

Teen-crime commercials create inaccurate picture

OUR OPINION: Racial depictions of "criminals" don't reflect the reality

Ever since voters approved a "tough" juvenile-crime bill last November, teen-age crime in Lane County appears to be on the rise.

Two Willamette High students were arrested for shooting Aaron Iturra in his garage, and a student at Thurston High shot another student while sitting at a stop light. One student stabbed another in a high school hallway; three teenagers robbed a SELCO credit union; two boys started a fire at Springfield High School, and last week two teen-agers were charged with an arson fire at Willamette High School.

At least here, the threat of being tried as an adult for these crimes hasn't proven itself to be an effective deterrent. Apparently to hammer home the message, the state has been running a series of tough-on-juvenile-crime commercials aimed at scaring Oregon's youth out of killing their classmates and burning down their alma maters.

So why isn't it working? Well, perhaps the commercials are speaking to the wrong audience.

The 30-second spots feature an authoritarian, white male police officer informing teenagers of the punishment that will be meted out to them should they choose to break the law. In between the visuals of the officer, however, young men stand in jail cells as the doors slam shut with an incarcerating clang. The shots of these young men paint a disturbing picture.

Almost all of these "criminals" are African-American or Hispanic. Thus, not only are the ads inherently racist, but they are also inaccurate. All of the teen-agers who have made Eugene headlines with their alleged crimes in the past year have been white. All of them.

What is most upsetting, however, is how not-shocking the commercials are.

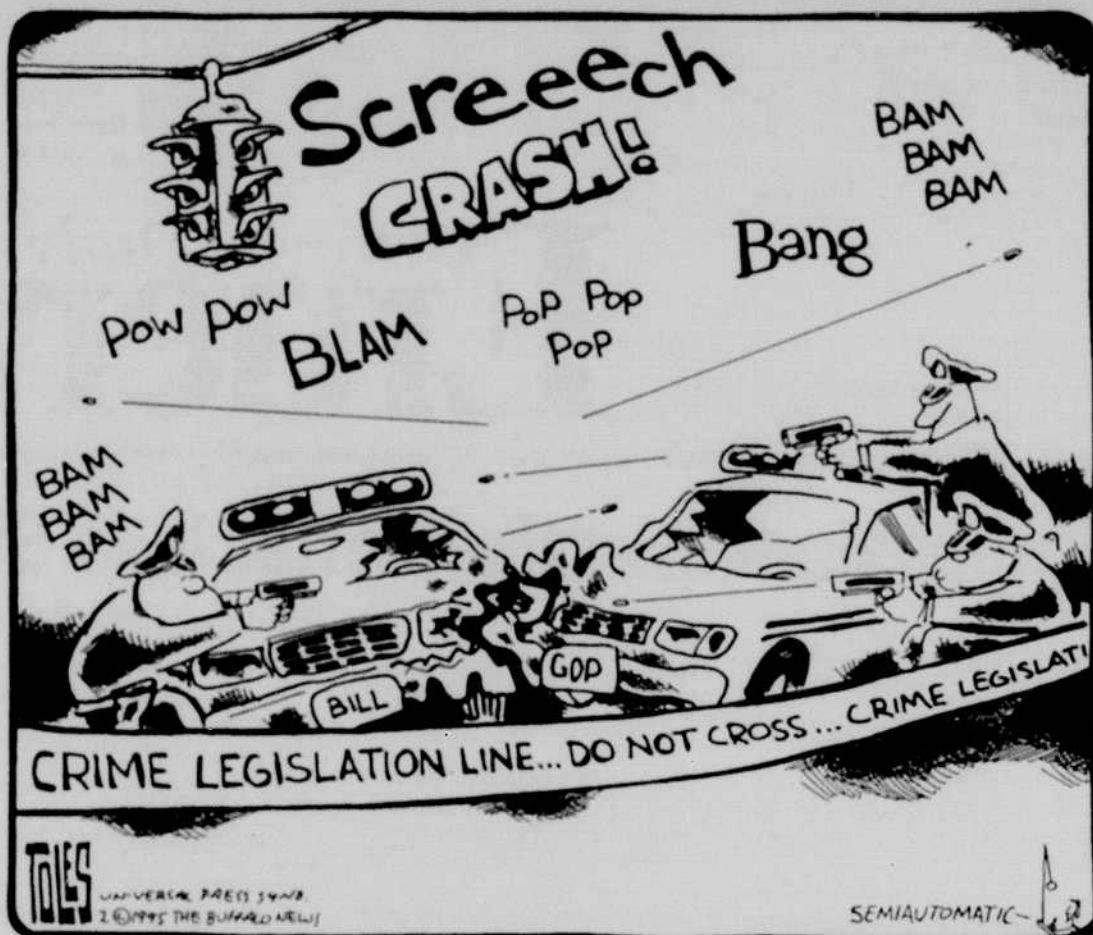
News-media images of African-American men frequently portray them as drug-selling gang bangers or imprisoned criminals. We have become so comfortable with these images, that seeing young, black men behind bars seems commonplace; it reflects what we have come to know as reality.

