



Pockets of Crime: Broken Windows, Collective Efficacy, and the Criminal Point of View

By Peter K. B. St. Jean

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Why, even in the same high-crime neighborhoods, do robbery, drug dealing, and assault occur much more frequently on some blocks than on others? One popular theory is that a weak sense of community among neighbors can create conditions more hospitable for criminals, and another proposes that neighborhood disorder—such as broken windows and boarded-up buildings—makes crime more likely. But in his innovative new study, Peter K. B. St. Jean argues that we cannot fully understand the impact of these factors without considering that, because urban space is unevenly developed, different kinds of crimes occur most often in locations that offer their perpetrators specific advantages.

Drawing on Chicago Police Department statistics and extensive interviews with both law-abiding citizens and criminals in one of the city's highest-crime areas, St. Jean demonstrates that drug dealers and robbers, for example, are primarily attracted to locations with businesses like liquor stores, fast food restaurants, and check-cashing outlets. By accounting for these important factors of spatial positioning, he expands upon previous research to provide the most comprehensive explanation available of why crime occurs where it does.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In this unique and original book, Peter St. Jean examines why some blocks in urban areas experience more crime than others. Based on a number of sources - most importantly, in-depth interviews with drug dealers and routine robbers about their strategies for selecting a location or victim - St. Jean finds pitfalls in both broken windows and collective efficacy theories, while proposing a promising new alternative." - Mario Luis Small, author of Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio"

About the Author

Peter K. B. St. Jean is assistant professor of sociology at the University at Buffalo.

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