

# POLICE DATA ON RACE IN LANE COUNTY DIFFICULT TO TRACK

**A** blistering report by the U.S. Justice Department finds that “the Baltimore Police Department for years has hounded black residents who make up most of the city’s population, systematically stopping, searching and arresting them, often with little provocation or rationale,” *The New York Times* reports.

Racial bias here in Lane County is trickier to track. In the wake of recent Black Lives Matter protests and police shootings of African-Americans, *EW* contacted the Eugene Police Department, the Lane County Sheriff’s Office and Springfield police to get an idea of how race is tracked in this area in interactions with law enforcement.

The answer is that it’s not tracked very much at all.

As of July 2015, Lane County has an African-American population of just 1.1 percent, compared to 13.3 percent nationally, and Oregon is 2.1 percent African-American. According to a July report by The Sentencing Project, in Oregon one in 21 of all African-American adult males was in prison in 2014.

In its analysis of U.S. Justice Department data, The Sentencing Project found that African-Americans are incarcerated more than whites by a ratio of 5.6 to 1, slightly higher than the national average.

Here in Lane County, Sgt. Carrie Carver with the Lane County Sheriff’s office says that the sheriff’s office doesn’t track race when it comes to arrests and police contacts.

*EW* put in a public records request with Springfield for its contacts, arrests and incarcerations, which the police department is in the process of responding to, however interim Police Chief Rick Lewis tells *EW*, while arrests and use of force are tracked, if a person is pulled over or police make a contact but don’t arrest or cite the person that information is not tracked.

Lewis says that from his perspective, if people are pulled over for a traffic stop but not cited, being asked what race they are might seem offensive or lead to the impression a ticket is given or not given based on race.

In Eugene, EPD’s public information officer Melinda McLaughlin says the police officially began testing an iPhone app on Dec. 1, 2015, that would collect traffic stop data. She says, “A group of 12 of our officers collected data for six months to test the app.”

After six months, McLaughlin says EPD assessed the app for needed changes and continued testing for another six months. “We will next decide how to roll out the collection technology for the rest of the department. The project in 2015 focused solely on data collection technology as the first step.”

And according to the most recent 2013 police use of force review by the Eugene police auditor, “We found no pattern among individual officers using force against minorities.”

Eric Richardson, Eugene-Springfield NAACP president, says the issue of tracking race has kind of gotten the runaround, but he knows EPD Chief Pete Kerns has it “on his radar and moving in that direction.”

Richardson also points to House Bill 2002, which passed in the Oregon Legislature in July 2015, as another positive step. The bill directs law enforcement agencies to adopt written policies and procedures prohibiting profiling by Jan. 1, 2016.

At the same time, Richardson says, “There’s a lot to be desired when it comes to the interactions with people of color.” And he’d like to see race “as an issue that gets dealt with promptly as opposed to being on the bottom of the pile.”

He says that the juvenile justice system tracks race a little better, “and if we go by that there is disproportionate contact” locally and statewide. ■

# SLANT

- While we welcome the recent **re-embracing of long-form journalism**, we weren’t impressed by *The Oregonian*’s recent and massive “Firestorm” piece. Fire is a huge concern in Oregon, but *The O* put thousands of words into laying blame on how the Malheur National Forest attacked last year’s Canyon Complex fires on Oregon’s east side, accusing firefighters of being timid, rather than examining how climate change and a lack of fire let those fires get so big in the first place. The life of a firefighter — usually a young man or woman — is more valuable than anyone’s home or ranch. Aug. 13, a member of Lolo Hotshots, Justin Beebe, 26, was killed fighting a fire in Nevada. Did *The O* miss the point? Aggressive fire suppression over the years caused these large blazes. We need to care for our forests better, not ask young people to take more chances than they already are to protect private property built into forestland.

- Those dark-suited men and their security system shouldn’t scare anyone away from the **terrific art show** hung this week in the Wayne L. Morse Courthouse at 405 E. 8th Avenue. Security takes a few minutes, requiring a photo ID and a walk through a metal detector — no cameras allowed. Kirsten Shende hung the show, bringing creative talent to the expanses of white that architect Thom Mayne designed into the 10-year-old building. A reception is planned for Oct. 5, 4 to 6 pm for the artists Jon Jay Cruson, Lynn Isen Peterson, Mike Pease, Deigh Bates, Michael Thompson, James Earl and Lynda Lanker. See Aug. 11 *EW* for Alex V. Cipolle’s story.

- **Phil Barnhart’s race to hold his seat** in the Oregon House is one not to be overlooked. Representing parts of both Lane and Linn counties, he nearly always has a quiet but critical contest. Chair of the House revenue committee, Phil is one of those public servants Oregon and Eugene is lucky to claim, going back to his beginning on the 4J school board. In the races in play this fall, his is listed as “lean Dem” not “likely Dem.” If you want to volunteer to knock on doors or donate a dime, here’s a good place to do it.

- Warning! **Donald Trump is coming to Oregon** Aug. 31. His plans seem rather loose, but so far they include a fundraiser in Portland and a rally somewhere else. We don’t want him here, especially after reading Nicholas Kristof in *The New York Times* Sunday, Aug. 14. Kristof, an *Oregonian*, writes how even the students in Forest Grove High School reflect the hatred and fear Trump is spewing about immigrants and “others.”

- Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, so we’re flattered that several news sources reported on the peculiar case of **“Fred Brito” the con artist** who led the Downtown Athletic Club for three months as Carlo DiMaria before being fired for lying on his résumé after we broke it on our blog. But let’s have a little honor among thieves journalists. If a news source breaks a story, give credit where credit is due! See our first story on our blog and the follow up in our 8/11 issue.

## ACTIVIST ALERT

- Organizers of Eugene/Springfield’s “new homegrown, non-commercial, progressive, **all-volunteer community radio station**” meet at 7 pm every Thursday on the 2nd floor of the Growers Market building, 454 Willamette; next to Morning Glory Café. “No Voice Left Unheard” KEPW says it is a news/public affairs and arts radio station that will soon be broadcasting radio shows “hosted and produced exclusively by people who live in this Eugene/Springfield area.” The group is looking for an experienced office manager as well as volunteers for programming, PR and fundraising. Call 541-731-9941 or go to [KEPW.org](http://KEPW.org) for more info.



### LINDA BURDEN-WILLIAMS

“I started guitar lessons in third grade,” says Linda Burden-Williams, who grew up in Marysville, Washington, and played bass guitar for 15 years in Puget Sound-area rock bands. “Shady Lady, She, Ship of Fools, City Slicker,” she enumerates. “We changed names regularly. We played music on the road, six months at a time. We traveled with eight people, two dogs and a monkey in a school bus with a VW van on top.”

The bus is where she met her husband of 36 years, Gary Williams. In the early 1980s, Burden-Williams took an acting class at the Northwest Actors Studio in Seattle.

“The first day, I felt like I was home,” she says. “It was a safe place where I could express all my emotions.” She had roles in several plays at the Actors Studio, then studied camera acting, and has since appeared in many network TV shows and independent movies. After the birth of their son, Garrick, the family moved to Veneta when Gary was offered a job in Eugene. On trips to New York or L.A. for work or education, Burden-Williams brought Garrick along and homeschooled him in a hotel room. In the mid-1990s, she began to offer acting classes at home in Veneta.

“I started with my son and his friends from school,” she says. A few years later, she moved her business, In Focus Camera Acting and Production, to a classroom in Eugene, where she teaches and coaches public speaking as well as camera acting. Her credits as a casting director include *The American Gandhi*, chosen as best film at last year’s Eugene International Film Festival.