

Broken windows policing in Portland must end

BY ELLIOTT YOUNG, CRYSTAL MALONEY AND JAMES OFSINK
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNISTS

Trump's new zero-tolerance policy for immigrants is based on the idea that if a law exists it must be enforced 100 percent. In contrast, Mayor Ted Wheeler announced that he did not want Portland Police engaged in suppressing the #OccupyICEPDX protest – demonstrating there is discretion in how police can enforce the laws.

A stunning report by The Oregonian just revealed that more than half the arrests in Portland last year were of homeless people, the vast majority of them (86 percent) were for nonviolent offenses. One quarter of those arrests were for procedural violations like missing court or violating parole. The statistics adjusted by population show that homeless people are 162 times more likely to be arrested than non-homeless people in Portland.

Portland is a very progressive city by most measures, and yet the debates over the homeless population and crime have led to calls for the kinds of aggressive policing that have been discredited across the country. A recent guest column in The Oregonian by people touting their progressive credentials advocated for Broken Windows policing to handle what they perceive as an increase in violent crime in the city. The problem is that they are wrong, both about the levels of crime in the city and the ways to reduce violent crime.

Policing of low-level offenses in Portland harms our community and leads to the current crisis of mass incarceration. Demanding “livability” for the “good people” has always meant targeting the poor and communities of color. The wholesale caging of human beings is not a cost-effective way to deal with our disinvestment in social services. It is also inhumane.

It is telling that the title of The Oregonian column was “Portland must stand up to predators.” Invoking the term “predator” is eerily reminiscent of the famous “super-



PHOTO BY KAIA SAND
Early morning on Friday, Feb. 2, Portland Police, Rapid Response and Portland park rangers conducted a sweep of the newly-formed homeless encampment, Village of Hope.

predator” term coined by criminologist John DiIulio in the 1990s. DiIulio has since repudiated the term and its impacts by portraying youth of color as animals. The purportedly “progressive” guest columnists in Northeast Portland have trotted out these long discredited labels to call for more policing at a time when the violent crime rate has been plummeting both nationally and in Portland since the early 1990s.

The broken windows theory developed by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in 1982 has since been widely repudiated by criminologists who have shown that data do not support the theory. In 2005, critical theorist Bernard Harcourt demonstrated that the link between neighborhood disorder and purse snatching, assault, rape and burglary disappeared when controlling for poverty and race. In 2015, using a big data set from Boston, criminologists Daniel Tumminelli O'Brien and Robert J. Sampson found no correlation between the kinds of “public denigration” offenses targeted by broken

windows policing and violent crime. Even Kelling, one of the intellectual authors of the broken windows theory, argues today that his theory was misapplied in New York City's stop-and-frisk policies that overwhelmingly targeted communities of color. New York City has since abandoned stop-and-frisk, citing its racism and ineffectiveness.

The basic argument by those who continue to advocate “quality of life” policing is that it has worked to reduce crime. The guest columnists parrot this position, contending that such policies “transformed the city from a cesspool of crime into the infinitely more livable place that it is today.” Let's leave aside the offensive description of New York as a cesspool for the moment. Violent crime declined all across the country in the 1990s, in New York City and in cities that did not adopt Broken Windows policing. It's just bad social science to attribute causation to a correlation when the evidence suggests otherwise.

Broken windows policing in Portland not

only leads to dramatic over-policing of homeless Portlanders, but also of black Portlanders. The fact that black Portlanders are over-policed has been well documented by the Portland Police Bureau, the MacArthur Foundation, the Portland Tribune and Street Roots. For example, in Portland, black people are charged at 27 times the rate of white people for spitting, eight times the rate of white people for jaywalking and 15 times the rate of white people for failure to cross the street at a right angle. Similarly, black people are charged by the district attorney at 4.6 times the rate of whites and the specialty units of the Police continue to stop black drivers at 12 times the rate of whites. These are precisely the kind of pretextual stops that are the hallmarks of broken windows policing, and they have led to a much higher rate of incarceration for black Portlanders.

Rather than more police, we need to direct more resources to housing the homeless and keeping the poor housed in our community. Additionally, we need more resources to provide mental health and addiction treatment outside of the criminal justice system. Why are we hiring more police to harass homeless people instead of using those funds to help them?

Talk of “predators” is a call to dehumanize targeted members in our community. We must answer the social ills of poverty, mental illness and addiction with compassion and care, not hate and more police.

Elliott Young is Professor of History at Lewis & Clark College, Crystal Maloney is an attorney and James Ofsink is a former Progressive Party candidate for Oregon Senate. Young, Maloney and Ofsink live in Southeast Portland and together have met repeatedly over the past year with Portland City Council staffers, pushing commissioners to end the city's practice of broken windows policing.

Did you **serve** in the **Armed Forces** and are **experiencing** or at **risk** of **becoming homeless?**

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ZINKE DID WHAT???
—Jay Ward

Oregon's wildlife, like this juvenile saw-whet owl, found in the Badlands Wilderness in central Oregon, rely on our public lands to thrive. Unfortunately, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke is working to remove protections on our public lands that safeguard wildlife and water. To learn more about how you can help protect our public lands and wildlife, visit www.oregonwild.org

Photo by: Gaby Diaz