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Black Women at Work in Corrections in the Era of Mass Incarceration: Documenting Demographic Changes in the New York City Department of Correction

Carolyn Fisher

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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BLACK WOMEN AT WORK IN CORRECTIONS IN THE ERA OF MASS
INCARCERATION: DOCUMENTING DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN THE NEW YORK
CITY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

by

CAROLYN FISHER

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2019

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Carolyn Fisher

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

Michael Javen Fortner

Thesis Advisor

Date

Alyson Cole

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Black Women at Work in Corrections in the Era of Mass Incarceration: Documenting
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by

Carolyn Fisher

Advisor: Michael Javen Fortner

Recent work has popularized the idea that mass incarceration arose in the wake of the civil rights movement to maintain the social and economic subordination of African Americans previously enforced under Jim Crow. This discussion has not accounted for the many black Americans working in corrections, particularly in large metropolitan jail systems. This paper documents the increase in black women working as correction officers and administrators in the New York City Department of Correction since the late 1970s and explores the implications of this growth on the strict racial argument about mass incarceration. Using administrative and archival sources, it argues that the Department has been a site of professional advancement for black women and that the timing of this demographic shift suggests that carceral expansion in part enabled black women to gain a foothold in a traditionally white and male profession. It argues that these are good jobs that have offered economic security and political power to black women in corrections, and that this evidence highlights the inadequacy of strictly racial arguments about the causes and consequences of mass incarceration. Finally, it argues that an accurate demographic picture of workers in corrections is critical for advocates of racial justice and decarceration.

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Introduction

The conversation around the rise of mass incarceration in the United States has often been framed in simplistic racial terms, most memorably by Michelle Alexander in her 2010 book *The New Jim Crow*. Her bestselling book has deeply influenced the discourse about America's incarceration crisis and has rightly drawn popular attention to the overrepresentation of people of color in American's prisons and jails (Bromwich 2018; Schuessler 2012). The work has galvanized advocacy groups fighting to end mass incarceration and was even cited in the legal decision ruling New York City's stop and frisk policy racially discriminatory and therefore unconstitutional (Benz and Lerner 2013; *Floyd v. City of New York* 2013, 56). As Marie Gottschalk (2014) has noted, "No other book has been so vital in making the problem of the carceral state starkly visible to the wider public and in rallying members of disadvantaged communities and other groups to take on the project of dismantling it" (Gottschalk 2014, 3). Alexander's core argument, briefly put, is that mass incarceration¹ is "the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement" (Alexander 2010, 11) and constitutes a racial caste system² that "function[s] nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship" (Alexander 2010, 12–13) and "permanently locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy" (Alexander 2010, 13). She argues that "[l]ike Jim Crow (and slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race" (Alexander 2010, 13).

¹ "Mass incarceration," for Alexander, "refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison" (2010, 13).

² She defines "racial caste" as a "stigmatized racial group locked into an inferior position by law and custom" (Alexander 2010, 12).

However, the simplistic racial framing of this argument presents black orientation towards the rise of mass incarceration as uniform and monolithic; absent from this work, as well as from the popular discussion it has engendered, is any acknowledgment of the many black Americans for whom careers as correction officers over this same period have been a reliable pathway to the middle class.³ Although black Americans are more overrepresented among the incarcerated than among those who guard them, they still represent nearly a quarter of bailiffs, correctional officers, and jailers⁴ nationally (Data USA 2017), despite comprising just under 13% of the general population (U.S. Census Bureau 2017) and 12% of the work force (Data USA 2017). What national figures mask, however, is that black representation in this profession is not geographically uniform, and that, in some places, including New York City, it is black women, in particular, who comprise its largest demographic.

As a condition of receiving funding in Fiscal Year 2017 (New York City Council 2016, 8), the NYC Department of Corrections was required to report the demographic breakdown of its officers by race, sex, and rank.⁵ That report, whose figures appear below in Table 1, indicates that as of October 2016, black women comprised the largest demographic among both rank-and-file officers (63% of whom are black and 89% of whom are non-white) and their supervisors (73% of whom are black and 90% of whom are non-white). And while men outnumber women among correction officers by 15 percentage points, the inverse is true among supervisory personnel.

³ An (non-academic) exception is a 2008 *New York Times* piece on the demographic “changing of the guard” in NYC corrections (Hauser 2008).

⁴ This is the Census Bureau category that best captures these workers. Bailiffs only make up around 4% of this group (Konda, Reichard, and Tiesmana 2012).

⁵ The report was also required as a condition of FYs 2018 and 2019 (as of September 30, 2017, and June 30, 2018, respectively); however, those reports disaggregate by race and rank only.

Correction Officers						
	Count			Percentage		
Race-Ethnicity	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Black	2,553	2,785	5,338	30.2	33.0	63.2
White	840	124	964	10.0	1.5	11.5
Hispanic	1,174	593	1,767	13.9	7.0	20.9
Other ⁶	287	89	376	3.4	1.0	4.4
Total	4,854	3,591	8,445	57.5	42.5	100
Supervisory Uniformed Personnel*						
	Count			Percentage		
Race-Ethnicity	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Black	255	482	737	25.1	47.5	72.6
White	92	18	110	9.0	1.8	10.8
Hispanic	68	71	139	6.7	7.0	13.7
Other	21	8	29	2.1	0.8	2.9
Total	436	579	1,015	42.9	57.1	100

Table 1. New York City Department of Corrections Demographic Composition by Race-Ethnicity and Sex of Correction Officers and Supervisory Uniformed Personnel*, as of September 30, 2016

*Includes Captains, Assistant Deputy Wardens, Deputy Wardens, Deputy Wardens in Command, and Wardens

These figures present a challenge for the argument that mass incarceration arose, in the wake of the civil rights movement, as a means of social control meant to maintain a “racial undercaste” of black Americans, excluded from the mainstream society and economy (Alexander 2010, 13). In this paper, I argue that the expansion of corrections in New York City is at least in part responsible for the high representation of black women in that field. In particular, the timing of black female growth in this field—especially their relative numbers—suggests that incarceration growth played an important role in this demographic shift. The gains of the civil rights movement and women’s movement of course facilitated this change as well, but the

⁶ “Other” includes those who identify as Asian, as Alaskan or Native American, or whose identities were “unknown/unidentified.”

change's closer temporal proximity to the explosive growth of the city's incarcerated population highlights its importance in creating an opportunity for black New Yorkers, particularly women, to enter and gain a foothold in a traditionally white and male profession. I argue that these jobs are, for the most part, good work, and that black women have consistently taken jobs in corrections for the good pay and benefits, as well as for the potential for advancement within the Department—a phenomenon which the simplistic racial theory about the rise of mass incarceration is unable to explain. The NYC Department of Correction has, I argue, been a site of tremendous professional and economic gains for black women, highlighting the inadequacy of an argument about the origins and implications of mass incarceration that focuses solely on race, while failing to attend to economic stratification, the experiences of women, and the local context in which criminal justice policy actually manifests.

I want to be clear: I am not suggesting that mass incarceration has actually been good for African Americans or that race is irrelevant simply because some black women have obtained well-paying jobs and leadership positions in corrections. The harms of America's bloated carceral system have been borne disproportionately by black communities, and this is a problem for anyone concerned with economic and racial justice. But the black community is not monolithic, and neither are black Americans' experiences of mass incarceration.⁷ Scholars have rightly pointed out that the simple racial account renders black victims of crime and their advocates invisible (Forman 2017; Fortner 2015; Miller 2010); similarly invisible are the black women who have obtained economic security and political power through work in corrections.

⁷ In fairness to Alexander, she does concede that “it should come as no surprise that today some black mayors, politicians, and lobbyists—as well as preachers, teachers, barbers, and ordinary folk—endorse ‘get tough’ tactics” (Alexander 2010, 214) and that “Jim Crow, as oppressive as it was, offered a measure of security for blacks who were willing to play by its rules” (Alexander 2010, 210)—but it is important to treat the material gains of black women working in corrections as real and their agency as valid.

An accurate accounting in this area is important not only for academics, but also for decarceration activists and policy advocates, such as those behind the #CloseRikers movement in New York City, who must be prepared to counter racially animated arguments from black corrections officers opposing the movement on the basis of preserving black jobs.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I present in more detail the strict racial argument, some existing critiques of that argument, and a survey of the literature pertaining to black women working in corrections. I then provide quantitative evidence of the demographic shifts in the DOC over time and defend my argument using these data—obtained from Department of Correction annual reports, EEO-4 reports required by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and recent DOC demographic reports. I conclude with the implications of my findings on the argument as well as some potential policy implications, particularly the importance of these findings for decarceration advocates.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I review the context in which my research question was developed and the context in which I believe it should be presented, which is as a contribution to the study of mass incarceration, race, criminal justice policy and reform.

