The "seven neighborhoods study," whose formal title actually is "The Non-Traditional Approach to Criminal and Social Justice." This study was originally conducted in 1979-1980 in Green Haven Prison by a group of incarcerated men called The Think Tank of which I was a member. The study was first issued in 1979 and then again in 1990 but received little recognition or media attention. In 1992, the New York Times received a copy and printed its findings as a front page article about my work. This, of course, put the study into the mainstream of criminal justice and prison discussion.

THE ORIGINAL RESEARCH SEEKING ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS WE ARE NOW STILL ASKING CAME FROM INSIDE THE BOWELS OF THE PRISON SYSTEM OVER THIRTY YEARS AGO.

The study was conducted to determine the racial and geographical demographics of people in prison in New York state, where they resided before prison and where they returned upon completion of their sentences. The study relies upon data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, New York State Board of Regents, New York State Department of Correctional Services, New York State Division of Parole, and New York City Police Department Reports of Crimes by precincts.

It was done with the technical assistance of the Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC), then headed by Dr. Kenneth Clark (of the Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka Kansas fame).

The study revealed, at that time, 85% of the state's prison population was Black or Latino and that 75% of them came from seven neighborhoods in New York City: Harlem, and the Lower East Side in Manhattan, South/Central Bronx, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville and East New York in Brooklyn and South Jamaica in Queens. It was among the first studies done that definitively connected race and prison populations with specific urban neighborhoods in New York City.

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For geographical and data collection references and political support, we identified the neighborhoods by State Assembly Districts. At the time they included: 29, 32, 33, 40, 42, 43, 55, 57, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 76, 78, and the 82nd Assembly Districts. Since then three of four more AD's were added. The remainder of the state's prison

population, approximately 25-30%, came from Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester, Albany, Poughkeepsie, Beacon, Newberg, Westchester County and Long Island.

Our analysis demonstrated a "direct connection" between low income, racially isolated, under served communities in the "seven neighborhoods," and racism, racial profiling (as expressed in stop and search reports), financial and banking "redlining," under achieving schools and poor quality education, majority of single parent families headed by women, high rates of unemployment, excess poverty, substance abuse, public assistance, and an entrenched "under-ground economy" that inevitably leads to encounters with law enforcement that result in prison or death.

We called these "crime generative factors." This we believe explains, to a large extent, why Blacks and Latinos from these neighborhoods are so disproportionately represented in the prison system. This was twenty years ago. Subsequent research, at both local and national levels, reveals that this pattern of racially segregated, under-served neighborhoods, inevitably account for the disparate number of its residents in the state prison systems around the country. These conditions still exist to an even greater degree today. While several other studies have appeared since ours, few focus their concentration on the racial and economic implications of the intersection between race, education, mass incarceration and mass unemployment in these communities.

In terms of education, a few years after our study, around 1994-95, then New York State Senator Alton Waldon (now a state judge), did an excellent follow-up study, "Critical Choices." He took our original demographic research, using the Assembly Districts, and juxtaposed it over failing schools in various New York City School Districts. He sought to determine if there was any correlation between substandard education and rates of imprisonment from certain geographical areas and racial groups.

Of course, there was; almost exactly the same neighborhoods that had so many of its people in prison had the worst schools in the city. It seemed clear to us, then and now, if we know where the failing schools are and they are the same neighborhoods that account for the high numbers in the prison system, then we can target interventions specifically to them in very cost effective ways. In our study, we called this a "community specific" approach. We still use this concept in all of the work that we do.

Approximately, ten years after our research appeared in the New York Times, around 2001, when I was a senior consultant with the Open Society Institute's After Prison Initiative, I shared this data with Eric Cadora, a policy analyst with the Initiative at the time. A few years later, circa 2003-5, he took the data and, using a geo-mapping system, created the research which identified, at the block level, the neighborhoods we had previously identified at the Assembly District level. With his more sophisticated technological tools, and computer access to greater data, he was able to quantify the number of residents

from a particular city block who were in prison and then attach a dollar figure to these numbers. This became the "Million Dollar Block Study." If asked, he will admit the origins of his study came from the "Non-Traditional Approach Study" we did, but he has never acknowledged it in writing as far as I know. The seventy-five or so blocks that he identified were taken directly from our study and correspond almost exactly to our original research.

There are two critical points here, first and most significantly, the original research seeking answers to questions we are now still asking came from inside the bowels of the prison system over thirty years ago. What is significant for your purposes is the combination of our research, the follow up work that Senator Waldon did and Cadora's. Using Walton's data -- which needs to be updated as does our own research -- you can accurately pinpoint the relationship between substandard performing schools and people in those neighborhoods who are going into the adult prison and juvenile justice systems at disproportionate numbers. And, as a result, determine where intervention is most needed, cost effective, outcome driven and evidence based. Central Brooklyn ranks highest on this list. Much of the work that we have done at the Center for NuLeadership at Medgar Evers College, in terms of under graduate and certificate program curriculum development, staff and outside agency trainings, public policy recommendations and briefing papers, is based on that original research.

The second point is our Center itself. It is an extension of the work we did in prison. As you know, The Center for NuLeadership is the first and only public policy, research, training, advocacy and academic center, housed in the largest university system in the United States, whose staff is comprised of formerly incarcerated professionals. Our work is informed by the experience of being formerly incarcerated ourselves. We offer this unique perspective to problem solving. It is only acquired by years in the street, time spent in prison and academic achievement at the post graduate level, coupled with successful transition to community.

Such a perspective, in the past, has traditionally been overlooked or underutilized. At the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions at Medgar Evers College, we create experimental project models born of our professional and personal experiences. These model projects address questions that have generally escaped definitive answers or supplement existing models whose success can be improved. Our biggest problem is that we have always been under funded and under-utilized by the community and leadership we seek to serve. Hopefully, this history about the "seven neighborhoods" will help bridge that divide and allow us additional opportunity to provide insights, added value and solutions to issues and problems confronting our communities.