



English 215 Final Project

The Cause of Crime

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Crime is an aspect of life that all citizens must deal with as it seems to have been around as long as civilization itself. Crime has ravished communities for centuries and one assertion is that crime is more prevalent in poor inner-city neighborhoods than it is in equivalents that are more affluent. Finding the root source of this plague has been on the minds of criminologists and others for centuries. This is because the control, reduction, and prevention of crime has been a major problem in our society and many others. There have been many different angles that have been studied as the potential cause of crime. Currently, the three major aspects include a lack of education, living in poverty, and being raised in a single parent home. Each of these perspectives offer insight to crime's true cause, but it seems that none can stand alone. Crime is a complex issue that may stem from many sources, but a lack of education, generational poverty, and the rupture of family structure each seem to play a prominent role in criminal activity.

Education is much more important today than it ever was. The quality and quantity of education a person receives is commonly viewed as a determinate of that person's success and/or way of life. Some believe that the length of one's education can distinguish those with a higher possibility of being incarcerated ("Education and Crime" 1). The disparity between the education levels of the inmate population and the general population are astounding. Only 18% of the general population have not completed high school or any equivalence, while 27% of federal inmates, 40% of state inmates, 47% of local jail inmates and 31% of probationers failed to do so (Harlow 2). The state of our society today stresses good schooling more than almost anything else and the inmate population in general seems to be a step behind the rest of society in the education department.

One aspect of the relationship between crime and education is that school is a place where children learn many important social skills ("Education and Crime" 1; Lochner 1-3). In the past, the main dwelling for socialization was a child's home, but as work becomes more demanding on parents, they lose valuable time with their children, therefore losing the

ability to properly socialize them. Hence, children spend much of their time at school and get much of their socialization accordingly ("Education and Crime" 1). Education may develop enough social skills to deter kids from engaging in crime. School stresses many behaviors that are not very useful in the criminal world including, treating others with respect and striving to be a good citizen. Education also gives students a future-driven look on life, which will cause them to contemplate the consequences of criminal activity more. A future-driven individual is more patient and less likely to take the risk associated with criminal activity (Lochner 1-5).

Another side of the correlation between education and crime is that poor school performance or low intelligence is an indicator of future criminal behavior (Karpowitz and Kenner, 4; Weatherburn, 4; Fagan, 11). The U.S. Department of Justice believes that "the typical offender is undereducated, unemployed and living in poverty before incarceration." Also, America's prisoners have a much higher illiteracy rate than our nation as a whole. Of the adult inmate population 19% are illiterate, compared to 4% nationally. In addition to this, up to 60% of the adult inmate population is functionally illiterate, compared to 23% nationally (Karpowitz and Kenner 4). Also, 34.9% of local jail inmates cited behavioral or academic problems as their reason for leaving school. Only 17.2% of the general population, yet to complete high school, cited this reason (Harlow 3). Patrick Fagan believes that many future criminals have substandard verbal memories and trouble grasping concepts, not excluding those of morality. They have hardships learning reading and counting skills (11). Don Weatherburn also brings up the idea that criminals, in general, are less intelligent than their counterparts. He says that many believe criminal activity is linked with one's intelligence quotient or IQ. Having a low IQ is said to increase criminal activity by decreasing the capacity to comprehend consequences of such behavior. The problem is that having a low IQ is also associated with poor school performance so the correlation between IQ and crime could actually be related to performance rather than intelligence (4). Performing poorly in school is also associated with truancy, the next aspect of the education and crime relationship.

The next view on the relation between education and crime is a dislike for school that eventually leads to truancy. Fagan quotes a professor

from Cambridge University saying, "Youth who dislike school and teachers, who do not get involved in school activities, and who are not committed to educational pursuits are more likely than others to engage in delinquent behavior[;]" those who display this lack of ambition usually begin skipping school and eventually drop out altogether (Harlow 11). Truancy is linked to delinquency, but Lance Lochner poses a good question: do kids drop out to commit crimes or do they commit crimes because they dropped out (5)? Weatherburn says a possible link is that juveniles that are in school are under supervision and therefore cannot commit as many crimes as they could away from school. The opportunity is what causes youth to offend. He also says that the truancy and crime association could be caused by truant students doing worse in school (4). Fagan believes that most juveniles have begun a "serious apprenticeship in crime" before they even drop out of school (11).