While Michelle Alexander's work is the most popular, she has not been alone in framing mass incarceration as the metaphorical successor to Jim Crow. Heather Ann Thompson (2010) has also championed this argument, arguing that black urban spaces were targeted and criminalized after the civil rights movement in the same way that African-American communities were following the Civil War, and that mass incarceration arose in response to social anxiety about black struggle for social and economic equality. Both Alexander (2010) and Thompson (2010, 707) identify the War on Drugs as the driver of mass incarceration.

Even those arguments which do not view mass incarceration primarily as means of social control still frequently comport with the strict racial argument. Most notably, Loïc Wacquant's (2002) class-based argument that mass incarceration arose as a way to "shore up an eroding caste cleavage" (Wacquant 2002, 44) and to "warehouse the precarious and deproletarianized fractions of the black working class" (Wacquant 2002, 53) similarly places mass incarceration in direct lineage with the institutions of slavery, Jim Crow, and the ghetto. He considers these institutions "genealogically linked" (Wacquant 2002, 41) and maintains that mass incarceration serves the dual purpose of extracting labor and socially ostracizing African-Americans (Wacquant 2002, 44).

Both theories dismiss the role of actual crime in the growth of jail and prison populations and fail to attend to the effects of class difference, particularly the role working- and middle-class blacks played in the formation of punitive crime policy. The strict racial argument, in particular, is grounded in Michael Dawson's (1994) concept of "linked fate," a theory which "requires that we relate African Americans' political beliefs and actions as *individuals* to their perceptions of racial *group* interests" (Dawson 1994, 45–6) even in the face of difference along other axes. Michael Fortner (2015; see also 2013 and 2014) has demonstrated that working- and middle-class support for punitive criminal justice policy was instrumental in bringing about mass incarceration and has argued that Dawson's "linked fate" concept neglects that "values operate as interpretive frames that individuals use to understand their material interests and their relationship and obligation to others" (Fortner 2015, 14)—in other words, that certain held values, in addition to class differences, may lead some black Americans to draw boundaries between "us" and "them" or "citizen" and "criminal," even within the so-called black community (Fortner 2015, 14). James Forman, Jr., (2012; 2017) has also argued that black class divisions have affected the punitive nature of contemporary American corrections. He notes that class

divisions in part account for the political salience of racial profiling (which affects all black Americans), for example, but not prison conditions (which do not affect middle- and upper-income black Americans) (Forman 2017, 13). He also highlights the role, in the formation of contemporary criminal justice policy, played by black crime victims, who “argued that a punitive approach was necessary to protect the African American community... from the ravages of crime” (Forman 2017, 11).

Other scholars have taken issue with the claim that the war on drugs is even the primary mechanism driving the rise of mass incarceration. John Pfaff (2017), in particular, has offered compelling evidence contra to what he calls “the standard story” about mass incarceration, which is grounded in the claim that racial disparities in prison populations are driven by disparities in enforcement of drug law. He offers evidence that “increased prosecutorial toughness,” more than longer sentences, private prisons, or the imprisonment of low-level, nonviolent drug offenders (which in fact constitute a small percentage of the incarcerated), is responsible for the rise of mass incarceration (Pfaff 2017, 5–6). Highlighting the importance of state prisons, which hold 87% of the total U.S. incarcerated population, he demonstrates that just 21% of the growth in state prison populations between 1980 and 2009 was due to individuals serving time for drug offenses, compared to 52% from those serving time for violent offenses (Pfaff 2017, 32). Further, given that just 16% of state prisoners today are serving time for drug offenses, it is clear that racial disparities in incarceration rates can hardly be driven by disparities in drug enforcement alone (Pfaff 2017, 46). Pfaff’s work highlights that, despite the political and moral appeal of calls to decarcerate non-violent drug offenders, such actions, while necessary, are far from sufficient to end mass incarceration; instead, we must reckon with far more difficult questions about how we deal with violent offenders (Pfaff 2017, especially chap. 7).

Hill (2011) (and, to a lesser extent, Thompson [2015]) has pointed out that literature on public-sector work has often ignored correctional work. Focusing on slashes to the public sector in the 1970s and declining union membership, while accurate on the whole, does not address the growing correctional sector and its attendant growth of correction officer unions—despite rightly acknowledging the role of government bureaucracies in the expansion of the black middle class. In his influential book *The Declining Significance of Race*, first published in 1980, Bill Wilson argues that economic and legal changes in America have rendered class a more salient category than race for many Black Americans, noting that the phenomenon is particularly pronounced in urban settings, in part due to the expansion of government bureaucracies, which offered new opportunities for well-paid work to a growing black middle class (Wilson [1980] 2012, 102–3). Wilson has acknowledged that “if [he] were writing *The Declining Significance of Race* today, [he] would ... place greater emphasis on black gains in the public sector and the major role of the polity in the crystallization of a black class structure,” (Wilson 2011, 60) and Marie Gottschalk discusses the importance of public sector employment in narrowing the black-white income gap and increasing class disparities among black Americans (Gottschalk 2014, especially chapter 4) without any mention of corrections as one such field. She does argue that urban austerity budgets, particularly in response to New York’s 1975 fiscal crisis, “facilitate[ed] the punitive turn,” (Gottschalk 2014, 279) but for the most part the literature on public sector employment and unions exists parallel to, without engaging with, the literature on expansion in corrections.

With respect to labor, academics have generally been less interested in corrections workers than in inmates, and the literature on black women working in corrections is even more limited and often quite dated. Most early work, following women’s entry in the 1970s into corrections positions in all-male facilities, examines the experiences of women working in men’s

prisons⁸ (Crouch 1985; Jurik and Halemba 1984; Jurik 1985; 1988; Kissel and Katsampes 1980; Lawrence and Marian 1998; Parisi 1984; Peterson 1982; Zimmer 1986; 1987; Zupan 1992).

Other literature has examined gender differences in occupational stress (Carlson, Anson, and Thomas 2003; Dial, Downey and Goodlin 2010; Griffin 2006; Gross et al. 1994; Hurst and Hurst 1997; Triplett, Mullings, and Scarborough 1999), officer perceptions of their work environment and roles (Carlson, Thomas and Anson 2004; Lovrich and Stohr 1993; Walters 1992; Wright and Saylor 1991; Zupan 1986), and officer attitudes towards ideological issues like rehabilitation, use of force, and supervision style (Crouch and Alpert 1982; Farkas 2000; Hogan et al. 2005; Jackson and Ammen 1996; Tewksbury and Collins 2006).

Some of this work highlights the ways in which employment as a correction officer may be considered “dirty work” and may be particularly challenging for women, especially women of color. The profession has often been characterized by low wages and low prestige (Britton 2003; Clear et al. 2006) and may still viewed as “dirty work”⁹ due to the significant amount of “body work” involved, such as supervising showers, performing cavity searches, and otherwise surveilling aspects of inmate sexual and personal activity that would normally be considered private (Britton 2003, chs. 4 and 5; Tracy and Scott 2006). Indeed, these aspects in part excluded women from the business of guarding men until the late 1970s due to concerns for the privacy of male inmates and fear for the sexual safety of female staff, relegating them to less remunerative work in facilities for women and children or work in administrative and clerical roles in men’s prisons when permitted to work in men’s prisons at all (Martin and Jurik 2007).

⁸ Belknap (1991) is a rare exception in her analysis of the experiences of women working in a metropolitan jail, rather than in state or federal prison.

⁹ “[P]ositions that are physically, socially, or morally tainted and challenge the worker’s self-esteem” (Martin and Jurik 2007, citing Tracy and Scott 2006) or “tasks that society considers socially, morally, or physically undesirable” (Tracey and Scott 2006, 7).

The job may also be quite dangerous, although female staff are no more likely to be assaulted than their male counterparts (Belknap 2015), and there is some evidence that increased female staff may actually reduce the overall level of violence (Martin and Jurik 2007). However, there is evidence that harsher conditions correspond with increased negative outcomes for those who work in these facilities, including the likelihood of increased alcohol and cigarette use, psychological problems (such as depression), and physical problems (such as back pain and headaches) (Bierie 2012). And indeed, there is evidence that, compared to men, women working in prisons experience greater work stress in general (Dial, Downey, and Goodlin 2010) and greater home–work stress in particular (Belknap 2015).

