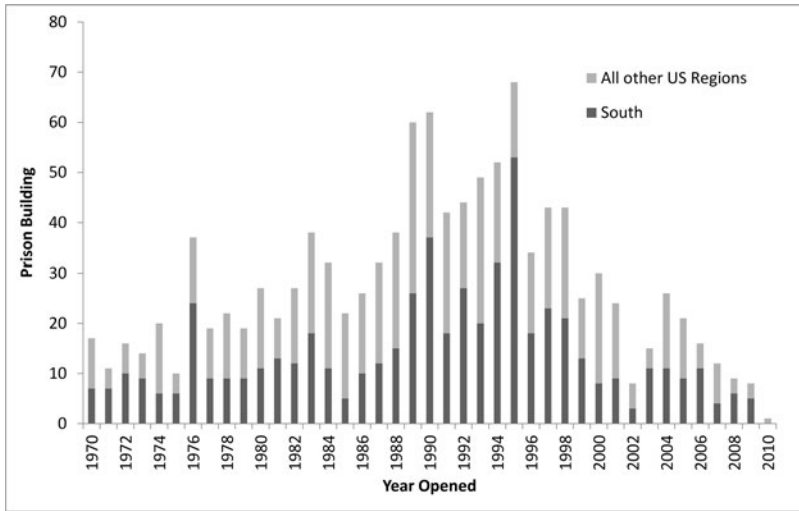
Figure 1.1. Prison boom: US versus the South

racial and economic inequality, my findings suggest that prisons are sited where rural disadvantage is already concentrated. Like urban disadvantage (Wilson 1987; Sampson and Wilson 1994; Wacquant 2001), concentrated rural disadvantage is marked by high poverty, residential segregation, and stigma. Studies show that rural blacks, like urban blacks, live in the most residentially segregated US census blocks (Aiken 1990; Lichter et al. 2007a; Wahl and Gunkel 2007; Cromartie and Beale 1980). Related studies suggest that black and Latino housing patterns are linked to concentrated poverty (Lichter et al. 2008). Therefore, we can think of racial and economic disadvantage in rural communities as fundamental to explaining the prison boom. Prison proliferation moreover benefits blacks and Latinos by providing employment as corrections officers. In a seminal piece, Everett Hughes (1962) describes the relationship between "Good People and Dirty Work" that explains why people believe that any job is a good job. The prevalence of prison building in the South suggests that southern culture may be germane in contextualizing the local "demand" for prisons (Cobb 1992; Reed 1994). Therefore, multiple factors (for example, region, rurality, race, and inequality) need to be accounted for in prison placement.

To account for the multiple, conflicting motives in prison building, the dominant narrative of the PIC needs to be reconsidered. The penal-industrial complex can be differentiated from the prison-industrial complex by its positive focus on punishment. In contrast, the PIC perspective casts

prison building as a normative function of overt racism and deterministic capitalism. I improve on the penal-industrial complex as a theoretical anchor in explaining prison proliferation by expanding beyond the singular focus on jobs. This reframing allows us to understand the bureaucratic function of punishment and its role in the prison boom. I redefine the penal-industrial complex as the economic, social, and political institutions related to the causes and consequences of the prison boom.

Finding Forrest City: Fieldwork across Rural Neighborhood Ecology

Along the 130 miles between Memphis, Tennessee, and Little Rock, Arkansas, the horizon is perfectly flat, as if scraped by a giant bricklayer. You will find swamps, a Super 8 Motel, an adult store, a billboard hawking guns and ammo, and Forrest City, Arkansas. Its front door is the intersection of the second-largest commercial truck trafficking route in the country, Interstate 40, and the north–south corridor of Arkansas Highway 1 / Washington Avenue. Driving along the interstate on a warm summer night, we watched the sun nuzzle into the rice paddies growing up from the marshy land.

I relocated my African American family, including my wife and two small children, to the Yazoo Mississippi Delta to understand the decision making of local white elites about economic development. Given the stigma of prison, I wanted to learn firsthand why town leaders would lobby for placement. I chose Forrest City for this case study, in part, because it fit the economic and demographic profile of a disadvantaged rural southern community struggling to attract new economic development (Taub 2004). In many ways, it is also the prototypical prison town. The 2000 census showed that 36 percent of the roughly 14,000 residents were white, with 61 percent African American. The median family income was about half the national average of $50,000, and the poverty rate nearly triple, at about 33 percent.