Education is also believed to reduce crime amongst criminals as well (Karpowitz and Kenner 3). As they stand now, recidivism rates in America vary between 41 and 71%. The most efficient way to reduce recidivism is to educate prisoners. According to a National Institute of Justice report to Congress this is the best way to suppress recidivism. In 1997, "The Three State Recidivism Study" revealed a 29% reduction in recidivism among inmates that merely attended school. A 1994 State of Texas report also found that convicts who received their GED and vocational training had a 20% lower rate of re-offending (Kaspowitz and Kenner 4-6). Also, the same report found a correlation between college degrees and recidivism. The rate that inmates recidivate is much lower in inmates that have college degrees, standing at 12% (Kaspowitz and Kenner 4-6). The type of degree also played a major role as the recidivism rate was 13.7% in inmates who had Associates, 5.6% of inmates with Bachelors, and 0% for inmates who held Masters Degrees. The State of Illinois found similar results as prisoners in college programs had a recidivism rate of 13.1%, while the rate of a control group was 37.5% and the rate of the general prison population was 39.2% (4-6). Education not only can deter future criminals, but it can also discourage present criminals from re-offending and being incarcerated.

Lochner estimates that if the average educational level was raised by just one year, state-level arrests could be reduced by 11%. This would also show by reducing various individual crimes. Murder would be reduced by 30%, auto-theft by 20%, arson by 13%, and burglary and larceny by 6%. He

also presents Hjalmarsson's finding that youth in jail have a 25% less chance to graduate high school by 19 than those who are not arrested. Lochner also asserts that America's economy would save \$2 billion dollars in social costs related to crime if the high school graduation rate in this country went up by just one percent (9-12). The relationship between education and crime seems to be very evident, but there are other factors that many believe play a prominent role in the cause of crime.

Another aspect that is argued as a cause of crime is poverty and inequality, but before delving into that aspect it is necessary to look briefly at the relationship between poverty and education. Children in poverty can have an "actual or perceived inferior education" due to the lack of available qualified schools. Adolescents also have few quality jobs or role models to look up to. This can multiply the chance of children hanging out in the streets associating with gang members ("Poverty and Crime" 1). This deprivation of adequate jobs and schooling may also reduce the amount of children who return to school or work (Ludwig, Duncan and Hirschfield 655-666). If poverty can lead to an inadequate education, which can lead to criminal behavior, is poverty the link our society has been searching for?

Poverty was one of the first aspects ever thought to be related to criminal activity ("Poverty, Inequality, and Crime" 1). Many youth deal with this epidemic, as 17.4 % of American children lived in poverty in 2006. Growing up in poverty is like being exiled from society, it is being alienated in your own country (Krugman 1). One of the reasons that poverty has been associated with crime is because it is an opportunity for the poor to acquire materials that they could otherwise not afford. Poverty can also produce violent crimes because force is an easy way to get a large quantity of goods. Many impoverished criminals feel the hope of treasures is worth the possibility of being caught. Thus, poverty causes desire, and in turn, increases the crime rate ("Poverty and Crime" 1). Ludwig, Duncan and Hirschfield also believe that there is a possibility that most crime can be linked to high poverty neighborhoods. They believe that criminal behaviors can spread throughout a community, tempting others to commit crimes (655). In "Poverty and Crime" it states that if the number of citizens living in poverty was to increase by just one percent it would cause about 135 more crimes. Also, this one percent increase would result in 25 more violent crimes. A 1% rise in poverty would amount to a 2.16% rise in crime and a 2.57% rise in violent crime (4-6). Therefore, an increase in poverty directly increases crime rates in America.

Although many propose that poverty is crime's root cause, another view suggests that inequality is the main source of crime. Poverty is considered to be "absolute deprivation" while inequality is defined as "relative deprivation." In other words, "absolute deprivation" is the lack of the resources needed to maintain a quality life and "relative deprivation" is having a lack of resources compared to those in the same community. It is believed that each individual assesses inequality in their own way. Property crime is the most common crime correlated with inequality, as it allows individuals to balance the resources around them. Other individuals can grow a "deep anger" associated with inequality that produces violent behavior. This "deep anger" angle is becoming more prominent with many criminologists. A quote from Karl Marx sums up inequality. Marx says; "A house can be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies social demands. But if a palace rises beside the little house, the little house shrinks into a hut" ("Poverty, Inequality and Crime" 2).

