

“LIQUOR STORE CLUSTERING & TARGETED ADVERTISING; BREAKING DOWN OF  
SPATIAL INEQUALITIES IN INNER-CITIES”

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## INTRODUCTION:

On paper, my hometown of Fall River is classified as a socioeconomically challenged city on the southern coast of Massachusetts, known for its waterfront and heavy Portuguese influence. With a median household income of \$43,503, nearly half of the Massachusetts average of \$81,215, a poverty rate of 19.7% that eclipses the 9.4% state-wide rate, and a population where a mere 15.4% of its residents have attained a Bachelor's Degree or higher, Fall River has earned itself an unfortunate ill-famed reputation across the Commonwealth which, when I first arrived on campus, led me to truly understand the weight that came with calling Fall River home<sup>1</sup>.

As I began to make friends with people from other cities and towns across Massachusetts, such as Sudbury (\$191,310 median household income), Newton (\$151,068), or Longmeadow (\$122,035), I was surprised as to how poorly Fall River stood in comparison to the places my friends called home. How could there be such a significant difference across municipalities separated by no more than a couple of county lines? What were the specific factors at hand that caused Fall River to deviate so much from averages across the Commonwealth for median household income, crime statistics, poverty rates, and number of college graduates?

For years, I have sought to find the answers to these questions in an effort to understand what factors contributed to the discrepancies in socioeconomic status of cities like Fall River when compared to Sudbury, Newton, or Longmeadow. Thus, in this paper, I explore the concept of spatial inequality, a term coined to highlight the, “Unequal distribution of resources and services across different areas or locations, such as healthcare, welfare, public services, household income and infrastructures”, which, I later argue, is a leading element negatively

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<sup>1</sup>“U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Fall River City, Massachusetts,” accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fallrivercitymassachusetts/PST045219>.

affecting in inner-cities like Fall River across the United States<sup>2</sup>. By pursuing this route of spatial inequality, I was then able to identify one specific facet of urban planning that has oftentimes been overlooked or neglected; The strategic mapping and clustering of liquor and convenience stores in minority-heavy, low-income neighborhoods.

Through an extensive analysis of targeted advertisements and the agglomeration of liquor and conveniences stores, I engage with this specific form of spatial inequality through a variety of lenses, such as the effects this invasive presence has on nutrition, public health, and emergency services, as well as considering the implications that the over-presence of alcohol and convenience stores have in contributing to continued cycles of poverty. Above all, I hope to employ these findings to propose a number of solutions to counteract these said spatial disparities, whether it be by revamping local licensing and zoning laws or by granting state legislatures the authority to award or deny liquor licenses to alcohol vendors, so that cities like Fall River are able to address and correct this form of spatial inequality.

## **DEFINING SPATIAL INEQUALITY:**

Oftentimes when analyzing inequities in society, we in the field of political science opt to pursue inequality from racial, ethnic, religious, or gender-related lenses, which, needless to say, are certainly viable options, but features a tendency to ignore the influence that geography and space play in contributing to societal injustices. By studying political science with considerations of spatial inequality, we are able to adopt a new framework that, “Combines geography and social dynamics to show how spatial poverty traps exist in urban areas”, which, can offer valuable insight as to, “Why poor people live in certain neighbourhoods, and why certain areas

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<sup>2</sup> Authors: Fei Fei Gao et al., “Trichomonas Vaginalis Induces Apoptosis via ROS and ER Stress Response through ER–Mitochondria Crosstalk in Siha Cells,” BMC, December 11, 2021, <https://www.biomedcentral.com/collections/spatialinequality>.

remain poor over periods of time”<sup>3</sup>. It is important to note, however, that spatial inequalities are not limited solely to land distribution, proximity, or distance, all of which entail a physical environment. Rather, this concept also takes into account social and political environments, both of which are transformed and redefined through organized filtration of populations through methods such as clustering, concentration, and congestion.

In this piece, I explore spatial inequality in the form of urban planning, more specifically entailing the proximity of convenience stores and liquor stores in socioeconomically-challenged communities, focusing on the following; (1) real-world examples of targeted advertisement and the invasive presence of these vendors in inner-cities, (2) the harmful nutritional effects these stores place on individuals in low-income neighborhoods, (3) the correlation between liquor store over-presence and alcoholism and drug abuse, and (4) the strain this mapping places on 9-1-1 systems, such as emergency medical services, as well as police and fire departments.

