

UNITED STATES - New Political and Social Messages Through the “Social Disorder”

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Daniel Mohammad Khan-Yousufzai faces charges for “vandalism, criminal mischief, and possessing instruments of crime”. What was his crime? He painted the letters “WRC” in the walls of [Common Rooms of the Cathedral of Learning](#). After that, he sat down outside the University of Pittsburgh main building, waiting for the police.

That situation driving me to thinking about [James Q. Wilson’s broken windows theory](#). According to this approach, disorder causes a breakdown in local social control, and this breakdown allows crime to flourish. The logical converse was that catching disorder early and eliminating it promptly would prevent this breakdown in control and the consequent spike in crime. Broken windows theory revolves around the concept of “disorder,” which is subdivided into “physical disorder” and “social disorder.”

Pitt’s authorities reactions are perfectly in line with these premises. The communication about this episode, through institutional media and TV news and Internet channels, was: [“Cathedral of Learning vandalism”](#) and “Vandal’s message”.

The common word in this situation is “vandalism”. This concept, in the common sense refers to a “crime”. Actually all Western nations consider vandalism a crime, which deserve a punishment according law and criminal codes in every democratic republic. Nowadays, graffiti is commonly associated with vandalism and, by its definition, as a crime. Especially the [“tagging”](#).

Therefore Daniel’s action was a “crime”. According to broken windows theory, his behavior is a “disorder”, both physical and social. The key “evidence” was the tag or graffiti as news and Pitt police have noticed.

However. Who are the criminals according to broken windows theory? Daniel seems no to be a criminal, if we observe him from a conservative point of view. He is an undergraduate student at [Pitt, one of the Top-100 colleges around the world](#). He is enrolled in English and Chemistry majors. Thus he has several skills in different fields, such as science and humanities.

Nonetheless, Daniel is a criminal for the simply fact that he made a graffiti and damaged a city landmark. This explanation implies a conservative and unfair situation. Theoretical approaches, like broken windows theory, have helped to legitimate oppression, discrimination and repression. The dialectical relationship between theory and practice, in the case of crime and urban planning, is fully accomplished by the work of James Q. Wilson.

“Disorder” as a concept is taken by police and authorities and can labeling an action like a crime. Thereby, write your name or your opinion in a wall should transform you in a criminal. That is absolutely valid in a city like Pittsburgh, which have beautiful and historic building as the Cathedral of Learning. I am sure that nobody wants to see Pitt completely destroy or painting with graffiti. The point is: a conservative approach, to urban planning and city organization, cannot explain new phenomena.

Daniel wrote “WRC”: [Worker Rights Consortium](#). This is a group that works with colleges around the nation to ensure laborers rights. Then Daniel’s action was a political and social action, not only a “disorder”. His goal is create an impact on public opinion and Pitt’s authorities in order to end

university's affiliation to [Fair Labor Association \(FLA\)](#), because WRC argue that association faces a conflict of interest.

Ultimately, broken windows theory has not enough abstract concepts to explain this “disorder” which seems to be a complex and rational action, rather than merely a criminal activity. Although broken windows theory has, until today, a huge influence on urban planning and social organizations. WRC, through tagging has sent a message in a new code: is necessary to overcome conservative thoughts and we need to build new integrate approaches to the current urban life-style.

Resources

Broken Windows: This article explains concepts and empirical application, in terms of police policy, of this theory. Wilson and Kelling analyzing Safe and Clean Neighborhoods Program, in New Jersey in the mid-1970s.

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/_atlantic_monthly-broken_windows.pdf

How does the Worker Rights Consortium work?: This website shows the mission of the WRC which is led by a board of academics, students and labour rights experts. It is therefore free of the corporate influence often found in other monitoring bodies.

http://peopleandplanet.org/wrc/how_does_it_work

FLA Watch: FLA Watch was created to expose the truth about the Fair Labor Association (FLA). While the FLA claims to be protecting workers' rights and improving labor conditions, the organization has demonstrated itself over the years to be nothing more than a public relations mouthpiece for the apparel industry.

<http://flawatch.usas.org/>