William Barr, William Scott Dwyer, and Patrick Fagan all agree that poverty is not a cause of crime (5; "Part 2", 1; 3). Poverty does not directly cause crime; instead, it is a factor in the cause but, independently, it is not the root source (Barr 5). During the Great Depression, poverty levels were much higher than they are today, but crime actually declined (Barr 5; Fagan 3). From the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, income was on the rise and crime moved right along with it (Fagan 3; Dwyer "Part 2" 1). In 1990, the income level was much higher than in 1903, but the murder rate in 1990 was ten times higher than the murder rate in 1903, which was at 1 per 1000 inhabitants (Dwyer "Part 2" 1).

Another argument presented by Barr and Dwyer, inverts the poverty/crime relationship by stating that crime actually causes poverty. One of the premises for this argument focuses on businesses and how crime deters potential employers from establishing them (Barr 2; Dwyer "Crime and Poverty, Part 1"). One reason for this is that crime against a business reduces revenue, raising prices in impoverished neighborhoods because merchants have to make up for any losses caused by theft. These high prices also suppress the standard of living in the community, as the income in the community cannot keep pace with the rise in prices. Blacks living in high crime areas suffer from poverty because they pay higher prices for food and other goods than do whites in neighborhoods with less crime (Dwyer "Crime and Poverty, Part 1"). Crime also decreases the likelihood that an area sees improvement; Barr describes a

"small contractor who tried to rehabilitate inner-city housing for low income tenants. He had to give up because drug addicts would break in, rip out his improvements, and sell them for drug money" (2).

Although it is unclear whether poverty is a cause of crime or crime is a cause of poverty, another perspective on their causes involves family structure and its defragmentation (Barr 6). Murry, Williams, and Salekin believe changes in family composition over the past century have increased criminal activity in juveniles. They define a family's structure in two separate ways. The "intact family" is a family that consists of both biological parents and their biological children (87-88). The "broken home" is a family that consists of a single parent or any other arrangement without both paternal parents (87-88). The break-up of the family is the main source of generational poverty. One clear fact is that a large percentage of families residing in broken homes live under the poverty line, as broken homes account for 65% of poor families. This is especially true for those in which a female is the head of the household. About 44.5% of these female led households exist in poverty (Barr 6). Along with this, if the amount of these households rose by 13%, it would multiply the offense rate by two ("Can Married Parents Prevent Crime?" 3). Although the two main premises of the broken home argument are illegitimate births and single parent homes, there are a few other familial characteristics that can help predict delinquency. These characteristics include the amount of family members in the household, inconsistent parenting, family problems, and child neglect (Murry, Williams and Salekin 89).

One side of the broken home argument states that out-of-wedlock births and divorce can increase crime. A study found that between 1973 and 1995, out-of-wedlock births could account for almost 90% of the rise in violent crime. In 1959, when crime rates were a fraction of what they are today, only 15% of black children were born illegitimately, compared to 65% by 1990. Also, in 1960, only about 2% of white kids were born illegitimately, compared to 20% by 1990. In addition to this, children of married couples offend at a lower rate than do those from single or divorces parents ("Can Married Parents Prevent Crime?" 2-3).

The main perspective of the family structure argument is that children that reside in single parent households have a much higher chance of becoming involved in crime (Barr, 6; "Can Married Parents Prevent Crime?" 2; Dwyer "Crime and Poverty, Part 2;" Murry, Williams and Salekin 88-92; Tanner, 1-2). Murry, Williams and Salekin studied a sample of 442 delinquents in the juvenile justice system and found that only about 37% of them came from two parent

