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## Are Debtors Prisons Back?

This [New York Times article](#) and [this episode of comedian John Oliver's TV show](#) illustrate a municipal practice which combines the entanglements of Kafka with the debtor prisons of Dickens. The result: even greater stressors placed disproportionately on the poor, especially poor people of color.

Here's how it works: Police go to great lengths to bust people for parking, traffic or other minor violations. When those ticketed are unable to pay the fines and fees right away, the town or county contracts with for-profit probation companies to collect the debt. The companies add "service fees" and penalties. The debt grows to hundreds, even thousands of dollars.

Paying it off grows more and more burdensome and unmanageable. Soon arrest warrants are issued. It's a way for municipalities to generate revenues without raising taxes and companies to reap profits on the backs of the most vulnerable. Families are being ripped apart as a result.

### *Poor Land in Jail as Companies Add Huge Fees*

By ETHAN BRONNER JULY 2, 2012