### **ALCOHOL-RELATED TARGETED ADVERTISEMENTS:**

The exponential rise of technology in the twenty-first century has paved the way for a new spectacle; Targeted advertising. By monitoring specific, “Demographics, shopping interests, or browsing behaviors”, targeted advertising functions by tracking consumer activity online and customizing, “Unique advertisements tailored to each audience segment” in efforts to appeal to populations that will conform to these marketing appeals and purchase the products at hand<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Kneebone, “The Changing Geography of US Poverty,” Brookings (Brookings, February 15, 2017),

<https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/the-changing-geography-of-us-poverty/>.

<sup>4</sup> “What Is Targeted Advertising?,” AdRoll, December 3, 2021, <https://www.adroll.com/blog/what-is-targeted-advertising>.

Thus, the true success of targeted advertisements can be attributed to its direct marketing techniques that prey upon select consumer demographic groups in an effort to cater towards specific users and increase revenue.

The alcohol industry is one of the leading culprits of exacerbating targeted advertising in low-income neighborhoods. Given the number of liquor stores in low-income neighborhoods, merchants and vendors advertise alcoholic products in these communities at rates far higher than those seen in more affluent municipalities. In a study of fifty neighborhoods in Chicago by the *American Public Health Association*, it was found that whiter, higher-income communities were home to an average of seven alcohol billboards, whereas poorer, minority-heavy regions averaged thirty-eight billboards per neighborhood<sup>5</sup>. In a similar report, researchers observed students walking home from school in various inner-cities in Northern California and ascertained that they were, “Exposed to between 10 and 60 storefront alcohol advertisements”, and that across these inner-cities, there were nearly, “Five times more alcohol advertisements” when compared to their suburban counterparts. With such strong targeted advertising taking place in urban Chicago, Northern California, and other low-income urban settings across the United States, that there is an imminent concern that children are being exposed to alcohol at much younger ages, potentially influencing them to participate in underage drinking.

Given the overwhelming presence of targeted advertisements by alcohol vendors in these inner-cities, adolescents exposed to these marketing appeals are more likely to, “Emulate the images they see in the advertising”, and, “Hold more favorable views on drinking”, that, “Strongly influence adolescents’ attitudes and/or purchase intent toward alcohol”<sup>6</sup>. Statistically

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<sup>5</sup> “Alcohol Availability and Targeted Advertising in Racial ...,” accessed December 16, 2021, <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh22-4/286.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> “Targeting of Outdoor Alcohol Advertising: A Study across ...,” accessed December 16, 2021, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254309357\\_Targeting\\_of\\_Outdoor\\_Alcohol\\_Advertising\\_A\\_Study\\_Across\\_Ethnic\\_and\\_Income\\_Groups](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254309357_Targeting_of_Outdoor_Alcohol_Advertising_A_Study_Across_Ethnic_and_Income_Groups).

speaking, this directed appeal towards youth has seen some success, with a study conducted by the *Center for Disease Control and Prevention* reporting that, “19% of young people aged 12 to 20 years reported drinking alcohol” and that, “11% reported binge-drinking in the past thirty days”, both of which are early onset indicators of potential development of alcohol abuse<sup>7</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, this targeted advertisement by the liquor industry does not exhibit detrimental effects solely towards adolescents. Although adult populations are less likely to become negatively influenced by these advertisements, recovering alcoholics are yet another demographic who suffer greatly by the over-presence of liquor promotion. For alcoholics in early stages of recovery, studies have shown that, “The intrusive nature” and, “Dominance” that liquor advertisements impose does not only trigger urges to drink, but also, “Diminishes the length of time an alcoholic spends in recovery”, which can worsen these cycles of alcoholism, leaving users subject to potential liver failure, hypertension, violent outbreaks, or financial burdens<sup>8</sup>.

## **EXPLOITATION THROUGH LEGIBILITY:**

By identifying and exploiting select groups and demographics that are more likely to fall victim to its targeted advertisements (underage children, recovering alcoholics, inner-city minorities), leading figures within the liquor industry have been able to devise specific strategies to increase the efficacy of targeted ads. Take, for example, how in predominantly Hispanic communities across New York, 74% of all alcohol advertisements were presented in Spanish in an effort to, “Facilitate message processing”, which has proven successful, granted the,

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<sup>7</sup> “Underage Drinking,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October 6, 2021), <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/underage-drinking.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> “Targeting of Outdoor Alcohol Advertising: A Study across ...,” accessed December 16, 2021, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254309357\\_Targeting\\_of\\_Outdoor\\_Alcohol\\_Advertising\\_A\\_Study\\_Across\\_Ethnic\\_and\\_Income\\_Groups](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254309357_Targeting_of_Outdoor_Alcohol_Advertising_A_Study_Across_Ethnic_and_Income_Groups).