homes while 53% came from single-parent homes (92). Children in single parent homes also have a stronger tendency to join gangs, as most gang members come from broken homes (Barr 6; "Can Married Parents Prevent Crime?" 2). Single parent households may also induce violent behavior in juveniles (Barr 6; "Can Married Parents Prevent Crime?" 2; Dwyer "Crime and Poverty, Part 2"). Of all juvenile murderers, 75% were raised in single parent homes (Barr 6). Also, the best indicator of future violence in boys is growing up without a father (Dwyer "Crime and Poverty, Part 2"). The document entitled "Can Married Parents Prevent Crime?" states that children who do not reside in single parent homes are half as likely to have brandished a gun or knife in the past year (2). Single parent homes also affect the chance that a juvenile becomes incarcerated. Approximately 70% of juveniles that are doing time come from broken homes (Barr 6; Dwyer "Crime and Poverty, Part 2" 2; Tanner 1). Single parent homes do not only influence the child in the home, but they also influence the community. Most communities that have a high ratio of single parent families also carry high crime rates (Barr 6; Fagan 1).

Patrick Fagan believes that fractured families have a profound emotional affect on juveniles. Violent criminals from broken homes usually did not receive that adequate amount of love, affection or dedication from their parents. Rejection and conflict are often associated with broken families which can bring a sense of dismay and a diminishing of family life. This can lead to youth releasing their frustration on other people in the community. He also believes that future criminals do not have any notion of attachment to their parents or family (Fagan). Fagan does not limit this emotional trauma to single parent families, claiming that when parents get into a fight or are angry they do not treat all of their children equally (Fagan). They usually focus their rage on the children that they perceive cause more problems. He theorizes that this physical and emotional torment can create a delinquent. Despite this, Fagan's main focus is on those families that lack a father. He feels that they not only lose the father figure, but they also lose most of their mother (Fagan). The father helps ease the mother's parenting load. In the absence of the father, the mother must pull over-time, which usually leads to poor parenting. The father is also the main source of authority for many families; he is the main deterrent of criminal behavior. When children come from stable homes, the community that surrounds them has little affect on their development. Over 90% of children in high-crime areas from intact families do not develop into criminals. Contrary to this, children

living in high-crime neighborhoods that come from broken families only have a 10% chance of avoiding delinquency. In conclusion, if the population of children increases by 10%, juvenile crime would rise by 17% (2-6).

Each argument that has been proposed in regards to the cause of crime is but one piece of the big picture. The real cause of crime seems to be an assortment of the three. Each has good arguments, but none of them seem to be able to stand alone as the root cause. Evaluating each argument is crucial in trying to visualize the main source of criminal behavior.

The fact that education is much more important than it ever was can hear no argument. Having an education is almost a requirement to maintaining a good quality of life, because with education comes opportunity. All anyone needs is an opportunity to make something happen, but without an education, these opportunities dwindle. The inmate population being less educated is no surprise; one reason for this could be that many criminals are caught in the system at a very young age and they tend to relinquish ambitions of completing school as they go through the in-and-out process that many convicts have become accustomed to.

School is the site of socialization for children today. Two incomes are almost a necessity today. This creates a situation in which both parents have to work, putting teachers and counselors in control of a child's early learning. If children are guided properly and taught basic values in school it can only help them as they mature into adulthood. School is the first place of socialization and, because of the amount of time a child spends at school, it is also the main place of socialization.

Poor performance in school can lead to a lower possibility of graduating, which, in turn, leads to fewer opportunities. This causes crime to become highly tempting for potential criminals. For Fagan to say that future criminals have problems grasping moral concepts is ridiculous. It is more likely to say that they abide by moral concepts less, but the main reason for that is living a criminal lifestyle. A life of crime entails breaking moral values, which could be the cause for Fagan's assertion.

It is from personal experience that I can disagree with this statement. When I was a teenager, I was homeless for about four years. During that time, I committed more robberies than I can count. Lacking a home forced me to drop out of high school a couple of weeks into the 9th grade. I was just trying to survive through the trying times. I was not confused or thinking that my actions could be justified, I was out

getting mine. Nobody was going to feed me, so I fed myself. I knew what I was doing when I was living that lifestyle. I was not robbing people then going home and praying to God, seeing if He was proud of my actions. Why do criminals run from the police? It is because they know what they are doing is wrong and they do not want to go to jail.

Now, the premise that IQ is a source of crime may be very valid. As Weatherburn mentions, having a low IQ can lead to a meager school performance, which can then lead an individual down a long path of trouble. This may be the root cause of the education correlation, because it is the beginning of the eventual downfall of students. The ability to learn is the ability to finish school.