The vestiges of the two-tier owner/worker Jim Crow system are omnipresent in the town's social structure and physical layout. Poverty is mainly concentrated in the lower town, west of Arkansas Highway 1 / Washington Avenue, while nestled in the hills east of Washington Avenue, off winding, almost secretive roads, many white elite families live in lavish single-family homes on large lots with immaculate lawns and well-sculpted gardens. Some of these families once ran cotton farms and still wield power statewide. Despite their physical proximity, these residents are socially distant. Most blacks growing up in the bottoms have never visited these homes; in fact, many did not think of them as part of Forrest City.

Exploring prison placement requires a multimethod research design and an eclectic data collection style that always connects to some form of observation. To investigate Forrest City, I used an ethnographic case-study method (Yin 2003) that included interviews, archival research, participant observation, mapping, and statistical analysis. Ethnography is an artistic and risky scientific method. It often involves relocating to an unfamiliar community. In this case, our identity as northerners marked us as outsiders. Extensive fieldwork is a test of discipline and perseverance not for the weak of heart. When well executed, however, it not only elicits interesting stories but also helps the social scientist construct theoretical frameworks. To describe the site and our experiences, I use what Duneier labels the Howard Becker principle: "most social processes have a structure that comes close to insuring that a certain set of situations will arise over time. These situations practically require people to do or say certain things because there are other things going on that require them to do that, things that are more influential than the social condition of a fieldworker being present" (Duneier and Carter 1999, 338). Being both participant and observer allows access to the community, but also provides the social distance to notice aspects of rural southern life that natives take for granted. The tension between access and distance aids in understanding, rather than merely describing, observed behaviors. As many ethnographers say, talk is cheap. Without understanding the relationships and the role of the informant in the community, interview data are hollow. Patterns emerged as I transcribed recorded interviews, coded, and wrote memos based on those codes from my notes as a participant/observer. I usually analyzed as I collected, which influenced further data collection. For example, ghetto elements in Forrest City were not immediately apparent, but routine review of my field notes exposed subtle cues of racial and spatial stigma.

In 2006, I spent four months conducting interviews and going through records at the local community college. After that, I moved to a neighboring community with my wife and children (summer 2007 through winter 2008). The qualitative data gathered during these periods consists of formal/informal interviews and observations. After establishing Mr. Stephens as a key informant, I built a network of informants using snowball sampling for interviews. Oisín Tansey (2007) finds that in creating a narrative history of a specific event, researchers should interview specific actors or segments of a community. I used this rationale in formal interviews with current or past Forrest City decision makers. Other informal interviews and observations arose in frequenting churches, bars, barbershops, restaurants, and stores; talking with hotel staff, neighbors, office staff, small business own-

ers, civic organization members, recreational facility staff, police, and City Hall employees. In constructing the social history of Forrest City, I also conducted archival research using print and electronic media (primarily newspaper articles from the *Forrest City Times-Herald*), nonprofit, and government records. I used numerous local, state, and federal government agencies as sources for quantitative analysis and descriptive statistics.

In addition, by making the cross-country move to the Delta, finding a place to live, placing my six-year-old son in elementary school, and engaging in other daily activities like grocery shopping, we began to gain an understanding of the people and place. I had no sooner understood the impediments to economic development embedded in places like Forrest City when codes and common themes emerged from the field and led me to see the broader structures and processes shaping the town's concentrated disadvantage. After a deeper investigation using historical and secondary data, I uncovered classic ghettoization processes like white flight, increased public housing, and de-industrialization, resulting in the social isolation of poor African Americans. After triangulating and further interrogating both the data and the research site, I was able to link ghetto structures and formation to a history of racist education and economic policies and practices. I used these pieces to engage with the literature, creating a micro-macro theoretical link. While the rural ghetto was not the central focus of the initial investigation, it emerged as the best way to make sense of the dynamic social, political, and economic context facing rural decision makers.