“Increased rate of alcoholism among Hispanic adults” across the United States<sup>9</sup>. As this exploitation continues to mount, it is imperative to recognize the volatility of the situation and potential demise at hand if no action is taken to prevent the over-exposure of alcohol advertisement to select populations in inner-cities across the United States. Thus, before seeking to formulate solutions, understanding how this targeting takes place will offer more insight.

Legibility, a term notably elucidated upon by American political scientist James Scott in 1998, can help explain just how the alcohol and convenience store industries are able to exploit certain groups of people. In his piece, “*Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*”, Scott explores the concept of legibility, which, across the fields of political science and anthropology, is defined as the attempt of a state to arrange and make its residents legible for classic state functions, such as taxation, policing, or conscription. Through his analysis, Scott asserts that legibility poses a significant threat to the general population, emphasizing how it, “Merely amplifies the capacity of the state for discriminating interventions”, whether it be through the segregation or debilitation of its people<sup>10</sup>. Under a legible state, Scott contends, urban planners are granted the position and power to, “Gaze down” upon its people, “As if they were in a helicopter” to attain a more “Readable” city that can be easily managed<sup>11</sup>. With specific acknowledgments to the cities of Bruges, Paris, and Chicago, Scott highlights just how rulers achieved, “Segregation of the population by class and function” through simplification and legibility efforts such as maps, censuses and cadastral lists, all of which presented urban planners with the opportunity to reduce the population into specific “Schematic categories” in efforts to appropriate, control, and manipulate<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 78

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 57

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 62-83 62-63

Under this understanding of legibility, Scott references one of the most grave and notable instances of legibility abuse in case of Nazi-occupied Amsterdam in May 1941. In efforts to gather information regarding the number of Jews living in Amsterdam, the *City Office of Statistics of Amsterdam* published maps that plotted the Jewish residents, and, under Nazi command, these maps were eventually used to deport more than sixty-five thousand Jews<sup>13</sup>. Certainly, the manipulation, exploitation, and deportation of Jews stands as an ill-minded, horrific exemplification of how legibility amplifies the capacity for segregation and discrimination of individuals within a state, but the mapping of Jews in Amsterdam can serve as a testament as to how vulnerable and extensive the effects of this manipulation can reach if led by actors with malicious political intents.

In the case of liquor and convenience store over-presence in inner-cities across the United States, it is evident that signs of legibility manipulation are present. As seen with the heavily-targeted advertisements and over-presence of liquor and convenience stores in low-income neighborhoods, it is apparent that authority figures within these industries have been able to collect detailed information regarding consumer tendencies and locations on specific populations, such as underage children, recovering alcoholics, or inner-city minorities, and manipulate urban planning efforts to pursue self-interests. With data to support the success of advertisements and higher rates of abuse in these specific communities, legibility has supplied the means for efficient implementation of targeted advertisements and the opening of new liquor and convenience stores in areas where vendors know people will purchase from.

## **INNER-CITY OVER-PRESENCE OF ALCOHOL & CONVENIENCE STORES:**

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<sup>13</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 78

Targeting advertising, however, is not a recently discovered phenomenon. In fact, this phenomenon has become so embedded in urban planning that we oftentimes forget how influential it has been in contributing to the disproportionate over-presence of convenience and alcohol stores in proximity to low-income neighborhoods.

Take, for example, the state of Maryland, where analysis of data from the 2000 *U.S. Census* found that, “Maryland’s poorest ZIP code has nine times as many liquor stores per resident as the state’s richest ZIP code”<sup>14</sup>. In Baltimore ZIP code 21201, an area where the racial majority is 49.7% African-American and the median household income is \$21,155, the study revealed that there were 58.9 liquor stores for every one hundred thousand residents<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, Montgomery County, Potomac ZIP code 20854, the wealthiest zip code in the state, which features a racial majority of 65.9% White and a median household income of \$172,442, was home to a mere 6.5 liquor stores per one hundred thousand residents<sup>16</sup>.

