



Reinforcing the Web of Municipal Courts: Evidence and Implications Post-Ferguson



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Friday, October 8
Noon EDT
406 Oswald Tower
and Zoom



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Investigations in Ferguson, Missouri revealed that many individuals, particularly Black people, entered the criminal justice system for relatively minor offenses, missed court appearances, or failure to pay fines. Municipal courts were focused on revenue generation which led to aggressive enforcement of municipal codes. Although subsequent reforms were passed, little is known about if and how the legislative changes influenced the law in action in the municipal courts. Using data from qualitative interviews with St. Louis area residents and regional court actors, as well as court observations, this paper documents the legal structure of municipal courts in the region, post-Ferguson. This work addresses how the parochial nature of municipal courts in St. Louis County perpetuates the financial marginalization of residents through the layering of punishment, and how the state legal structure further facilitates control, even after reform.

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