Additionally, female correction officers still encounter sexism and sexual harassment on the job. In fact, in this respect, the behavior of male coworkers is more often a problem than that of inmates (Martin and Jurik 2007). For women of color, such harassment may be especially complicated; women prison workers of color may bond more closely with men of color than with white women (Owen 1988) and may therefore experience deeper feelings of betrayal if harassed by their male colleagues of color (Martin and Jurik 2007). Correction officers of color, in general, may also experience tension resulting from their authority over inmates of their own race, and black inmates in particular may resent black female officers, whom they may view as “violating racial unity” (Martin and Jurik 2007, 179). Maghan & McLeish-Blackwell (1991) note that black female officers in their study expressed concern over the high incarceration rates of young black men, which was compounded, for many, by their own relationships with incarcerated friends and family members (93).

Furthermore, correctional facilities are often unsanitary and unpleasant work environments (Martin and Jurik 2007), and, in some cases, correctional staff may be literally locked inside the facility, unable to leave for the duration of their shift (Feinman 1994). This

“locked-in culture” as well as the irregular work schedules that often characterize a career in corrections may be particularly challenging for women given their still greater familial responsibilities (Feinman 1994; Martin and Jurik 2007). And, as Hans Toch notes in the foreword to the 2nd edition of Lombardo’s ([1981] 1989) *Guards Imprisoned*, correction officers may also be “locked in” in a metaphorical sense. “They are not only physically confined,” he notes, “but are locked into movie caricatures, into pejorative prophecies (sometimes self-fulfilling), into anachronistic supervision patterns, into unfair civil service definitions, into undeserved hostilities and pre-judgments of their actions. Officers are imprisoned by our ignorance of who they are and what they do...” (Toch 1989, ix).

Still, much of the literature on race and corrections work treats these jobs as desirable, and in fact has primarily highlighted the racial disparities between who occupies carceral facilities as inmates and who benefits from the employment opportunities afforded by having such facilities constructed in their community (Gandy 2015; Thompson 2013). Existing work on the demographics of corrections workers better fits the strict racial narrative about carceral growth by focusing on state prisons, which tend to be located in and thus hire from communities that are both very rural and very white, yet house large populations of people of color (Wagner and Kopf 2015). The consequent racial disparity between those held inside and those guarding them is indeed troubling and has been acknowledged as problematic at least since the Attica uprising and massacre in 1971 (Britton 2003; Gandy 2015; Thompson 2013;¹⁰ Wagner and Heyer 2003). Nevertheless, the singular focus on prisons in the literature on corrections workers and race obscures very different demographic trends taking place in city corrections departments.

¹⁰ Thompson also examines the Attica prison uprising in great and moving detail in her 2016 book *Blood in the Water*.

Recent work on gender and corrections work, by contrast, has pointed out the growth of black women, and women of color more broadly, in the field, although most have not engaged very deeply with the topic (Belknap 2015; Jurik and Martin 2001; Martin and Jurik 2007). This paper builds on two important exceptions and in fact employs them in a few instances as quantitative resources in the absence of administrative data. Maghan and McLeish-Blackwell (1991) look specifically at black women working as correction officers and CO supervisors with a particular focus on the New York City Department of Correction. They build on a profile of black, female COs constructed from survey data in McLeish-Blackwell (1990), with a particular interest in the factors black women indicated were important in their decision to become correction officers. However, the most detailed contribution on black women in correction—and most relevant to the study of New York in particular—comes from Feinman (1994), who interviewed black female correction officers in the 1970s and 1980s about demographic changes in the NYC Department of Correction since the 1950s, supplementing this work with some then-current quantitative figures. This valuable work has not been extended since its third edition was published in 1994, and no one before or since has synthesized the scant quantitative data on black women in correction over time. This paper’s contribution is the creation of a new data set of that information for New York City and an effort to introduce that information into the discussion about race and mass incarceration.

Research Design

On a practical level, the New York City Department of Corrections (NYC DOC) is useful to study because it “offers an excellent illustration of the gains made by black women in corrections” (Feinman 1994, 171) and because it is the site of the limited existing work on black women working in corrections. But there are more substantive reasons to study the city and its corrections staff as well. At its peak in 1991, the department oversaw an average daily jail

population of 20,419, the second highest in the country after Los Angeles (20,779) (Snell 1993). Since then, New York City has cut its average daily jail population by more than half (to around 8,000 in December 2018) and now boasts the lowest incarceration rate of America's large cities (City of New York 2018). Despite this tremendous progress, the New York metropolitan area has the country's highest employment levels of correction officers and jailers (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017), and the city's jails, particularly those located on Rikers Island, are notoriously violent, characterized by officer misconduct and abusive treatment of inmates, particularly of adolescents and young adults. As recently as 2014, a federal inquiry found "a deep-seated culture of violence" throughout the facilities on Rikers, in which "DOC staff routinely utilize force not as a last resort, but instead as a means to control the adolescent population and punish disorderly or disrespectful behavior" (U.S. Department of Justice 2014; Weiser and Schwirtz 2014; Winerip and Schwirtz 2014). Jails in general are often the first point of contact with (the "front door" to) the criminal justice system (Subramanian et al. 2015), and even a few days in jail can have serious deleterious consequences for detainees. Seventy-five percent of the individuals held in New York City's jails are awaiting trial and many are incarcerated merely due to their inability to make bail (Lippman 2017, 25). There is evidence that as few as three days of detention increases the likelihood that those held (relative to those released on bail) will plead guilty, be convicted, be incarcerated (and if so, receive longer sentences), and are more likely to re-offend both before trial and after completing their sentence (Aiken 2017; Subramanian et al. 2015). Longer stays can have lasting, negative psychological impact, exemplified by the tragic story and suicide of Kalief Browder, who was detained for three years without trial on Rikers Island for allegedly stealing a backpack (Gonnerman 2014; Schwirtz and Winerip 2015).

New York has also played an important historical role in the story of mass incarceration. In the 1960s and 1970s, drug use and crime rates rose precipitously; the harms of both were

concentrated in black and Latino communities (Fortner 2015, 261; Schneider 2011, x, 118). Already the epicenter of the American heroin market since the 1920s, by the mid-1960s, New York City was home to half of the country’s heroin users (Fortner 2014, 258; Schneider 2011, x, 10). New York State’s draconian Rockefeller drug laws, enacted in 1973, served as a model of punitive drug policy for other states and for the national “war on drugs” (Fortner 2015, 11; Hill 2011, 66; Kohler-Hausmann 2010; Schneider 2011, xiv; Weiman and Weiss 2009) and resulted in the mass arrest and incarceration of New Yorkers, disproportionately people of color (Fortner 2015, 258). Indeed, data on New York City’s average daily incarcerated population bear that out; as is evident in Figure 1, below, which charts the size of the city’s average daily inmate population beginning in 1970, the number of incarcerated New Yorkers more than tripled between 1978 and its peak in 1991.