Although conducting qualitative research can be an isolating process, I am forever indebted to the people of Forrest City for opening their hearts and homes and community to my family—no one perhaps more than André Stephens. Stephens, the executive director of the Saint Francis County Community Development Corporation (SFCCDC), is a key player in local development, as evidenced by the recent construction of a multi-million-dollar senior housing center (*Forrest City Times-Herald* 2011). Mr. Stephens has lived in Forrest City for nearly two decades, yet some residents still consider him a Yankee. He has joked about this with me claiming, "Me and you are considered just Yankees. That's better than being a damn Yankee"! He immediately welcomed me because of his respect for the colleague who brokered our connection.[7] He adopted my family as fictive kin (Anderson 1978; Stack 1974) and provided office space and other support for my study through the SFCCDC. Because it serves indigent clients, working in the Saint Francis County Community Development Corporation provided initial access and, eventually, entrée into other spheres of life that would have been impossible otherwise. Mr. Stephens introduced me to numerous informants,

including the few remaining white elite families who still owned most of the land in town, despite the recent emergence of black political power in the mayor's office and city council positions. Mr. Stephens's social position as an outsider and professional position as a local developer afforded him access to decision makers on both sides of the town's long-standing racial divide. He was strongly interested in illuminating the economic plight of rural black communities in hopes of better positioning his life's work.

Through Mr. Stephens and the SFCCDC, I made several contacts that would prove crucial to the study. I first met Charles Freeman when he interned at the SFCCDC. He had just completed his first year at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, where he studied finance and computer science. He had been the starting tight end for the Forrest City High School football team and was recruited to play at North Carolina A&T. His surname is significant both locally and historically to blacks. During slavery, blacks did not have surnames because they were property. Shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation, many took a popular US president's surname, like Lincoln, Washington, or Jefferson; others took their master's surname. Other more militant blacks took the surname Freeman or Freedman to announce their liberation. As a Forrest City native, Charles Freeman is critical yet very proud of his hometown. His family is well respected and well known. His father and uncles recently sold the convenience store they operated, which housed a gas station and laundromat.

Charles and I played basketball many times at the newly constructed Forrest City recreation center. He is left-handed with a hoop game reminiscent of the late, great Hank Gathers. He is brown-skinned, six feet two, and burly but not fat. No real hops (jumping ability) to speak of, but he has a quick drop-step spin in either direction out of the post. His feet are nimble as he runs down the quick, small guards. I have enjoyed sharing meals and hanging out at "Club" Wal-Mart with him. He served as local guide and confidant to help me make sense of local customs. He is also an excellent example of how young adult men should navigate rural southern culture—I often modeled my behavior after him. This decision was strategic: he is not only one of a few young adults I encountered in the area with strong aspirations toward upward mobility but, more importantly, he commands and gives respect. Charles looks other people in the eye and says "Yes, ma'am" or "No, sir." Whether the person is black, white, young, or old, Charles shows he is interested and genuinely cares by asking after family members. He has the beautiful manners of a proper southerner.

Shortly after arriving in Forrest City, Charles and I embarked on a transect. Ethnographers use transects as data-gathering tools to ascertain how in-

formants make sense of space and place. I used these driving tours as opportunities to understand what institutions and neighborhoods were important to key informants. Gaining the lay of the land taught me the spatial fissures along wealth, race, and disadvantage within Forrest City. During the initial ride, Charles was quite open in his opinion of Forrest City. As I drove, he pointed out recent infrastructure improvements including paved sidewalks in "old" downtown and other traditionally underserved neighborhoods, the newly constructed recreation center, and the modern air-conditioned additions to the grade schools. The recreation center and school improvements gave Charles a great sense of pride and satisfaction. They signaled a marked change from past policies that did not invest in youth. These improvements were the crowning accomplishments of the first black mayor, Larry Bryant.

The school improvements took years to accomplish because Arkansas school budget increases were tied to local communities imposing a millage—an additional tax for specific school projects. After years of complicated political battles, the millage was passed in Forrest City, making infrastructure improvements at the schools possible. A major part of the uneven academic performance of Forrest City schools can be linked to poor funding. While Arkansas is ranked educationally below most states, the eastern portion that is part of the Mississippi River Delta performs the worst. Forrest City is no exception.

