

How the system specifically targets the poor and turn them into criminals

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



The broken windows theory is described as “ disorder and vandalism, or the physical deterioration of the neighborhood, as well as minor offenses (loitering).” An example of this would be a neighborhood that is not well taken care of. There may be trash in yards, graffiti, or broken windows. The broken windows theory has a direct relationship with the poor because when a neighborhood has these physical qualities it “ signals that no one cares about the neighborhood and that crime is present.” The deteriorating state of the neighborhood also encourages more crime to be committed. This has an effect on the poor because like it was mentioned in the “ The Debtors Prison” these people are now targeted for things like “ unkempt lawns” and the color of their houses. This can be described as broken windows policing. It is easier to target the poor when they live in a “ broken windows” neighborhood.

Social disorganization theory, by Shaw and McKay, is a theory that states that people commit crime not because of who they are but on their environment. One main factor of this is poverty. There are many examples of this in Edelman “ Not a Crime to be Poor”. One specific example, is the story of Ji Seon Song’s and his African American, seventeen year old client. Song’s client lived in poverty, had a drug abusing mother, was bullied at school, and so on. Overall, he had a very poor home life. One day Song’s client “ phoned in two fake bomb threats to the school.” This is an example of the social disorganization theory because if the boy had a better home life he may not have ever committed a crime. His environment had a huge factor in what he did. Starks deviant/criminal places theory is another theory that I found to recur in Edelman’s book. This theory focuses on the place that people live

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and that this is what makes them commit crime, not who they are as a person. An example of this is the story of “ Mom”. A mother and her daughter, living in a hotel in a poverty ridden neighborhood, try to make ends meet by being on food stamps. “ Mom” broke the rules by trying to sell her plasma for extra money. This relates to Starks theory because if the mother and daughter had not been living in such horrible conditions “ Mom” would never had to do anything to potentially break the law.

Ferguson, Missouri is a city famous for the shooting of African American man, Michael Brown. This case brought a lot of attention to the treatment of African Americans and police. What Ferguson, Missouri also did is bring light to the issue of criminalizing the poor. “ Ferguson charged fines of up to \$531 for “ high grass and weeds” in someone’s yard.” Ferguson helped show that poor people were being targeted for unnecessary tickets and citations simply because these people lived in the poor neighborhoods. In addition, poor citizens whom were arrested or had to go to court were bombarded with additional and outrageous fees that keep piling up. We see enormous amounts of examples in this area. In both Edelman (2017) and we see example of how the system specifically targets the poor and turn simple infractions, and innocent people, into criminal acts and criminals.

In Edelman (2017) there is a full chapter on the criminalization of benefits. Edelman describes the criminalization of benefits in two different ways, either the person receiving the benefits is being accused of cheating the system or the receiver is not being allowed to receive benefits at all because of a criminal past or arrest. The consequences of this criminalization are that

people who are in desperate need of these benefits may not be able to receive them. Someone who was arrested for something very simple, even if they weren't charged, may not be able to receive food stamps to help feed their children. The repercussions of criminalizing benefits can have a huge impact for all involved.

Race and class/poverty intersect in many different ways. Edelman (2017) writes about how the two interact, specifically in schools. There is an overwhelming number of children, specifically from poverty ridden homes/neighborhoods, that are being sent to court for infractions at school. The same children are being ticketed and fined through the court system. This is just another example of criminalizing the poor. Edelman (2017) tells the story of a young African American girl Jayden whom is attacked at school and subsequently ends up being taken to court for the her " role" in the crime. Edelman (2017) uses the example of Jayden to show how race and poverty intersect. You can see how race and poverty interact throughout the whole of Edelman's (2017) book in various forms. From poor minorities being targeted for excessive court fines to the reference on speed traps in impoverished African American neighborhoods. The long term effects on criminalizing the poor can have lasting effects on specifically the person who is being targeted but also on crime rates, jail/prison volumes, tax payers, etc.