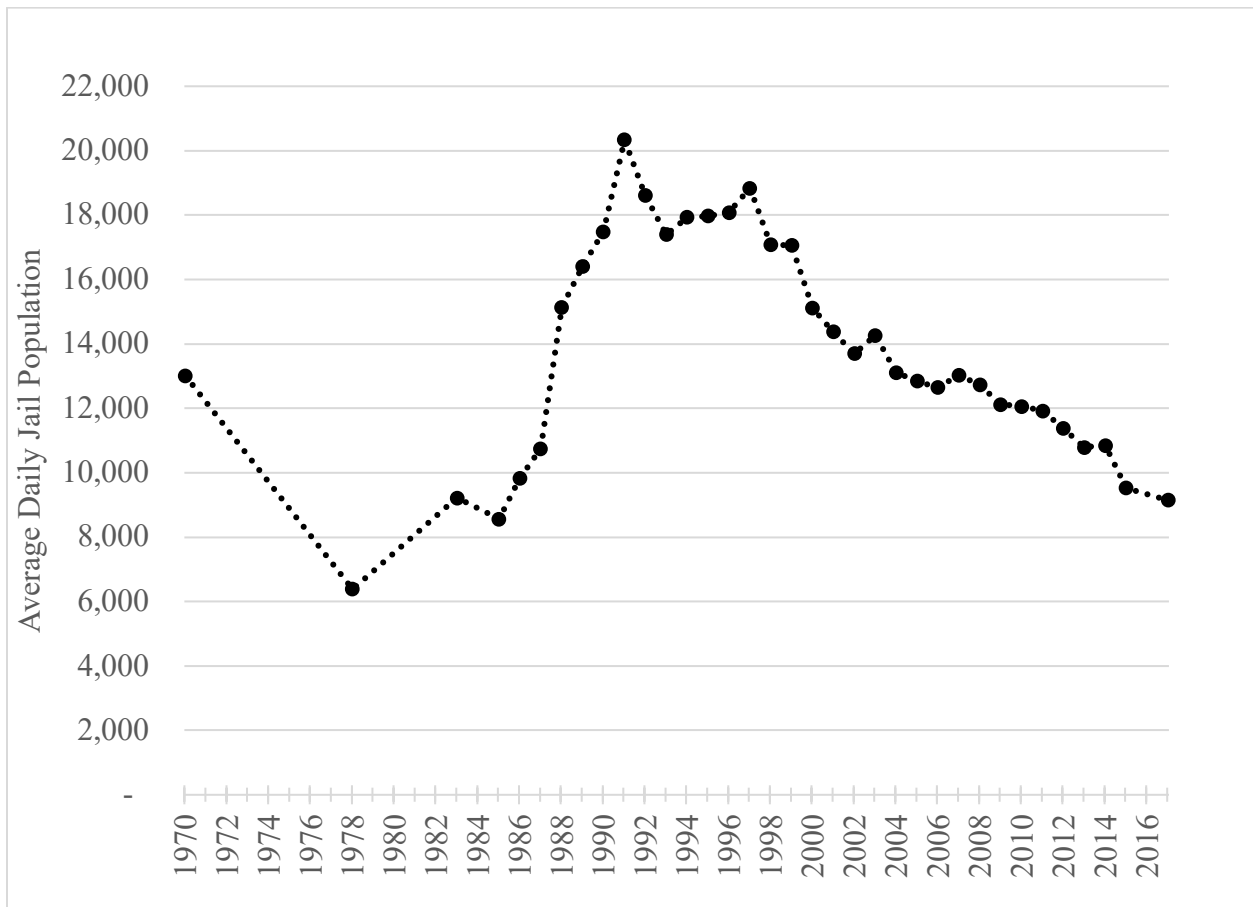


Figure 1. New York City Department of Correction Average Daily Jail Population, 1970–2017.

Source: Vera Institute of Justice’s “Incarceration Trends” project (Vera 2015) except 2017, which is from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (2019).

The central question of the paper is the following: Have black women in corrections benefited from carceral expansion in New York? This question may be better understood in two parts: (a) does high black female representation among those in positions of power in the DOC seem to be temporally related to carceral growth in the city, and (b) can such growth be characterized as beneficial? I must stress that although this paper endeavors to answer the first part of the question using quantitative data on correctional staff over time, my approach is exploratory and somewhat general in nature, and I leave the work of a detailed time series analysis to the more quantitatively minded. The bulk of the paper is devoted to answering the quantifiable portion of the question; the theoretical implications are explored in the discussion section.

As formulated, the possible outcomes are the following:

H1) Yes, black women in corrections have benefited from carceral expansion in New York—their high representation among correction officers and administrators in the DOC does appear to be related to carceral growth in the city, and this growth may be accurately characterized as beneficial;

H2) Yes, black female representation in NYC corrections has grown, seemingly due to carceral expansion in the city, but this growth should not be characterized as beneficial; and

H3) No, the representation of black women in NYC corrections does not appear to be positively related to the timing of growth of the city jail system, so the question of whether their high representation is good is immaterial.

The “dirty work” hypothesis, H2, is most compatible with the strict racial argument about mass incarceration. Both Alexander (2010) and Thompson (2010) highlight that the exclusion

and subordination that mass incarceration imposes on African-Americans is not just social but also, importantly, economic. In a system designed to subordinate and economically exclude a racialized group, it would hardly be surprising to find members of that same group tasked with the undesirable work of day-to-day management and administration of that system. Indeed, in the particular context of incarceration, the conditions in which corrections officers work are the same as those in which incarcerated individuals live. Support for this hypothesis may consist in evidence of low pay, poor benefits, weak political power, or other attributes that meet the definition of “dirty work” as offered by Martin and Jurik (2007) and Tracey and Scott (2006) for workers in this profession, particularly if the undesirability, as proxied by these variables, grows in tandem with the representation of black women in the field.

H1, my hypothesis, poses the greatest challenge to the strict racial argument. A system designed to, among other things, exclude black Americans from the mainstream economy is not likely to also create a pathway to good, middle-class work for black families, particularly one that includes increased political power in the form of a strong correction officers’ union and increasing representation among DOC leadership. Alexander, in particular, frequently highlights the permanence and locked-in nature of this subordinate status (see, for example, Alexander 2010, 12–13), and evidence of economic and social mobility for black Americans via the carceral system is inconsistent with her argument. On the other hand, this hypothesis is consistent with arguments by Fortner (2015) and Forman (2017), which highlight class distinctions among African-Americans as well as black support for punitive criminal justice policy.

H3’s relationship to the strict racial argument is less clear. Recent DOC demographic reports indicate that the representation of black women as COs in NYC jails is currently high, and this fact alone may pose a threat to the strict racial argument. However, it may be the case that this representation has always been high, or, indeed, that increasing black female

representation appears to be associated with *decreasing* city jail populations. Evidence of either would leave the relationship between black female employment in corrections and mass incarceration an open question.

To test my hypothesis, I use administrative and archival data to analyze the representation of black women in corrections over time—particularly between 1985 and 1991, the period over which the New York City jail population (and incarceration rate) soared. The timing of these demographic changes, as well as information regarding pay and benefits in the DOC will help adjudicate between the three possibilities.

Data

The quantitative data come from a variety of sources, discussed in turn below. While it would be ideal to have access to official department demographic records over the years, I have found no evidence that such reports exist. The recent demographic reports, which helpfully disaggregate by race/ethnicity, sex, and rank, were first required as a condition of the New York City Council’s Fiscal Year 2017 Budget (New York City Council 2017, 8) (and again as terms of FY 2018 (New York City Council 2018, 10) and FY 2019 (New York City Council 2019, 4), although the latter two reports do not cross-tabulate by race and sex). The DOC Annual Report was suspended in 1969 (Catalog 2018), and in any event it did not disaggregate staff by race, only by personnel type (custodial or civilian), rank, and sex. Nevertheless, the Seventh Annual Report, published in 1960, does include overall jail population and custodial employee totals, which appear below to represent overall trends.¹¹

¹¹ Specifically, “Personnel Quota Increases, Comparison of Personnel and Inmate Population 1954–1960” (New York City Department of Correction 1960, 59).

Apart from the year 1960, data on NYC jail populations come from the Vera Institute of Justice’s “Incarceration Trends” project (Vera 2015)¹² and, for 2017, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (2019). The jail population for the years 1970, 1978, 1983, and 1988 are drawn from the National Jail Census,¹³ conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (hereafter BJS) (BJS 2005a; BJS 2005b; 2005c; 2005d). These censuses are also the source of correctional personnel data for 1978 and 1988.¹⁴ The bulk of the data collected concerns the number and demographic characteristics of individuals incarcerated at each facility, but the census does sometimes request demographic information about both corrections officers and non-uniformed staff, including sex and race or Hispanic origin. Unfortunately, only one survey, 1988, collected, by rank, cross-tabulated information on sex and race/ethnicity. The 1970 census only asked: “What was the number of full-time jail employees at your facility on March 15, 1970?” (BJS 2005a, Codebook). The 1972 census collected the total number of full-time administrators (which include “chief jailer (or sheriff or chief of police), deputies, and assistants”) (BJS 1994, Appendix 1, 2) and custodians and includes some disaggregation by role

¹² The dataset they provide includes interpolated data for years in which no census or survey data is available, but I have excluded that information from Figures 1 and 2.

¹³ The National Jail Census was conducted in 1970, 1972, 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, and 1999. In most years in which the Census is not conducted, beginning in 1982, BJS instead administers the Annual Survey of Jails (previously the “National Survey of Jails”) (ICPSR 2019). BJS also conducted in 2005 the “Census of Jail Inmates” and in 2006 “Census of Jail Facilities.” For 2013, the census was merged with the Deaths in Custody Reporting Program and renamed the “Census of Jails” (ICPSR 2018). The 2006 Census of Jail Facilities appears to have been hindered by significant non-response issues in the categories of interest. The 2006 codebook indicates that data on staff gender, race/ethnicity, and occupational category (i.e., uniformed or civilian staff) were particularly vulnerable; the 2006 census reported missing between 37.2% and 63.5% data on sex of correction officers and race of staff alone (BJS 2010, Codebook).

¹⁴ The 1970 Census of Jails does not include total counts of custodial personnel, only the total number of full-time and part-time payroll employees (BJS 2005a). The 1972 Census of Jails does not collect for each facility geographical information more detailed than the state and is therefore not comparable to other years or useful in this context. Vera also excludes 1972 for this reason as well as its proximity to the 1970 census (see Kang-Brown and Hinds 2018, 5, footnote 7). I have excluded the 1993 Census due to its proximity to 1992, for which I already have data.