Glenn Ross of Baltimore’s McElderry Park neighborhood, pertaining to ZIP code 21201, asserts that the community is, “Way above our percentage of liquor stores per population”, calling the liquor stores, “Magnets for drug addicts” that can, “Destroy the whole block if it’s a badly run store”, a testament to the harmful effects the proximity of liquor stores may have on low-income communities like those in ZIP code 21201<sup>17</sup>. For political scientists and public

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth A. Shack, “Low-Income Neighborhoods Home to Higher Number of Liquor Stores,” CNS Maryland (CNS Maryland, October 7, 2016), <https://cnsmaryland.org/2003/04/18/low-income-neighborhoods-home-to-higher-number-of-liquor-stores/>.

<sup>15</sup> “ZIP Code 21201 Profile, Map and Demographics - Updated December 2021,” Zipdatamaps.com, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.zipdatamaps.com/21201>.

<sup>16</sup> “ZIP Code 20854 Profile, Map and Demographics - Updated December 2021,” Zipdatamaps.com, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.zipdatamaps.com/20854>.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth A. Shack, “Low-Income Neighborhoods Home to Higher Number of Liquor Stores,” CNS Maryland (CNS Maryland, October 7, 2016), <https://cnsmaryland.org/2003/04/18/low-income-neighborhoods-home-to-higher-number-of-liquor-stores/>.

policy experts like Jeffrey Fagan, a professor at Columbia Law School, inner-city, alcohol-related crime has become an epidemiologic pandemic, linked closely with, “Troubled homes, disorderly neighborhoods, and dangerous streets”, as well as negative health effects that make alcohol accessibility a priority for policymakers and citizens alike<sup>18</sup>.

Another study in California found that in West Oakland, a low-income community presented with, “1 liquor outlet for every 298 residents”, which paled in comparison to Piedmont, a more affluent area, which was home to, “1 alcohol outlet for every 3,000 residents”, illustrating a vast difference despite the two only being separated by four miles<sup>19</sup>. The examples of Baltimore, North California, West Oakland, however, are just three of the thousands of cities and towns across the United States that demonstrate quantifiable evidence of disproportionate clustering of liquor stores. With alcohol readily available at locations all within short distances, it is of no surprise why alcohol abuse rates are higher in areas like Baltimore, Northern California and West Oakland. Certainly, with such discrepancies across municipal lines, easy acquisition of alcohol poses a number of detrimental effects, from malnutrition and addiction to strains on emergency services.

## **EFFECTS ON MALNUTRITION & ADDICTION:**

Given the surplus of alcohol stores and convenience stores in inner-cities, research has confirmed that there is a significant difference in unhealthy nutritional habits and addiction rates among poor and non-poor households. For individuals residing in neighborhoods with, “A large number of convenience stores nearby”, reports found evident trends in, “Poorer diet quality”

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<sup>18</sup> John J. DiJulio and Jr., “Broken Bottles: Alcohol, Disorder, and Crime,” Brookings (Brookings, July 28, 2016),

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/broken-bottles-alcohol-disorder-and-crime/>.

<sup>19</sup> “Alcohol Availability and Targeted Advertising in Racial ...,” accessed December 16, 2021, <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh22-4/286.pdf>.

when compared to their counterparts from higher-income neighborhoods with fewer numbers of such stores<sup>20</sup>. This increased consumption of cheaper, lower diet quality foods in socioeconomically challenged neighborhoods, in turn, means that communities with more convenience stores will be home to individuals with higher risks of obesity, hypertension, stroke, and more. In addition to unhealthy eating habits and increased risks of obesity, hypertension, and stroke, over-presence of liquor and convenience stores has become strongly correlated with chronic alcoholism and drug addiction.

Just this past June, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania studied the connection between the number of alcohol and convenience stores in Baltimore and the number of reported drug overdoses, finding that for, “Each additional off-premise alcohol outlet” in the community, there was, “A 16.6% increase in the neighborhood drug overdose rate”, a figure that the researchers attribute to the copious amounts of drug paraphernalia sold at the local alcohol and convenience stores in the area, such as lighters, bongs, pipes, needles, rolling papers, and more<sup>21</sup>. With such readily availability of drug paraphernalia at these convenience stores, communities with an abundant number of these stores have also reported an increased number of gatherings on the premises, some of which have become sites of drug transactions, contributing to the further influx of drugs into these neighborhoods.

