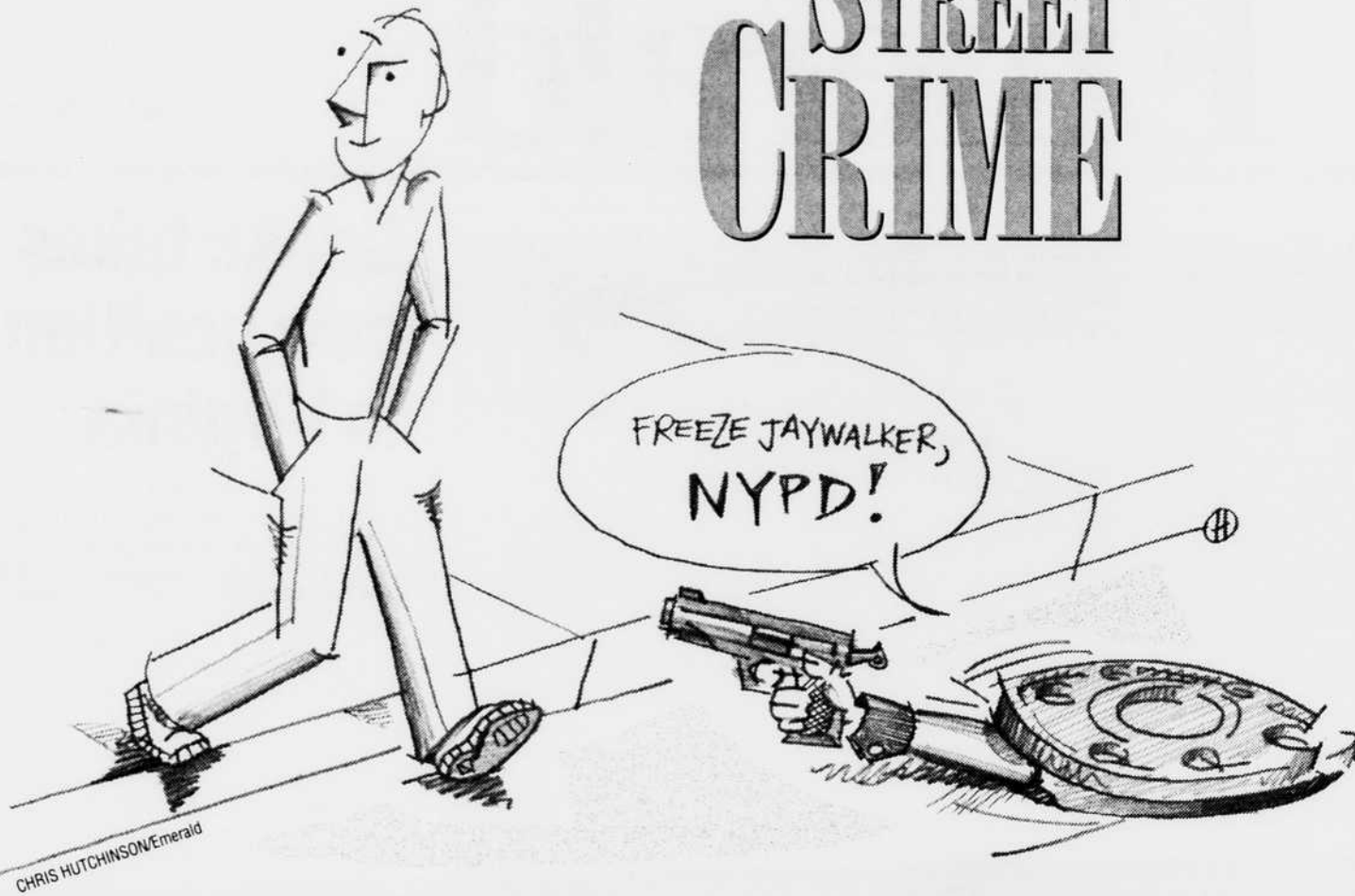


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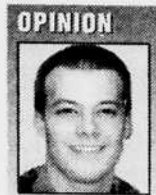


Too many communities are impinging on personal liberties and chasing jaywalkers in the vain hope of stopping petty crime

A great crime wave has struck this nation. It has nothing to do with drugs or gangs of juveniles. For that matter, it is unrelated to the rampant theft and environmental destruction carried out by major corporations.

No, the greatest crime problem in America's cities is jaywalking.

Don't take my word for it. Authorities throughout the nation have announced they intend to crack down on this dangerous activity.



Mike Schmierbach

In Portland, one of the first announcements of the former police chief was that he was going to start taking jaywalking seriously. After all, if you ticket people for illegally crossing the street, you just might scare them out of snatching a purse. (Conversely, of course, you might empty their pockets to the point where a little petty theft seems warranted.)

The funny thing is, people don't really jaywalk in Portland. Up in the Rose City, pedestrians calmly wait at lights and drivers politely wave as foot traffic makes its way through the intersection. About the only jaywalking I ever witnessed was running cross country, when waves of malnourished stick figures would dart their way about the Park Blocks.

I suppose that may be why the proposed crackdown never really amounted to anything. But while the plan died, the idea didn't go away. New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is currently pushing to end jaywalking in New York.