During this drive, I also took note of the modern, planned industrial spaces closer to key highway nodes like Interstate 40, Arkansas Highway 1, and the newly constructed Dale Bumpers Road, which all lead to the prison. The bypass from Arkansas Highway 1 and Interstate 40 that leads directly to the prison is named for former Arkansas governor and United States senator Dale Bumpers, to acknowledge his role in securing the federal correctional facility. Lichter and Fuguitt (1980) demonstrate the competitive advantages to businesses of being located near an interstate, and the more modern industrial areas in Forrest City follow this logic. Just north of Interstate 40, corporate branches include a distribution center for Pepsi, a Sanyo television manufacturing plant, and a Boar's Head meat processing plant. Arkansas Highway 1 separates the industrial park from a motel campus that includes national chains like Holiday Inn, Best Western, Days Inn, and Hampton Inn. Just south of Interstate 40 along either side of Highway 1, a series of strip malls is anchored by a new, large Wal-Mart.

In many respects, de-industrialization and globalization have restructured the physical geography of towns like Forrest City. Shops and restaurants line both sides of Washington Avenue. Fast food restaurants like McDonald's, Burger King, KFC, and Sonic dominate this streetscape near

Figure 1.2. Forrest City central commercial district, Arkansas Highway 1, Washington Avenue

the highway. The occasional Winn Dixie Chicken or Bonanza Steakhouse nestles between them. Although some residents walk to these centrally located strip malls, most drive. A car culture prevails over rural southern communities. The newer, larger Wal-Mart on the west side of the highway is not simply a store in this town. Open twenty-four hours a day, it transforms into what Charles calls "Club Wal-Mart" for many young adults on Friday and Saturday evenings. This newer store is directly across Highway 1 from the superseded, now vacant Wal-Mart on the east side. The area has a high volume of commercial activity, people, and cars, and Charles called it the center of town. There are few other local entertainment options, and young adult activities often involve travel to Memphis or Little Rock. Hanging out at Wal-Mart is a low-stress, low-investment option for socializing. Wal-Mart is not the only global corporate space lining Washington Street in Forrest City. The multitude of commercial establishments along Interstate 40 and Arkansas Highway 1 appealed to interstate travelers and local residents alike.

Even in the agricultural sections of Forrest City, there are facilities one would expect to find in urban neighborhoods, like a roller-skating rink, a bowling alley, and a movie theater. In fact, Forrest City has a country club equipped with a golf course, tennis courts, and a swimming pool. While Forrest City possessed most of the businesses and facilities that one would

find in a larger community, quantity, quality, and size varied: Forrest City had fewer of them, and they were usually lower quality and smaller. For example, the movie theater had a limited selection of first-run movies. Some younger informants complained that the owners/operators would not bring "controversial" or "urban" films, and the hours of operation were limited mainly to the weekends. These limits also contribute to "push" factors for young, upwardly mobile residents to relocate to Memphis or Little Rock for entertainment.

While newer commercial and retail developments were clustered near the interstate and the new Wal-Mart, public and financial services could be found in the traditional center of town on either side of Arkansas Highway 1 near Broadway Avenue. They include city hall, the police and fire departments, the chamber of commerce, a recently constructed courthouse, the Saint Francis County Museum, several banks, realtors, and insurance companies. While there are plenty of storefronts, few businesses operate in this area; they either died or moved to the main highway by the smaller Wal-Mart, leaving the county square a virtual ghost town. The faded, chipped, white outline of lettering for the Don José Mexican restaurant haunts an abandoned structure on Washington Street. Space has been redefined in communities like Forrest City, with the shift of commercial activity away from traditional downtowns, sometimes called "Wal-Martification." Here, the central business district shifted from proximity to town government agencies to the Wal-Mart near the interstate highway. While macroforces like globalization exert pressure, decision makers in communities like Forrest City ultimately determine what businesses are developed locally. Local community leaders have agency, even without many development options.