(jailers, deputies, custodians) and race (black, white, “other race,” or “no resp for race”) (BJS 1994, Codebook); unfortunately, the 1972 figures are not comparable to those of others years even in these same categories, as the smallest geographic unit is the state (BJS 1994). The 1978 and 1983 censuses collected only the total number of full- and part-time custodial officers and administrators (BJS 2005b; BJS 2005c). The 1999 census includes race and sex separately (BJS 2009).

Beginning in 1999, correctional personnel data are drawn from EEO-4 reports provided directly to me by NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services. These reports are required for all states and for political jurisdictions with 100 or more employees under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, annually until 1993, and biennially in odd-numbered years since (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2017). These reports contain detailed tabulations for each city department, reporting employees disaggregated by employment status (full-time, other than full-time, and new permanent, full-time hires), job category (e.g., “official/administrators,” “protective services,” or “para-professionals”), salary, sex, and race. Reports for 2009–2017 (2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017) are available on the NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services’ website (NYC Citywide Administrative Services 2019), and the Department provided me with reports covering 1999–2007 (1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007) via email. I was told that the department does not have reports from earlier years, and they were unable to provide me with any information about the existence of any earlier reports (Alan Deutsch, personal communication, January 9, 2019, and March 27, 2019).

Some secondary sources—mentioned in the literature review—help fill in the gaps. Data for 1984 come from Maghan and McLeish-Blackwell (1991);¹⁵ data for 1990 are from Maghan and McLeish-Blackwell (1991)¹⁶; and data for 1992 come from Feinman (1994).¹⁷

A note on terminology

Racial and ethnic categories are socially constructed concepts which by nature are oversimplified and context-dependent. The race categories used in the EEO-4 reports shift a bit even over this short period under consideration. For example, “Hispanic” becomes “Hispanic or Latino,” and a few additional categories are added, but it remains possible throughout to construct totals of “non-Hispanic white,” “non-Hispanic black,” and “Hispanic” workers, as in the 2016 Demographic Report reproduced earlier in the paper. I use these categories in both my reproduction of the DOC report (combining “Asian,” “Alaskan or Native American,” and “Unknown” into “Other” for simplicity) and in my own calculations throughout.

Results

Overall Trends

The NYC incarcerated population and total custodial personnel between 1960 and 2017 appear below in Figure 3. The average daily jail population more than triples between 1978 and 1991 (from a low of 6,382 to a high of 20,332), while total custodial personnel increase nearly five-fold over approximately the same period (from 1,851 in 1978 to 10,291 in 1992)—although, notably, the dramatic growth in correctional staff does not really begin until after 1983. Although more precise figures are needed to confirm this relationship, there appears to be a one-year lag between changes in the jail population and the number of correction officers in the Department.

¹⁵ Originally from LaSalle (1987) and disaggregated only by sex.

¹⁶ Originally from a New York City EEO-4 report for 1990.

¹⁷ Originally from an American Correctional Association statistical printout dated as of June 30, 1992.

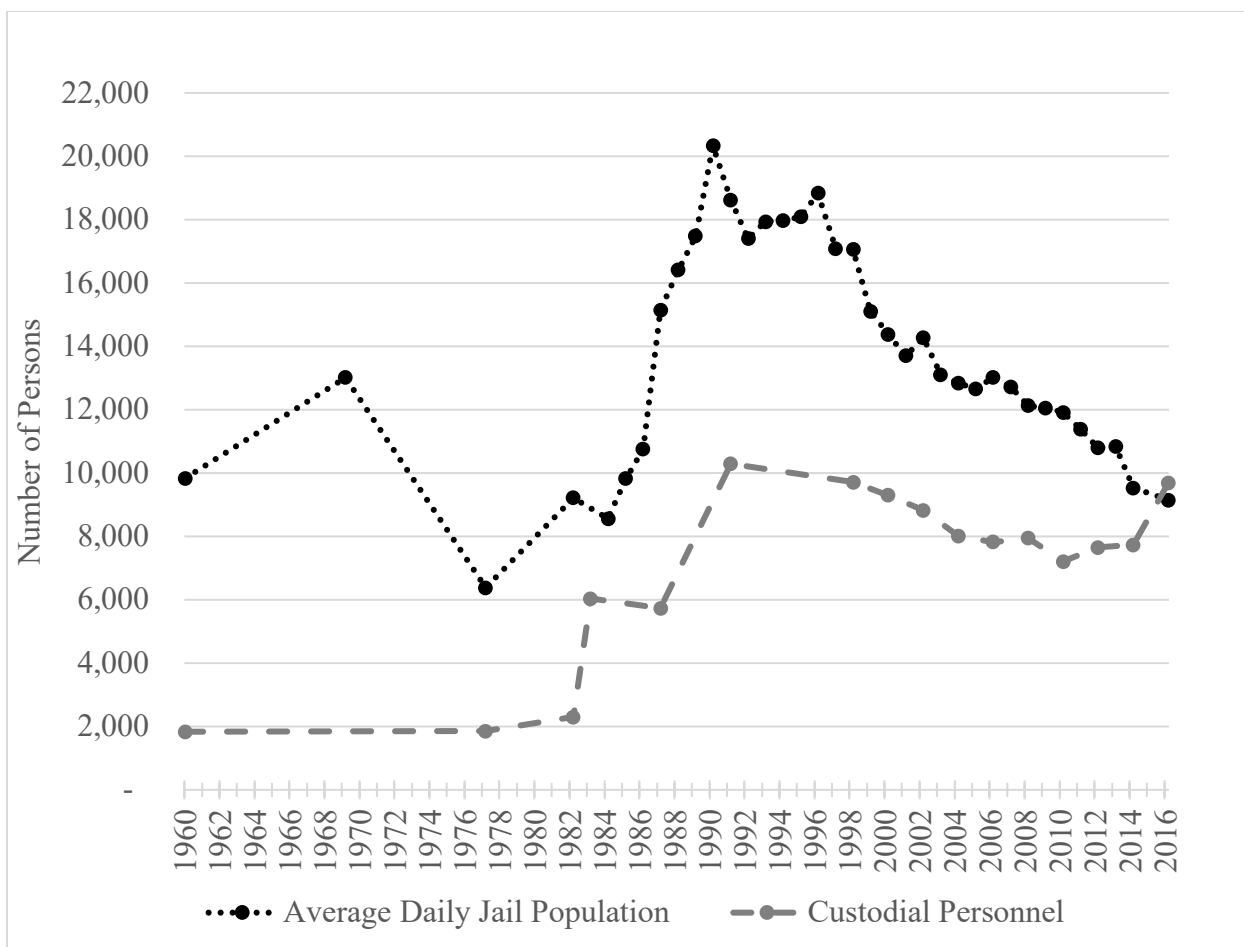


Figure 2. New York City Incarcerated Population and Total Custodial Personnel, 1960–2017.

Note: The jail population data for 1960 reflect the record daily high for that year, rather than the average daily population.

Demographic trends – Correction Officers

The expansion of both the carceral population and correctional staff over the period of growth beginning in 1978 were accompanied by changes in the demographic composition of correction officers, especially in the growing representation of black women. Table 2 and Figure 4 present the demographics of correction officers in the NYC DOC from 1978 to 2017.

Unfortunately, detailed demographic details are not available in 1978, but a clear portrait of the growth of black women in the department nevertheless emerges. The CO workforce more than triples in size between 1978 and 1984, at which point just 15%—921—of all officers were women of any race. Feinman (1994, 171) reports that by the 1980s, black women constituted

approximately 80 percent of all female corrections officers. Applying this information to the 1984 data, we can conservatively estimate that approximately 12% of the CO force at that time were black women. This figure should, I stress, be considered a very rough estimate—Feinman’s own estimate is approximate, and “by the 1980s” is extremely imprecise. Nevertheless, given the low percentage of female COs of any race in the department in 1984, the rising prominence of black women in the department between then and 1988 is clear. By 1988, black women alone constitute 20% of the department’s correction officers (and black men constitute another 34%, bringing the total percentage of black COs to over 50%). That percentage grew steadily, with black women becoming the largest demographic at least by 1999 at 31% and growing to 37% in 2009, at which point their percentage began to fall even while their absolute numbers remained between 2,600 and 2,900.

As indicated in Figures 1 and 2 above, 1985 marks the beginning of the dramatic increase in daily average jail populations in the city, doubling from 8,559 that year to 17,485 in 1990. The growth is even more dramatic when compared to the 1991 high of 20,332, marking a 138% increase from 1985. Over roughly the same period, 1984 to 1990, the number of black female correction officers nearly quadruples, increasing by 393% to 2,851, while the number of correction officers overall almost doubles, growing from 6,039 to 11,537, a 91% increase. Further, the largest period of growth appears to be between 1988 and 1990, during which the number of black female correction officers increased by over 150%, from 1,121 to 2,851. This period corresponds with large increases in the average daily population in New York City jails, which jumped by 63% from 10,750 at the end of 1987 to 17,485 at the end of 1990 (the increase between 1987 and 1991 is even starker, with the population nearly doubling in an 89% increase to 20,332, but unfortunately we do not have demographic details of officers for that year).