Unsurprisingly, in addition to drug addiction, inner-cities with more liquor and convenience stores correlate to higher rates of alcohol abuse. Isaac Rhew, an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at the University of Washington, unveiled in his research that, “Residents of neighborhoods characterized by high poverty and

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<sup>20</sup> “(PDF) Database Resources of the National Center for Biotechnology Information,” ResearchGate, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7602560/pdf/ijerph-17-07517.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> By: Utsha Khatri et al., “Liquor Stores and Drug Overdoses,” Penn LDI, August 3, 2021, <https://ldi.upenn.edu/our-work/research-updates/liquor-stores-and-drug-overdoses/>.

disorganization tended to drink twice as much in a typical week as those in other types of neighborhoods”, while also uncovering that binge-drinking, which is classified the consumption of four or more alcoholic beverages in one sitting, occurred, “Four times as frequently” in low-income neighborhoods when compared to higher-income communities<sup>22</sup>. These increased alcohol abuse tendencies, however, should come as no surprise. With such a high concentration of liquor stores, coupled with poverty-related stressors such as, “Conflict, family violence, food insecurity and residential mobility”, individuals in inner-cities have proven to be more likely to pursue alcohol or drugs as coping mechanisms, as seen with increased numbers of alcoholics and substance abuse found in homes in economically-challenged neighborhoods<sup>23</sup>.

### **STRAIN ON PUBLIC HEALTH & EMERGENCY SYSTEMS:**

Given the rates of abuse of alcohol and drugs amongst individuals living in low-income households, the psychological effects brought forth by these substances oftentimes place significant strains on 9-1-1 services, such as emergency medical services and police and fire departments. In the United States alone, the influence of alcohol and drugs in reported crime offer mesmerizing statistics. In a report issued by the *National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence*, it was found that, “Between 25-50% of violent crimes are committed by someone under the influence of drugs or alcohol”, with nearly 60% of those crimes being robbery, theft, and property-related<sup>24</sup>. In Baltimore, whose liquor store clustering was referenced earlier in the

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<sup>22</sup> “Where You Live May Impact How Much You Drink,” UW News, accessed December 16, 2021,

<https://www.washington.edu/news/2017/05/15/where-you-live-may-impact-how-much-you-drink>

<sup>23</sup> “Stress as a Mechanism of Poverty’s Ill Effects on Children,” American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association), accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/newsletter/2012/07/stress-mechanism>.

<sup>24</sup> “Alcohol, Drugs and Crime: What’s the Connection?,” ncadd, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://ncadd.org/addiction/alcohol-drugs-and-crime>.

piece, officials from the local Emergency Medical Services report that, “40 to 60 percent of the 9-1-1 calls to which Baltimore EMS responds are related to drugs or alcohol”, a staggering figure that has placed a strain on the employees within the department<sup>25</sup>. With such heightened rates of alcohol and drug abuse in cities and towns, police, fire, and EMS departments are being overwhelmed and overworked, resulting in diminished resources and fewer units available.

As unfortunate as it may be, the fact of the matter is that individuals residing from socioeconomically-challenged inner-cities are more likely to be subject to cycles of continued poverty and addiction. In situations where individuals face specific poverty-related stressors, such as financial instability and employment insecurity, triggers prompt individuals to cope with stress through outlets, frequently through alcohol or drugs. As we know, poorer inner-cities are subject to excessive targeted advertising, which, worsens temptations to attain said addictive substances that are influenced by these ads. While these temptations are triggered, the accessibility and attainability of alcohol and drugs in these neighborhoods and communities means that there are a multitude of locations where these substances are readily available for purchase. Once acquired, users may develop malnutrition (liver failure, hypertension, appendicitis) and addiction (binge-drinking, further financial instability, emotional instability), both of which increase the number of emergency calls which worsen the strain and demand on the 9-1-1 system, which, in turn, weakens the general well-being of these communities, thus repeating this tragic, seemingly-endless cycle.

#### **RELEVANCE IN FALL RIVER, SOLUTIONS, & CLOSING THOUGHTS:**

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<sup>25</sup>Greg Rienzi, “Johns Hopkins Pilots Study on EMS Treatment of Substance Abusers,” The Hub, September 2, 2014, <https://hub.jhu.edu/gazette/2014/september-october/focus-baltimore-city-ems/>.