South along Arkansas Highway 1 between the old and new centers of town are several banks, the civic center, a grocery store, a drug store, and some hair salons, most notably, the House of Fashion, owned and operated by Terri Stephens, wife of André Stephens. Farther down are churches, including First Baptist and other red brick and gray buildings that are or once were of great significance. In between the churches and some commercial buildings, a red brick, two-story apartment building had roughly twenty units. Signs of neglect spoke volumes—paint peeling off white window trim, some windows wide open and missing screens, others with broken screens dangling, the front entrance door slumped off the hinges. Disrepair like this is associated with disorder in urban settings (St. Jean 2007). While enlightening, these initial signs could not fully prepare me for what I would learn about rural communities during my study of Forrest City.

Modeling Prison Placement

It is useful to separate the building of a prison and its impact on a community into several distinct stages. Throughout this book, I will distinguish between prison siting, prison placement, prison building, and prison impact. Siting refers to the role of a government entity—usually the state or federal government—in selecting a site on which to build a prison. Placement draws our attention to the process by which local civic and political leaders attempt to secure such a facility—that is, how they convince the state to site a prison in their town. Building refers to the construction process itself, while impact points to the social, economic, and political costs and benefits as a result of the arrival of a prison.

While there are certainly local nuances to any type of "demand," there are also broader, seemingly universal, forces that predict a bid for prison placement (or, for that matter, any other LULU). Prisons represent different things to different people. Some see suffering and stigma, while others, especially communities that have seen better days, envision economic development opportunities and jobs. These conflicting views manifest a dynamic tension at the community level. So how do prisons or any other LULUs find communities willing to receive them? Understanding the placement of LULUs requires one to account for multiple levels of stigma, including the region, the town, and even within the community itself. Understanding prison placement in the United States requires a unique lens sensitive to rural disadvantage. Rural disadvantage is more persistent and entrenched than urban poverty; locals' hopes for prison impact make no sense without this context. Yet rural poverty remains concealed and off the beaten path, as scholarly work on stratification in rural areas lags behind urban areas in both breadth and depth.

Understanding prison placement requires adopting the perspective of the type of community most likely to receive one. Given that prisons are more likely to be built in impoverished rural communities with sizeable poor black or Latino populations, any explanation of prison "demand" must take this type of community structure into account. In the NIMBY to PIMBY model below, I suggest that race leaders/middlemen and white elites form a growth coalition (Logan and Molotch 1987) in response to the rise of the rural ghetto. Despite an otherwise racially contentious political climate, the growth coalition allows the key players in the city to come together across racial lines and secure a prison. Ultimately, the decision to pursue a prison reveals how some rural areas make decisions to manage stigma and social inequality. I argue that the counterintuitive notions of PIMBY for prisons is
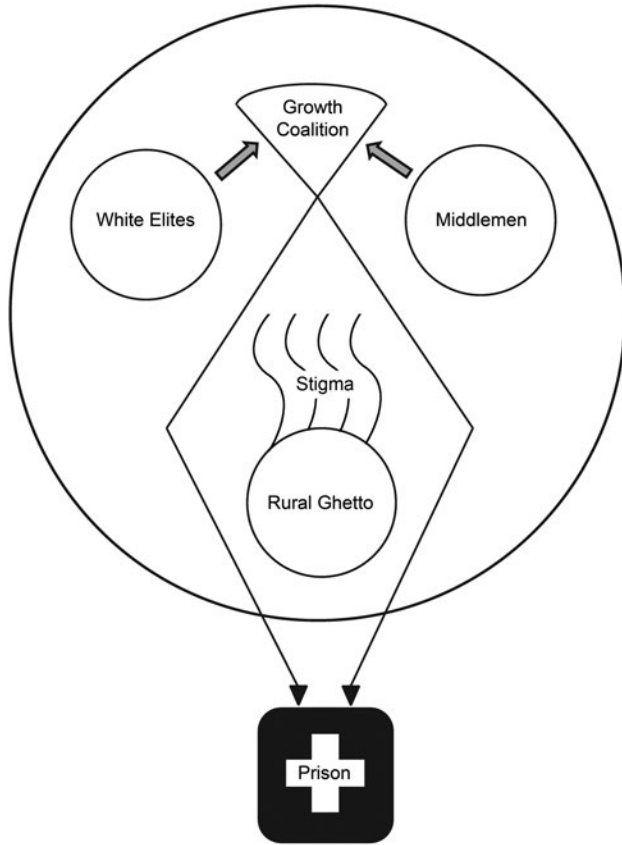
Figure 1.3. NIMBY to PIMBY: modeling prison placement

based on a town's efforts to manage spoiled identity (Goffman 1963; Rivera 2008). This model of prison placement captures the dynamic tension facing rural communities with limited economic opportunities. We cannot truly judge someone else's living arrangements until we visit their backyard. *Big House on the Prairie* offers a glimpse into the backyard of the rural South.

