Rupture the Pipeline!
Law, political economy, and information systems in the school-prison nexus

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This thesis complicates the idea of a school-prison pipeline and expands traditional conceptions of what counts as education policy studies in two ways. First, through a theoretical reframing of the school-prison nexus, and second, by conducting a qualitative empirical study, both of which informed the other. This two-pronged project asks to what extent non-educational and even non-juvenile justice institutions are involved in the school-prison nexus. Specifically explored are the institutional realms of the law and law enforcement, the political economy, and public representations through media as well as the racist, classist, and gendered structures of each.

The methodology of the ethnographic study focuses on interactions of different actors, stakeholders, and gatekeepers in order to provide insight as to how such complex phenomena as the school-prison nexus develop across institutional lines today, and over time serve larger projects. Informed by an understanding of two overarching frameworks: neoliberal globalization and the Prison Industrial Complex, this thesis focuses on the interactions of institutions, rather than individuals. Both of these constructs acknowledge deep institutional racism, sexism, and class oppression, which are engaged at every possible juncture in this work.
The ethnographic data in combination with the convergent lens developed and applied, suggest that a system of repressive social control connects schools and prisons through the actions of the police and the criminal legal system, but also through other arms of the state, including housing, urban development policy, public aid, and child family services. Such repressive apparatuses are, in turn, legitimated in the public imagination through the circulation of public identities or representations of people, communities, and community institutions constructed in media.