Giuliani's efforts — which not only include commanding police to issue a \$50 fine for illegally crossing the street but also feature barriers placed throughout midtown Manhattan — follow his campaign against subway turnstile jumpers.

Having recently stumbled into New York, I'm inclined to think the mayor may be onto an effective fund-raising technique, if nothing else. Unlike Portland, New York defines its character through its flouting of traffic rules. Swarms of people collide with fleets of taxis at every intersection in a cacophony of horns and curses.

If New York cops were inclined to give out a bunch of tickets, the city coffers would probably burst in a hurry. As it turns out, however, the police don't seem especially interested in chasing down jaywalkers. Elizabeth Kolbert, a columnist for The New York Times, quoted one officer as saying, "Even the cops don't agree with this nonsense."

Perhaps the officers don't have the energy to chase down jaywalkers after pursuing turnstile hoppers through the subway system. At least the people underground stole \$1.50 from the New York transit system; jaywalkers can only be accused of slowing down a few cabs and possibly increasing fares a notch.

Or perhaps the cops realize what Giuliani and others haven't been able to figure out — ticketing jaywalkers and other petty criminals isn't an effective way to use police resources or stop crime.

The issue isn't isolated to cities like New York and Portland. Even in Eugene, where one at times wonders if the police do have anything better to do, a series of proposals have upheld the mentality that the root of social problems is petty crime.

Recently passed laws include the ban on dogs and skateboards along 13th Avenue and the closure of the park on 14th Avenue. Both these laws were based on the theory that any time young people gather, they make trouble for local businesses.

There is no question these actions have pleased many local companies. The police state is always appealing to those it protects.

The real question is whether proposals to universally harass "undesirables" because some of them might make trouble protect the community as a whole. Crime

has declined on the subways under Giuliani's reign; drugs are undoubtedly a little harder to purchase on 13th Avenue these days. But the eventual effect of proposals like these is problematic.

For one thing, such laws are often followed by even more draconian regulations. In New York, the merely comical subway and jaywalking rules are accompanied by plans to install video monitors at many public areas — such cameras are already in place in Washington Square Park. In Eugene, the newest plan is to start a daytime curfew for Eugene students.

Both of these plans dramatically increase the ability of the city to control individual behavior. An increasing number of people will be caught in an ever larger social net, while a smaller and smaller percentage of actual criminals are caught.

An additional problem exists as well. Such laws are not only troublesome because they require massive restrictions on social liberties to work, but because they also have the potential to not work at all.

In New York, dozens of police officers are being forced to man the midtown barricades and hand out tickets to jaywalkers. Meanwhile, these officers are not investigating serious crimes or watching for more significant offenses. A similar scenario could occur if high numbers of police hours in Eugene must be dedicated to hunting down high schoolers who are busy skipping trigonometry.

I suppose the real purpose of such laws is to give the impression that city government is acting to protect the people while in reality it busies itself looking out for the chamber of commerce. Given that the companies are the major source of campaign funding, I suppose we can look forward to more laws strictly regulating jaywalking. If that occurs, perhaps one day we'll witness the sight of a swarm of police officers chasing down a high school cross country team.

Mike Schmierbach is the editorial editor for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protect rare species

Currently, the Fender's blue butterfly, Willamette daisy and Kincaid's lupine are in the process of being listed as "threatened" (encouraging efforts to prevent the species from becoming endangered). This is a small victory in the battle being waged against endangered species. Every year 50,000 are lost. On the North American continent, 480 species have become extinct since the Declaration of Independence.

In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was enacted for the purpose of protecting threatened and endangered species. Currently, there is an attack against the act backed by millions of dollars from agribusiness, logging and mining companies. There are many restricted areas that wealthy business corporations would love to have access to so they can continue to exploit.

Now, grassroots groups like OSPIRG are working hard to educate people about the importance of strengthening the act. The reality is, without the act wealthy corporations would increase their right to access areas, disregarding the various wildlife and ecosystems they encounter.

For Valentine's Day, the University chapter of OSPIRG had an event entitled "Have a Heart for Endangered Species." We talked to people about the importance and urgency of the act and let the public know how important this issue is to so many groups. I strongly urge everyone to "Have a Heart" and support the act that helps preserve thousands of species every year.

Henry Oldham
 OSPIRG

Evaluate faculty

Feb. 16 marks an important date for students and faculty. This is the date that the professor evaluations for spring term 1998 come out. The evaluations bring together a coalition of both students and professors, with the intent of fostering cohesiveness. Students are able to give their instructors valuable feedback, while influencing and shaping course curriculum. The intent of the evaluations is not to punish or instill fear among faculty. The hope is that both students and instructors will come together to produce a healthy and harmonious classroom environment.

Students have always questioned professor evaluations. How will this help? Do professors even listen to what I have to say? Does my one evaluation even matter? These are the questions that most often come up from students. Our answer to these questions is, yes, you do matter. Every time a student thoughtfully fills out an evaluation, the whole student body benefits. This is the key theme that needs recognition. The result of such deliberate student action produces thorough evaluations. Everyone should be proud of these evaluations, for it's an accomplishment that everyone has taken part in.

Brian Fitzgerald
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