The case of Forrest City demonstrates the complexity of context and institutions in the matching process of economic development. Classic growth machine models cannot account for undesirable land uses, as they frame any economic development as PIMBY. The environmental justice approach to LULUs, in contrast, positions communities of color solely as victims of undesirable land use. But, as the case of Forrest City will show, the path from NIMBY to PIMBY is not necessarily predictable, with twists and turns along

racial lines. Understanding how communities come to demand a LULU—the process of placement—requires an understanding of the role of stigma in those same communities. Stigmatized places are more likely to "demand" stigmatized institutions, particularly if the stigma of the community is equal to or greater than the stigma associated with the institution in question.

Rural towns most likely to receive a prison suffer the quadruple stigma of rurality, race, region, and poverty. Despite the negative stigma associated with prisons, locals shape positive meaning from prison placement. White elites and black race leaders/middlemen use similar frames in discussing prison placement as a positive response to the bourgeoning rural ghetto. However, positive views of prison impact are differentiated along community roles and race, with White elites viewing the prison most positively. Specific actors or sets of actors are crucial to understand prison building.

As a result, I propose the following model of prison placement. A functioning growth coalition that can properly signal prison demand to state/federal authorities requires that white elites must be joined (or at least not opposed) by middlemen. Philip Selznick (1949) posits co-optation as "the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence" (13). In formal co-optation, "there is a need to establish the legitimacy of authority" to the "relevant public," whereas informal co-optation produces "the need of adjustment to the pressure of specific centers of power within the community" (Selznick 1949, 259). In the case of Forrest City, race leaders were both formally and informally co-opted into the growth coalition. In race leaders' support for prison construction in exchange for minority set-aside contracts, we see informal co-optation. Then-local NAACP chapter president Larry Bryant's decision not to oppose the project at the 1990 community meeting serves as an example of formal co-optation. Together, these instances clearly point to race leaders' willing participation in both types of co-optation. This case study should not be oversimplified as one of black race leaders being duped by the white elite or becoming victims of oppressive neoliberal forces.

Although this model is based on Forrest City, a prototypical prison town, slight adjustments can be made to understand the process of prison placement depending on the region, state, and local racial composition of towns that have or will pursue prisons. For instance, given the racial composition of prison towns in the Texas panhandle, middlemen will most likely be Latino, not black. Surely local cultural and state procedural mechanisms may differ, but the process of placement should not differ wildly from Forrest City.

Outline of the Book

This book answers two broad questions. First, what is the source of prison "demand" that spurred the prison boom? Second, how do prisons impact rural towns? Chapters 2 through 5 address the question of prison "demand." Chapters 6 through 8 address prison impact. I begin by reframing the Please in My Backyard (PIMBY) question in chapter 2 by asking, "Have you seen my backyard?" This chapter explores the potential motivations behind prison placement in rural communities by focusing on the role of stigma in defining a town's identity. In underscoring events that affected Forrest City's reputation, including a rape trial and a manufacturing worker's strike, we can see how stigma builds in rural communities prior to prison placement.

In comparing life in Forrest City to residing in the Chicago Housing Authority developments, a resident states, "it's the same, only quieter." I use this quote to advance the notion of a rural ghetto in chapter 3, suggesting that processes like white flight, de-industrialization, and the expansion of public housing created a new form of inequality in communities like Forrest City. Borrowing from urban sociology, I detail how the rural ghetto has emerged as a post–Jim Crow form of subjugation instrumental to the prison boom. Through ethnographic and historical data, we came to understand firsthand how the Delta is deeply defined by systems of racial oppression. Before this respondent compared drug abuse, drug selling, and crime in her Forrest City neighborhood to Chicago, I did not make the experiential link between these communities. From here, I show how elements of concentrated disadvantage like murder rates and residential segregation provide a basis for considering how the ghetto concept applies to certain rural communities. More importantly, I suggest that just as there are urban ghettos, rural spaces of concentrated disadvantage should be understood as rural ghettos that have similar functions in rural ecology.