Another argument is that truancy is a prevalent source of crime. The loss of ambition is the cause of truancy; truancy cannot stand alone. Identifying the source for the loss of aspiration is a key component of proving the truancy argument. Even if a definite source was discovered that could be considered the source of crime, not truancy. When I was a teenager, I was already involved in crime before I dropped out of school. Of course, there are exceptions: there is always the well-off suburban kid who decides he is not going to school because he does not want to. Children that drop out for reasons besides crime could be highly susceptible to it, as idle hands are the devil's playground.

The relationship between education in prison and recidivism appears to be a very strong argument. Statistics can be misleading at times, but they do not lie. Participation in education lowers recidivism rates, so it may be a crime deterrent. If inmates are not going to educational classes or programs, they become more likely to commit crimes because prison is a criminal's institution of higher learning. Living entails learning, whether good or bad, right or wrong – living is learning. If prisoners do not learn school skills in prison then they will learn criminal skills.

If the average education level passed was raised by one level, then crime would also decrease. As previously mentioned, with education comes opportunity, and with opportunity comes a sense of security. If a person is working a job that can actually support both the potential criminal and their family, then crime is not as tempting. An increase in education causes an increase in productivity, therefore leading to less criminal activity.

Poverty has a definite effect on education, because impoverished neighborhoods and districts do not have high-quality schools. Schools in the projects are run down and controlled by students, which is not true of schools in affluent neighborhoods. Again,

there are exceptions, but the underlying premise that schools in poorer neighborhoods are of less quality than schools in wealthy, or well-off, neighborhoods cannot be disputed. The rapper known as The Game speaks of inequality and the inferior education that is bred by it through saying the following:

Thinking how they spend 30 million dollars
on airplanes
When there's kids starving
Pac is gone, and Brenda still throwing babies
in the garbage
I wanna know what's going on like I hear
Marvin [Gay]
No school books
They use their wood to build coffins (The
Game).

One of the main reasons an individual commits crime is because it gives them an opportunity to balance resources without possessing the adequate skills to do so legitimately. This is especially true in impoverished communities with a high crime rate. Everyone in society wants to look good and looking good entails being paid well. Everyone in this country, regardless of class, is tries to make a buck while they still can.

The life expectancy in impoverished neighborhoods is also much shorter; living a good life, while you still have a life, is very important. One can assert that a low life expectancy comes from being involved in crime, but those who make this assertion have never been in these types of neighborhoods: bullets do not choose targets. They fly where they are shot and innocent school children, infants, and parents have been lost to many a stray bullet. The reason this short life expectancy is really intriguing is because these individuals are living in the present. They are trying to survive and live now, because tomorrow is not promised. This feeling of deprivation leads to a cease of the fear of being caught.

Those who believe that crime is contagious also seem to be on to something. When children, especially teenagers, see others in their community reaping the benefits of crime, it becomes that much more interesting. When people who grew up just like them, and come from where they come from, are making good money, driving nice cars, and getting pretty women, this is like waiving a cheeseburger in a starving African child's face. They are going to do what they have to do to get that cheeseburger. The poorer a person is, the hungrier a person is – both literally and figuratively – which can lead to higher crime rates. I used to call the time of a robbery “lunch time,” because I was a predator searching for a meal.

Deprivation is a main source of crime, whether from poverty or inequality; this is made apparent by examining crime in suburban children. Some middle-class children shoplift and steal because their parents would not buy them a new video game, or the new shoes that everyone else has. The feeling of being deprived of something can cause a person to resort to an alternative means of reaching equality. Imagine the amount by which that feeling is multiplied when, instead of being deprived of some things, a person is deprived of nearly everything. As mentioned earlier, objects begin to look like lunch meat. The inner-city is often correlated with high crime rates and by simply looking at the structure of many big cities, it is possible to see how inequality can bring about this feeling. Compton and Watts are both a part of Los Angeles, but then again so are Beverly Hills and Hollywood. If poverty was not related to crime at all, why don't places like Beverly Hills have high crime rates? This inequality and deprivation is why children start off committing property crime; once they realize that physical force can get them much more, much faster, they then graduate to violent crime.