Meanwhile, Eugene laments its rise in gang activity and white residents stay on the lookout for black gang members hanging out in their neighborhoods.

But the state's scare-tactics don't reflect the truth; they only fuel racial stereotypes.

Tougher crime laws, in and of themselves, do little to prevent teen-agers from committing crimes. If Oregonians want to curb the increase in teen-age violence, they must begin to look at the causes of antisocial behavior in young people.

Feeling unloved and ignored at home while being educated in a school system that erects financial barriers to extracurricular activities will take its toll. Oregonians need to look toward prevention rather than reaction. And white Oregonians might start by taking a closer look at their children's lives.



Marching band plays amid undue apathy

While many football fans get up to grab a pretzel and a soda at half-time, the Oregon Marching Band grabs its instruments and heads for the football field.

The Fighting Ducks of football are not the only team to begin an enduring season of rises and falls on 100 yards of Autzen AstroTurf. Every fall the band also prepares for the sometimes-long football season.

I was a member of the band for four years. My membership included trips to the "Toilet Bowl" (Oregon State in Corvallis) and — the pinnacle of my band tenure — the Rose Bowl in January 1995.

After spending that much time entertaining fans, I had this odd notion that the band's field shows and grandstand tunes were appreciated by the fans.

But I have served my time, and now, with my student tickets, I see the games from a fan's perspective. I have realized the band is recognized and appreciated ... by some. But the majority of the fans don't know what the band is, how much time the band spends in rehearsal or how hard the band members work.

Being in the band, the biggest student organization on campus, was one of the best things I've done at the University.

I met and quickly became friends with many different people. I was able to attend all the home games, and I had a pretty good seat between the 30- and 40-yard lines.

We went to Cal-Berkeley and to Washington State, and to Pasadena for the illustrious Rose Bowl. We even played at a Ducks game in Husky stadium, with a side trip to a Seattle Seahawks halftime show.

We marched in the pouring rain from morning until late afternoon at Oregon State, Autzen stadium and multiple exhibition shows. We were drenched like everybody else, but we also practiced in the rain, endured the cold and wind and fell in the mud.

During my first two years of this "fun," the band practiced on the hammer-throw field, near Hayward Field. That's hammer-throw — as in divots and mud holes larger than the pies you made as a kid. After about 5 p.m., we had to rehearse in the dark because the field had no lighting — hence, rain-soaked clothes and mud-covered shoes. And our instruments were none-too-happy about the moisture.

During my last two years, we moved up to the library field. Granted, the lighting was better, but we had to deal with complaints from people who said they were unable to study in

the library because of the music. Who should be studying at 4 in the afternoon on a Friday?!

So if it wasn't one problem, it was another. But despite numb fingers and blistered lips, the band still practiced without (too much) complaining, and the results were great shows seen at Saturday football games.

We sacrificed a great deal of our time to prepare for the shows, and some fans showed their thanks. While in Pasadena for the Rose Bowl, we played at several New Year's Eve alumni gigs. These people appreciated us so much that we extended our playing time to make them happy. In doing that, we missed our opportunity to ring in the New Year out of uniform.

But the band does its best to keep the fans happy ... even for those who don't stick around for the halftime shows or who haven't quite made it into the stands before the game starts.

Sitting in the student section, I notice several paying "customers" leaving at halftime and several students staying. In the past, however, the band has usually played only one game facing the student sections. Yet, very few students join in the cheer when the band plays a grandstand tune, and even fewer seem to know what is going on around them.

At the University vs. Pacific game (Oct. 7), I realized I was practically the only student in my section who cheered. I don't know whether that was because I had been in the band and knew the cheers, or because none of the other students cared to show their enthusiasm and support for our Ducks.

I'm confused. How can anyone refuse to partake in the shout for a touchdown, with "Stick It In?" Especially when we've been able to do it a lot more in the past two years.

And who else but a 200-person band is better at starting "The Wave" in a packed stadium?

So yes, we build enthusiasm and we create support for our team. In different ways (musically vs. athletically) we work just as hard, and we are just as talented. Yet we're still trying to achieve the same enthusiasm and support.

The football team is gaining a lot of attention this week for Homecoming. But amid the noise, the band members will be around also. They don't get a bear hug when they score a touchdown or a pat on the butt when they make a tackle. But the band could use an occasional pat on the back.

And from where I sit, they certainly deserve it.

Kim Weiss is the associate entertainment editor for the Emerald.

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