Year	Black Women	Growth Rate of Black Women	Total COs	Growth Rate of COs	Percent Black Women	Average Daily Jail Population	Growth Rate of Jail Population
1978	n/a	n/a	1,851	n/a	n/a	6,622	n/a
1983	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,834	48.5%
1984 ¹⁸	~725	n/a	6,039	226.3%	~12%	n/a	n/a
1985	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,559	-13.0%
1988	1,121	~54.6%	5,730	-5.1%	20%	15,143	76.9%
1990	2,851	154.3%	11,537	101.3%	25%	17,485	15.5%
1991	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20,332	16.3%
1992	2,764	-3.1%	10,291	-10.8%	27%	18,622	-8.4%
1999	3,038	1.9%	9,711	-5.6%	31%	17,057	-2.0%
2001	3,095	-2.2%	9,298	-4.3%	33%	14,378	-15.7%
2003	3,028	-4.8%	8,824	-5.1%	34%	14,265	-0.8%
2005	2,883	0.8%	8,013	-9.2%	36%	12,841	-10.0%
2007	2,907	0.0%	7,822	-2.4%	37%	13,029	1.5%
2009	2,907	-10.0%	7,945	1.6%	37%	12,124	-6.9%
2011	2,616	3.3%	7,208	-9.3%	36%	11,919	-1.7%
2013	2,703	-1.3%	7,653	6.2%	35%	10,793	-9.4%
2015	2,669	8.2%	7,734	1.1%	35%	9,531	-11.7%
2017	2,889	1.9%	9,685	25.2%	30%		

Table 2. Demographics of Correction Officers and Size and Growth Rate of Average Daily Jail Population in New York City Department of Corrections, 1978–2017.

¹⁸ Figures for this year are estimated using information on total female officers (from LaSalle 1987 in Maghan & McLeish-Blackwell 1991) and percentage estimates from Feinman (1994) on the proportion of black female officers among all female officers during this time.

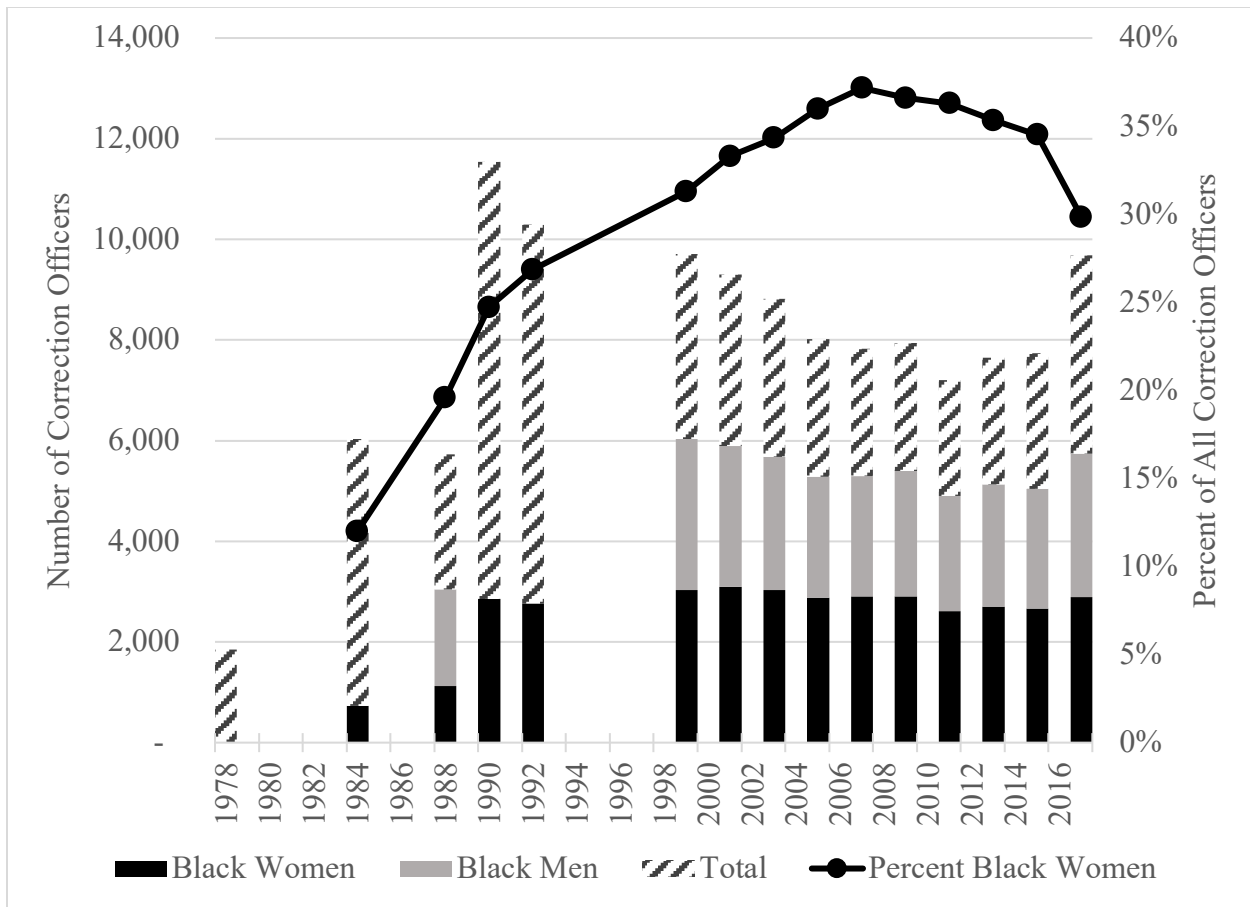


Figure 3. Demographics of Correction Officers in New York City Department of Correction, 1978–2017.

Demographic trends – Officials/Administrators

Similar demographic changes took place among departmental leadership over the same period. Table 3 and Figure 4 present demographic changes in DOC Administration beginning in 1999. The growth of black women among leadership over just this more recent period is striking: only 15% of administrators and officials in 1999 were black women, but by 2017, that figure had grown to 46% (with black men constituting another 19%). This constitutes more than a 180% increase over the period. The rate of growth of black women in these positions far outpaces the growth of administrators overall in every year for which there is data. Over only one two-year period (2009–2011) is there a negative rate of growth for black women, and it is several points less than the decline overall. This may suggest that even during periods of contraction for the

department, black women are let go at a lower rate than members of other demographic groups, perhaps highlighting the cumulative effects of increased black women in leadership.

Year	Black Women	Percent Black Women	Growth Rate of Black Women	Growth Rate of All Administrators
1999	189	15%	n/a	n/a
2001	208	18%	10%	-7%
2003	292	24%	40%	5%
2005	326	28%	12%	-3%
2007	373	32%	14%	0%
2009	426	37%	14%	0%
2011	382	38%	-10%	-13%
2013	397	40%	4%	-3%
2015	469	43%	18%	10%
2017	536	46%	14%	9%

Table 3. Demographics of Officials/Administrators in New York City Department of Corrections, 1999–2017.