The final view on the cause of crime is family structure, or the destruction of that structure. Family composition in America has distinctively changed in past decades. Barr makes a great point as he believes that generational poverty can be accounted to the fall of the family (6). Illegitimate births also increase the number of single-parents, which has been directly correlated to crime. This is the reason why illegitimate birth rates can also mirror crime rates.

The reasons that single parent households are often associated with crime are vast and very convincing. First of all, being a single parent can increase the chance of living in poverty because with one income it is much harder to save money. This leads to families living pay check to pay check, which also limits the possibility of saving. When all a single parent has is right in front of them, it is hard to establish a future driven attitude. Secondly, a single parent has to work harder than a couple, because single parents lack that second income. This directly decreases the amount of time that the parent can adequately supervise and train a child, or children. This can also cause the adolescent to search for a family outside of family, and this family usually ends up being a gang. They are striving for that security blanket that is missing in a household with a busy parent. The less a family is present for a child, the more that child yearns for a family. The reason that single parent households affect a community is simply that the more under-supervised children in

a neighborhood, the more children will misbehave. Even when coming from an intact family children are pressured by peers and the environment to engage in the same activities.

Lastly, a reason not aforementioned, is that some single-parents find the stress of trying to survive so overwhelming that they resort to drugs as an escape. My mother is a single mother of three children and she fell into this trap. The fact she was on drugs took away from her ability to provide for us and also reduced income because of the money that went to drugs. Her inability to provide brought out the man in me. I was only twelve years old when I made up my mind: I was the man of the house and I had to care for my family. My own involvement in crime as a juvenile was directly influenced by our family's poverty and my mother's inability to escape it.

To be completely honest, one must recognize that the vast majority of criminal activity is centered in inner-city ghettos. The real cause of crime is a combination of the three arguments that manifest an unhealthy environment for children. The first aspect of this chain of events is illegitimate births. The biological parents of an illegitimate child may not have even had a relationship prior to conception. Even if the parents did have a relationship, it may not have been serious which cannot be said of married couples. This directly creates the possibility of more single parent households. Single parent households have a greatly enhanced chance of being impoverished and many are born into poverty themselves. Escaping poverty as single parent is a difficult task to handle. Living in a poor neighborhood escalates the chance that a child is placed in an inferior school. Along with this, Paul Krugman, a Nobel Prize winning economist, reported that a story in The Financial Times claims that poverty harms the brain. Poverty can lead to a growth of stress, and these hormones "impair neural development" and the development of language and memory (1). If poverty can reduce a child's learning abilities and increase the chance that they are placed in a bad school, then poverty can lead to poor school performance. Poor school performance, as mentioned before, results in diminished opportunities to escape poverty. This enhances the temptation of crime in the minds of impoverished youth. This is the reason that these arguments are actually a chain of events that eventually cause criminal behavior.

The first two verses of Tupac Shakur's hit song "Dear Mama" portray how each of these aspects are interrelated. He raps:

When I was a young me and my mama had beef
Seventeen years old kicked out on the streets

Though back at the time, I never thought I'd see
 her face
 Ain't a woman alive that could take my
 mama's place
 Suspended from school; and scared to go home,
 I was a fool with the big boys, breakin all the
 rules
 I shed tears with my baby sister
 Over the years we was poorer than the other little
 kids
 And even though we had different daddys, the
 same drama
 When things went wrong we'd blame mama
 I reminice on the stress I caused, it was hell
 Huggin' on my mama from a jail cell
 And who'd think in elementary?
 Heeey! I see the penitentiary, one day
 And runnin from the police, that's right
 Mama catch me, put a whoopin to my backside
 And even as a crack fiend, mama
 You always was a black queen, mama
 I finally understand for a woman it ain't easy
 tryin to raise a man
 You always was committed
 A poor single mother on welfare, tell me how ya
 did it
 There's no way I can pay you back
 But the plan is to show you that I understand
 You are appreciated...
 Now ain't nobody tell us it was fair
 No love for my daddy cause the coward wasn't
 there
 He passed away and I didn't cry, cause my anger
 wouldn't let me feel for a stranger
 They say I'm wrong and I'm heartless, but all
 along
 I was lookin for a father he was gone
 I hung around with the Thugs, and even though
 they sold drugs
 They showed a young brother love
 I moved out and started really hangin
 I needed money of my own so I started slangin
 I ain't guilty cause, even though I sell rocks
 It feels good puttin money in your mailbox
 I love payin rent when the rents due
 I hope ya got the diamond necklace that I sent to
 you
 Cause when I was low you was there for me
 And never left me alone because you cared for me
 And I could see you comin home after work late
 You're in the kitchen tryin to fix us a hot plate
 Ya just workin with the scraps you was given
 And mama made miracles every Thanksgivin
 But now the road got rough, you're alone
 You're tryin to raise two bad kids on your own
 And there's no way I can pay you back
 But my plan is to show you that I understand
 You are appreciated (Shakur).