As I refer back to Fall River, I think about just how prevalent these spatial inequalities are in my hometown. With a population just over 89,000, Fall River is home to twenty officially licensed liquor vendors (bars, restaurants not included), which equates to 22.4 stores for every 100,000 residents. What surprised me the most, however, was the distribution of these liquor stores. In the northernmost portion of the city, which many consider to be the most affluent part of Fall River, there is all but one alcohol vendor, whereas the other nineteen are dispersed in the central and southernmost regions of the city, many of them in proximity to public housing complexes and infamous low-income neighborhoods. Consequently, year after year, Fall River is the municipality home to the most liquor stores in Bristol County, and, in turn, continuously reports the highest rate of substance-related emergency room admissions per 100,000 residents in the county (20.4%), according to a 2020 report by *Spring Hill Recovery Center*<sup>26</sup>. As surreal and somber as these statistics may be, they serve as a reminder as to how the bunching of liquor vendors plays such a strong part in contributing to spatial inequalities, even in our backyards.

The question that must be asked now is how we plan on addressing this crisis. In the aforementioned example of West Oakland, California, as residents of the city learned of the alarming rates of liquor outlets in contrast to Piedmont, local activists sought to reduce the density of these vendors by creating the *Education, Monitoring and Enforcement Program*, which, “Established operating standards for all city alcohol outlets” and, “Mandated that alcohol outlets ‘avoid creating a public nuisance, endangering public health or safety, or violating criminal laws’”, placing specific conditions and regulations on merchants which, if found viable, would result in the stripping of licenses<sup>27</sup>. In doing so, the program demonstrated a profound

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<sup>26</sup> “Fall River,” Centers.com, accessed December 16, 2021, <https://www.centers.com/rehab/massachusetts/fall-river/>.

<sup>27</sup> “Alcohol Availability and Targeted Advertising in Racial ...,” accessed December 16, 2021, <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh22-4/286.pdf>.

commitment towards holding vendors accountable for potential wrongdoings. Potential implementation of programs like these in cities where mapping and clustering of liquor stores pose threats to the public would hold vendors responsible and demonstrate an important commitment to impeding potential illegal activity.

Introducing statewide legislation could also potentially offer some solutions in minimizing the amount of liquor vendors across the United States. In June 2011, voters in Washington voted to pass a bill that removed, “The state from liquor business”, and allowed, “Private retailers to sell spirits instead”, a significant overhaul of the liquor industry, with offices across the state estimating that the number of liquor outlets would jump from 328 to 1,428 with the implementation of the new regulations<sup>28</sup>. With this 435% increase in vendors across the state, the prevalence of alcohol to Washington residents become as available as ever before, posing threats of availability and abuse unlike ever before. In an effort to combat this measure and seek to reduce the accessibility of alcohol across the United States, passing legislation that would return the business of the liquor industry back to the state could potentially benefit inner-city communities and its residents by preventing further construction of new liquor store units.

The most important solution, however, starts with acknowledgment of how we are in this position to begin with. Before we can even start to address alternatives, understanding how the over-presence of liquor stores and drug paraphernalia-selling convenience stores came to be is an important first step. At the end of the day, recognizing how urban planners and industry leaders obtain and manipulate demographic data epitomizes the fears James Scott alluded to in, “*Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*”. To prevent alcohol vendors from taking advantage of vulnerable populations within neighborhoods, the first

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<sup>28</sup>Melissa Allison, “Voters Kick State out of Liquor Business,” The Seattle Times (The Seattle Times Company, November 9, 2011), <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/voters-kick-state-out-of-liquor-business/>.

step that elected officials and residents alike must take is to make themselves inherently less legible. By reducing the amount of consumer data and demographic information in the hands of industry leaders, vendors would no longer be able to track and target specific individuals, as seen with underage children, recovering alcoholics, or inner-city minorities.

Although the inequalities brought forth by the invasiveness or dense concentration of liquor and convenience stores never seem to make news headlines quite like racial, religious, and gender inequalities, it is critical that we, as political scientists and actors within our communities, identify and give attention to spatial inequalities, especially given its influence in worsening systemic discrimination. In socioeconomically challenged cities like Fall River, correcting the over-presence of targeted advertisements and liquor stores can set a precedent for future generations to come by potentially freeing individuals from the shackles of underage drinking, mitigate alcohol addiction, reduce the amount of substance-related crimes, and alleviate the strains placed on first responders and the emergency system, granting communities like my own the opportunity to strive towards more equitable opportunities for its people to escape cycles of poverty and amount to new levels of prosperity.

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