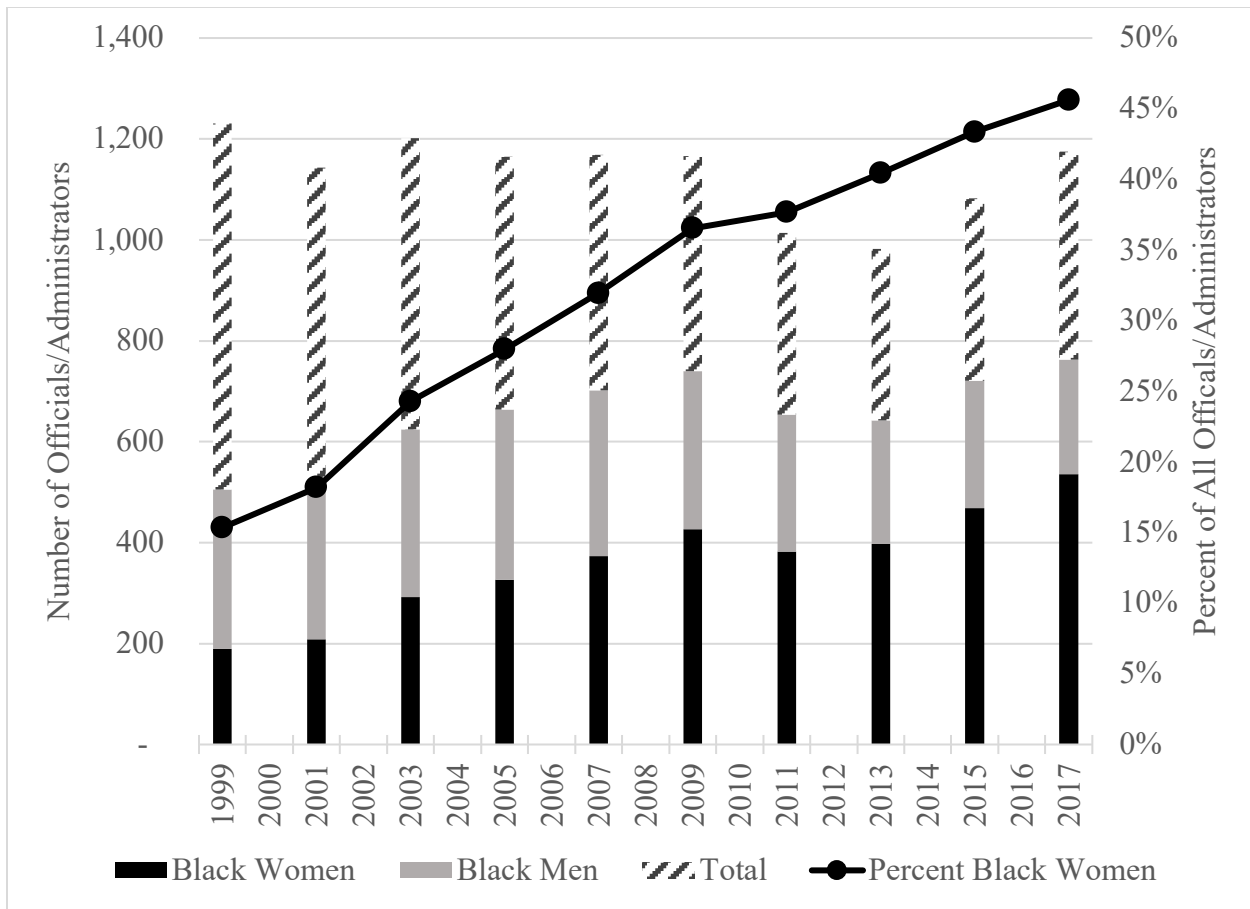


Figure 4. Demographics of Officials/Administrators in New York City Department of Correction, 1999–2017.

Discussion

As noted previously, the civil rights movement and women’s movement laid the groundwork for black women’s entrance into work in corrections, particularly the 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation was unconstitutional, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbade employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex and national origin and especially Title VII’s 1972 amendment extending these protections to government workers. Previous work has highlighted the importance of these legislative and judicial victories in drawing black women into public sector work more generally, but even those that acknowledge this growth in correctional work specifically (e.g., Martin and

Jurik 2007) do not linger on the implications of that relationship on arguments about race and mass incarceration.

The timing of the demographic changes in the New York City DOC thus provides evidence of the role carceral expansion has played in the growth of black women in corrections. While the observed changes clearly transpired after the legislative and judicial gains of the civil rights movement and the women's movement, as late as 1984, only approximately 725 of 6,039 correction officers (12%) in the department were black women. However, over the most dramatic period of growth in the city's average daily jail population—between 1985 and 1991—the number of black women working as correction officers in the DOC nearly quadruples, far outpacing the overall growth in CO staff in the department. Further, even as the department shrinks alongside decreasing jail populations between 1991 and 2009, the number of black women working as COs in the department either continued to grow, even as overall CO numbers declined, or, in the few years in which their numbers do contract, fell at a lower rate than the department overall. After 2009, that trend reverses, with the number of black female COs either growing less than the overall growth of the CO work force or actually decreasing in numbers during the years the department grows.

What should we make of the declining growth—and declining overall numbers—of black women among COs over the last decade? While it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the exact timing of the shift based on the evidence here, a look at the data on demographic changes among DOC officials and administrators suggests that at least some of the women leaving positions as correction officers are being promoted into leadership.

Together, the recent CO and administrator figures tell a story. At first, the falling number and percent of black women among the CO workforce after 2009 may appear to suggest the possible negative relationship outlined in H3, above. But viewed in conjunction with the rapid

growth of black women in DOC leadership, they instead offer quantitative support for the qualitative observations about black women in the DOC reported by Feinman and others: that the DOC has been not only a site of steady employment for black women but also and importantly a site of professional development and growth for this group of women workers. What the figures suggest is not that black women are leaving CO roles for other employment but instead are being *promoted out* of these roles into positions of increased responsibility, pay, and prestige within the Department.

So, does high black female representation among those in positions of power in the DOC seem to be temporally related to carceral growth in the city? Yes, but with some qualifications. The trends among correction officers certainly provide strong evidence in favor of this conclusion. But it is important to note, especially with respect to rising representation amongst departmental leadership, that the steady growth—and overall near tripling—of the number of black women officials and administrators, despite constituting a shift from just 15% overall in 1999 to 46% in 2017, has taken place over a period of significant decline in the New York City average daily jail population, from 17,057 to 9,145, a decrease of 46%. Does this evidence constitute a rebuke of my argument that black women in corrections have benefited from jail growth? I would argue that it does not, primarily because the claim I am making is not that, as a rule, black women do benefit from carceral expansion, but rather that the initial expansion of the NYC jail system opened a door for black women in the city to a profession previously occupied primarily by white men. Having gained a foothold in the field in the late 1980s and early 1990s, an expanding jail population was no longer necessary to pull black women into employment in corrections. So, why the continued growth?

This question dovetails with the second piece of the research question: can the growth of black women in corrections be accurately characterized as “beneficial”? Work as a correction

officer is, in many ways, a good government job, which, like other government jobs, has historically offered stability, good benefits, and opportunities for professional advancement to white women and women and men of color (Martin and Jurik 2007). Indeed, good pay and benefits are often cited by COs as reasons for taking these jobs (Britton 2003). McLeish-Blackwell (1990) surveyed correction officers about their decisions to become correction officers; of the 43 black women included in the survey, 39.5% indicated that “salary” was the most important factor in their decision, while another 16% said the most important factor was “benefits” (see Maghan and McLeish-Blackwell 1991, Table 1, 90). And while other factors—shortages of male workers in the 1970s, low job entry requirements, and increased opportunities elsewhere for white women (Feinman 1994; Martin and Jurik 2007)—drew black women to the profession in the 1970s, even at that time work as a New York City correction officer offered a solid, middle-class wage. In 1975, the starting annual salary for COs was \$13,673—the equivalent of \$65,000 today—and after just one year of service, that figure jumped to \$16,116 annually—over \$75,000 in 2019 dollars (New York Correction History Society 2013).¹⁹ While CO salaries have fluctuated somewhat over time, often in the course of battling for pay and benefit parity with police officers and firefighters, in 2017 the average base salary for an NYC correction officer was \$69,862 (not including benefits and potential for overtime, which put average annual total compensation well over \$100,000) (NYCOpenData 2017).²⁰

¹⁹ An image of this pay table was shared to the New York Correction History Society Facebook page, and the comments, while anecdotal, are nevertheless illuminating (comments have been edited lightly for clarity): Jacqueline Perry: “I had mentioned to someone last week when I started the job ‘74, the pay was \$13,000. They didn't believe it...you just posted proof”; Ira Finkelstein: “Bought a house on Long Island and 2 cars”; Jean K. Golding: “When I [came] in 1980 the starting salary was \$16,500, plus a new contract was just negotiated. [I]t rained money, especially with the overtime”; Freddie Lewis: “When I started the salary was \$6,633.22 a year [in] 9/21/59.... And that was [as] a High School Grad!” (New York Correction History Society 2013).

²⁰ The median household income for New York City between 2012 and 2016 was \$55,191 (U.S. Census Bureau 2016).

The NYC Department of Correction also offers correction officers opportunities for career advancement, perhaps even more than other municipal agencies.²¹ Black women in particular have benefitted from these opportunities since the late 1960s. In 1969, Jessie L. Behagen was promoted to superintendent of the New York City House of Detention for Women (Feinman 1977; Feinman 1994), becoming the first black woman to hold the position of superintendent (warden) in the DOC and, at the time, the only black female superintendent²² in the country (Taylor 1971). She was succeeded in 1971 by Essie O. Murph, who oversaw the newly opened NYC Correctional Institution for Women on Rikers, which replaced the House of Detention for Women early that same year (“3 Prison Aides” 1971; Feinman 1977; Feinman 1994; “New Women’s Prison” 1970). In 1980, Jacqueline McMickens broke new ground as the first female chief of operations, the highest uniformed office in the department (Feinman 1994; New York City Department of Correction [NYC DOC] 1984), and, in 1984, as commissioner of the department, achieving the distinction of not only the first black woman to hold the office, but also the first commissioner to have started her career as a correction officer (Feinman 1994; Maghan & McLeish-Blackwell 1991; NYC DOC 1984). She appointed as her successor chief of operations another black woman, Gloria Lee, who, like McMickens, began her career as a DOC correction officer and rose through the ranks. Before becoming chief of operations, Lee had served as the warden of the Bronx House of Detention (an all-male facility) and subsequently as a supervising warden of the entire Rikers complex (Feinman 1994; Maghan & McLeish-Blackwell 1991; NYC DOC 1984; NYC DOC 1985). These examples of career advancement in the department—as well as of the iterative effects of more black women in leadership—may help

²¹ In 1991, Maghan & McLeish-Blackwell note that career advancement was realized more in the DOC than in the NYC Police Department (89).