In chapter 4, I show how local decision makers construct narratives of how the FCFCF will improve the town's reputation. In order to build support for placement, the prison, an otherwise stigmatized institution, is reframed as a savior, a stabilizer, or a way to advance Forrest City. These narratives are used in the campaign to effectively reframe NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) to PIMBY (Please in My Backyard) regarding placement. Residents show a willingness to accept a stigmatized institution based on characteristics of the community and the institution. I suggest that when a town becomes more stigmatized than an institution like a prison or hazardous-waste facility, the town is more willing to accept these institutions to save their reputation.

In chapter 5, I highlight the prison placement process using the case of

the FCFCF. I build a theory of prison placement, suggesting that a community's willingness to accept a stigmatized institution depends on characteristics of both the community and the institution. Surprisingly, despite the negative stigma associated with prisons, rural community leaders produce a groundswell of support by framing the prison as a way to save the community from continued economic decline. While having a rural ghetto could be a sufficient impetus for securing a prison, the case of Forrest City suggests at least two other necessary conditions. First, local white elites must want the prison and exercise social capital to acquire the facility. Second, local black/Latino leadership must also support (or at least not oppose) the decision. These interlocking interests form the basis for a growth coalition between white elites and race leaders (Logan and Molotch 1987). While I am not suggesting that these otherwise contentious groups are sharing power, my case study suggests that race leaders are co-opted for their public support.

Chapter 6 uses local perceptions of prison impact to present the numerous challenges and opportunities prison building provides. While the FCFCF is overwhelmingly viewed positively by residents in Forrest City and Wynne, this chapter also describes a disjuncture in local opinion: while local leaders portray the prison as a windfall, some residents have a more mixed reaction. Perceptions of prison impact are nuanced and differ with an individual's position in the local social structure. To date, the few studies measuring prison impact focus on positive economic growth from prison placement. By understanding local rural perceptions of the prison's impact, I call for a theoretical reorientation to measure prison impact.

Chapter 7 delves further into investigating the impact of the FCFCF. I use descriptive statistics to detail impacts of the FCFCF in Forrest City and a neighboring town, further demonstrating the pros and cons of prison impact. Simultaneously, the chapter establishes that the rise of the rural ghetto presents obstacles to rebuilding Forrest City's reputation, despite the presence of the FCFCF. On the eve of opening, a resident compared the living conditions in the federal prison to those of fellow residents and concluded that conditions for prisoners are better than many Forrest City residents. This provides a signal that, despite the perceived improvements from prison building, the town continues to struggle. I maintain that despite the presence of the FCFCF, Forrest City's reputation has suffered.

I conclude the book in chapter 8 by discussing the theoretical and policy implications of prison proliferation. Given the current fiscal crisis facing many states, policy makers must ask two equally important questions. First, can states afford to build more new prisons while still maintaining old ones? Second, given their political backing by unions and local legislators, can

state governments afford to close prisons? I discuss these critical questions by first demonstrating how prisons slow economic decline in disadvantaged communities across different periods of the prison boom. I also show that prisons distort rural demography by increasing total population counts, male/female ratios, and measures of racial segregation and poverty. I suggest these difficult policy questions can be best answered by analyzing the results unearthed by the proposed model for the specific state.

This study also has implications for prison abolitionists and other criminal justice activists and provides a bridge to potential new allies in the fight against prison expansion. Prison activists generally work in underserved, disadvantaged urban neighborhoods that routinely experience prisoner reentry, but not the disadvantaged rural communities where prisons are primarily located, which also experience high levels of prisoner reentry. The positive benefits of prison building for rural towns of color complicates the campaign to end mass imprisonment and prison proliferation. Lastly, I discuss the future of social scientific research on prison towns and disadvantage. The discursive connection between rural and urban microlevel community functions of stigma and disadvantage suggest that we reestablish a rural/urban continuum. We must return to rural communities as a central site for investigating systems of race, punishment, and disadvantage. Finally, a methodological appendix describes the methods used in this project.