

The “broken windows” theory and its application in today’s society

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



The “ Broken Windows” Theory and its Application in Today’s Society The “ broken windows” theory as explained in the article; which holds that physical deterioration and an increase in unrepaired buildings leads to increased concerns for personal safety of residents and a rise in the crime rates, is an applicable theory for the conditions in the inner cities. I believe it also can apply to the current conditions in some suburban areas that are degrading, such as the local town of Norristown where I grew up. Norristown up until the 1960’s and the rise in drug use, was peaceful little mini-city in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Growing up in Norristown, my father would tell me stories of neighbors taking care of neighbors during tough economic times, and even fearing getting in trouble because everyone in the neighborhood would hit him before he got home to his father. The area hangouts were always clean and peaceful, and the houses were up kept. There still was crime, but it wasn’t always violent or prevalent. That all changed in his estimation by the late 1960’s. The drug culture entered into the area, and houses started to become run-down due to numerous squatters living 10-15 at the time in them. Area hangouts became dangerous, and he said they would have to literally fight other groups to be allowed to use the basketball courts. Violent crimes with weapons rose, and so did murder. During the 1970’s and the 1980’s, older residents began moving out in droves despite the Council’s attempts to institute tougher crime-fighting tactics. By the turn of the 2000’s, many neighborhoods looked rundown and were dangerous. I was born in Norristown in 1986 and lived there until my parents were able to move out in 1998. Drugs were rampant, crime was bad, and my mother never let me leave the house without someone older and trustworthy

escorting me. If you took the time walking down in the neighborhoods, which we did a lot to get to school, you noticed many of the things mentioned in the "broken windows" theory breakdown. Many houses had broken windows, graffiti, and were the hangouts for drug users. Squatters were as prevalent as they were in the late 1960's, with anywhere between 10-20 adults of all kinds of races living in the houses and dealing drugs. The police couldn't do anything without getting shot. A lot of officers were harmed, and the drug operations to try and stop the flow of drugs from Philadelphia and Camden, NJ were hardly successful. I personally saw two of my cousins fall trapped to both sides of this dichotomy, one became a narcotics officer who was forced into retirement due to being shot in the back by a drug dealer, and another cousin is spending the next 25 years in prison for drug trafficking and the sale of cocaine. Gangs and drug dealers began coming from Philadelphia to establish "satellite" branches of their operations. People began putting bars on their windows due to the break-ins, community events kept getting cancelled, and the sound of gunshots became normal. By late 2004, the Council in Norristown decided to take action. Rundown houses were boarded up and condemned. Cops were brought in from outside jurisdictions to train the Norristown police on how to run better undercover drug sting operations. Crime was reduced, but murders were still high. The Council also sought out one thing they didn't before, outside investment by companies to revitalize sections of the town. With these steps, Norristown has begun to improve, and so has the feelings of safety for the local populace. However, Norristown has decades of decay to combat, which will take time. If only they had looked at the "broken windows" theory they could have fixed this years ago.