²² Before 1979, “superintendent” was used to refer to the female commanding officer of the women’s jail. After changes in leadership in the late 1970s, “superintendent” was replaced with “warden” for both sexes (Feinman 1994, 174).

explain the significant growth of black women working as COs in the department after 1984 (see Table 2 and Figure 3). And, as McMickens, Lee, and other black women working in the DOC noted in interviews with Clarice Feinman, as the system “became identified with black women,” more black women joined its ranks (Feinman 1994, 171).

In addition to the economic security and opportunities for career advancement afforded individual officers, New York City’s correction officers have collectively achieved a substantial amount of political power at the city and state level, particularly under the leadership of charismatic but mercurial (former) union president Norman Seabrook. He was president of the Correction Officers’ Benevolent Association (COBA)—the largest municipal correction officers’ union in the country—from 1995 until his 2016 arrest on corruption charges for investing 20 million dollars of the union’s funds in a high-risk hedge fund in exchange for kickbacks (Ransom 2017; Rashbaum et al. 2016; Schwirtz and Winerip 2016; Weiser and Greenberg 2019).²³ During his two decades of union leadership, he secured large gains in salary and pension benefits for COBA members (Ransom 2017; Wang 2017) and established a foundation to support the families of slain correction officers (Editorial Board 2015). He also commanded tremendous political power, consulting with the mayor and commissioners about Correction Department policy and political appointments (Schwirtz and Winerip 2014) and directing correctional legislation at the state level through alliances with governors and legislators, in part through union campaign contributions (Editorial Board 2015; Ransom 2017). Seabrook is too large and controversial a figure to fully capture here, but whatever one thinks of his approach, or his ethics, the fierce loyalty he inspired in union members is a testament to the economic and

²³ Seabrook was sentenced to 58 months in prison in February 2019 (Weiser and Greenberg 2019).

political gains won for NYC correction officers during his tenure. Whether the union will be able to maintain its power in his absence remains an open question.

Still, the economic stability, career opportunities, and collective political strength made available to black women through work in corrections may help explain why black female representation among COs and leadership continued to grow even in the face of declining jail populations. They also offer evidence of the extent to which these jobs are “good” and desirable. So, to return to the central theoretical question, do these findings complicate the strict racial argument about mass incarceration, which posits that the current U.S. criminal justice system constitutes a racial caste system which, like slavery and Jim Crow before it, subordinates African-Americans socially and economically? At the very least, the reality of economic and political success for black women in the DOC highlights the contradictory consequences of mass incarceration for people of color and draws attention to the ways that analyzing policy through a strict racial lens can obscure more than it explains.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have provided synthesized, quantitative data on the representation of black women as correction officers and officials in the New York City Department of Correction over the period of carceral expansion in the city. I have argued that these jobs are generally good, and that high representation of black women in corrections therefore challenges the simplistic racial argument about mass incarceration. My study of the demographic changes in the NYC DOC is meant to contribute to a more informed, accurate, and holistic discourse about the effects of mass incarceration. Still, this work provides merely a starting point in the discussion about black women working in urban jails and any implications that may have on arguments about the causes of and remedies for mass incarceration, and much more rigorous quantitative work exploring the temporal relationship between black female representation in corrections and carceral expansion,

in New York and elsewhere, would be both welcome and clarifying. Because of the importance of power in the carceral context, this paper has focused specifically on uniformed personnel and departmental leadership—not all staff employed at correctional facilities. Other workers are important components of the jail ecosystem as well, and future studies might broaden the question of demographic changes in corrections to include all workers in urban jails.

Correction officers' unions can and have been powerful opponents of decarceration and prison downsizing, and, for this reason, the demographic composition of this workforce matters. Much of the evidence that unions behave this way is based on the successful efforts of some large state unions to affect penal policy (Page 2011), although there is disagreement about the extent to which generalizations about all correction officers' unions can be made from these particular examples (Thompson 2011). As noted earlier, the racial composition of prison staff varies quite a bit from those of urban jails. Nevertheless, even smaller, municipal unions can use their power to fight against certain progressive carceral reforms. In New York City, COBA has repeatedly stymied efforts for progressive reform, both under Seabrook's leadership and that of his successor Elias Husamudeen, (Editorial Board 2015; Schwartz and Winerip 2014; Schwartz and Winerip 2016). In particular, the union has fiercely and vocally opposed the mayor's recent embrace of the plan to shutter the facilities on Rikers Island and build smaller jails (staffed, importantly, by significantly fewer corrections officer) in the city's five boroughs (Correction Officers' Benevolent Association 2017).

An accurate rendering of the people behind this opposition is important for activists and advocates fighting to end mass incarceration. If the goal—or at least *a* goal—of decarceration is increased racial and economic justice for black Americans, we are not served, as either academics or activists, by failing to attend to the complexity of the racial politics in places like New York. We will be surprised to see black men and women employ racial arguments *against*

movements like #CloseRikers, and fail to understand why such movements feel like an existential threat to this group of workers. An accurate diagnosis of the causes of mass incarceration is necessary to dismantle it, and advocates of decarceration are not served by a strictly racial theory about its origins that cannot account for one of the nation's—and therefore the world's—largest jail systems being primarily, and increasingly, helmed and defended by black women. Finally, a detailed understanding of black CO resistance to decarceration—and any successful effort to bring them aboard—will be impossible from afar; scholars and activists alike will need to speak directly with correction officers to better understand their positions and to develop a mutually agreeable path forward.

Appendix

Sex	Race-Ethnicity & Sex	Year																		
		1978	1984	1988	1990	1992	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017				
Men	Black Men	1,851	5,118	1,925	8,143	7,025	2,997	2,802	2,652	2,398	2,394	2,485	2,283	2,431	2,371	2,853				
	Hispanic Men			812			1,382	1,299	1,193	1,033	946	963	847	953	1,007	1,497				
	Other Men			18			69	67	92	108	126	141	145	183	213	427				
	White Men			1,473			1,635	1,423	1,234	973	814	779	695	710	764	1,010				
	Black Women			1,121			2,851	2,764	3,038	3,095	3,028	2,883	2,907	2,907	2,616	2,703	2,669	2,889		
	Hispanic Women			206			349	344	400	435	441	431	448	489	460	500	518	746		
	Other Women			172			6	6	43	42	56	72	74	71	69	73	82	110		
	White Women			3			189	152	147	135	128	115	113	110	93	100	110	153		
	Total			1,851			6,039	5,730	11,537	10,291	9,711	9,298	8,824	8,013	7,822	7,945	7,208	7,653	7,734	9,685

Table A. Correction Officers by Race-Ethnicity and Sex in New York City Department of Correction, 1978–2017.

Sources:

- 1978: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2005b), National Jail Census
- 1984: Maghan and McLeish-Blackwell (1991) using LaSalle (1987)
- 1988: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2005d), National Jail Census
- 1990: Maghan and McLeish-Blackwell (1991) using a 1990 NYC EEO-4 report
- 1992: Feinman (1994) using statistics from the American Correctional Association
- 1999–2017: NYC EEO-4 report

Sex	Race-Ethnicity & Sex	Year									
		1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Men	Black Men	316	308	332	338	329	314	271	245	252	227
	Hispanic Men	154	139	134	120	110	103	87	83	71	78
	Other Men	6	6	8	7	7	9	10	14	22	31
	White Men	480	403	348	281	237	195	165	141	141	141
	Black Women	189	208	292	326	373	426	382	397	469	536
Women	Hispanic Women	31	34	39	45	58	56	46	52	76	90
	Other Women	0	0	3	4	8	11	10	8	11	18
	White Women	55	45	46	44	46	52	43	42	40	54
	Total	1,231	1,143	1,202	1,165	1,168	1,166	1,014	982	1,082	1,175

Table B. Officials/Administrators by Race/Ethnicity and Sex in New York City Department of Correction, 1999–2017.

Source: NYC EEO-4 reports (see text)

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