These verses describe the ways in which being a
 single mother can force both mother and child into
 situations that they do not desire.

Overall, a long history of family dysfunction,
 generational poverty and a lack of education have
 slowly given birth to an environment and attitude
 that plagues high-crime communities. Biologists
 believe in evolution and an adaption of traits to
 environment. This is no different; children adapt to
 and eventually become products of their environment.
 When boys, some not even teenagers yet, are forced
 into the role of being the man of the house, a sense
 of pride comes along with it. The man-child becomes
 the protector of the family and its primary source of
 income. When children are the head of a household, it
 forces them to mature at a faster rate than those who
 are allowed to have a childhood. When children learn
 adult values, they act on them, because they feel that
 it is the grown thing to do and in these neighborhoods
 the grown thing to do is to be tough. Also, the lack of
 a single parent's ability to supervise their children can
 also create a situation in which children from broken
 homes have their own children, as teenagers, who will
 also be raised in single parent homes.

In addition to this, crime-plagued
 neighborhoods instill bad habits into children. One
 of the most important rules in the 'hood is the code
 of silence: "snitches get stitches." In an attempt to
 protect their children from other predators in the
 neighborhood, parents teach them that snitching
 is wrong. When I was about four or five years old,
 there was a man next door who was beating up his
 girlfriend. The police came, and I having witnessed
 the incident, told the cop he was the one who hit her.
 When my mom found, I got the biggest whooping of
 my life. She told me to keep my mouth shut and to
 mind my own business. Situations such as this have
 the potential to legitimize crime in a child's mind,
 therefore creating an environment and community
 that is numb to crime and violence. Criminal behavior
 is not looked down upon by many people in these
 communities, and being a big-time criminal can even
 create a type of celebrity status in the neighborhood.

A child can only learn what he or she is
 taught. The saddest part of the cycle is that innocent
 children are taught that the 'hood is all they have.
 Every human seems to have a need to assimilate with
 others around them. The common attitude among
 members is that the only way out is in a box, either
 a pine box or a concrete box. Thus, the "live fast, die
 young" attitude encourages youth to engage in crime,
 because that is what the role models around them
 are doing. This also limits the benefit of getting an
 education and reduces the possibility of working for a

living. Despite this, materialism is another big facet of these communities and when undereducated, angry youth are deprived of the goods that create a quality life they will survive by any means necessary. The basic idea in the ghetto is the following: "my mother never made it out, her mother never made it out, all of my friends' mothers never made it out, so why am I any different?"

Live fast, die young. Live slowly, and die old. The fracture of family, generational poverty, and a lack of education have all increased the rate of maturity and pace of life in poor communities. The environment and attitude that this fast pace creates decreases the chance that an individual can escape poverty, while increasing the chance that they become involved in crime. Though there are exceptions, each of these individual inadequacies can force a person

to be a couple of steps behind those who do not face them. When an individual is faced with any two of these tribulations, it can create a situation where the individual is a lap behind from the start of life's race. When all three are combined into one, the individual is that much behind the competition: this is America today. If all three of these aspects are allowed to fester and grow in a community for generations, they create an environment and attitude that interferes with the normal ability to grow and become a productive member of society, thus breeding criminal behavior. When starting a race laps behind the competition, it takes an amazing person to defeat the odds and make up the difference. There are extraordinary people that come from the projects, but the fact is, it is hard to go from worst to first – and this is the exact attitude that plagues inner-city ghettos today.

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