

traditional news outlets, which require a considerable budget, mugshot sites are relatively cheap and easy to run. "It's really pretty economical to put out information in this way," he says.

"As a journalist myself, I'm always in favor of more free speech, more comments, more people discussing these issues," Milbourn says. "The main thing is, what's the context here? How can we move the discussion on public safety forward in a way that helps us really understand the complexity of the problem?"

It's not an easy problem to solve, Milbourn suggests. "We're in this moment of experimentation in trying to figure out what this new phase is going to look like," he says of the current state of journalism, where decades of budget and staff cuts have led media outlets away from more hard-hitting, Watergate-style investigative reporting.

Weber says sites like *LCMU* are "the future of news," in that they are unfiltered sources of events happening in real time. He admits that eyewitness testimony is notoriously unreliable; and yet, thanks to the collective nature of the site, he sees a lot of policing of information among the members, especially whenever someone posts something that is straight-up false.

Weber, who refers to himself as an "accidental journalist," calls *LCMU* a "death pit where people can battle it out" in ongoing discussions about the nature of drug addiction, the pros and cons of gun ownership, the causes and solutions of homelessness, etc., etc.

THE PUNCHLINE

"It can have value," Weber says about *Lane County Mugshots Uncensored*. "You can leave, or you can stay and read this and understand that it's a slice of your own community. It's a slice of what's going on here. It may be vile, but this is what your community thinks."

He continues: "If you don't like what they're saying,

don't blame me. This group is your community. As a whole, when you put these comments in a bowl, you're looking at what a majority of people thinks. This is what you're up against."

The talk isn't pretty on *LCMU*, Weber suggests, but it's real. Concern and contempt collide in rough and rude language that speaks to the current zeitgeist. Look away at your own risk. These are your neighbors. This is your city.

The establishment liberals and high-minded progressives in Eugene who are wringing their hands and wondering what to do about the Trump phenomenon would do well to quit tilting at windmills and take a look at *Lane County Mugshots Uncensored*, where the other half tends to pipe up — that disenfranchised and angry half of the population that the snobby glitterati of Eugene consistently fails to recognize, or even see.

The people who populate *LCMU* are, largely though hardly exclusively, those "deplorables" Hillary Clinton so grotesquely called out during her campaign, pointing to a catastrophic division at the core of our politics no amount of policy talk will stitch up. Eugene, which considers itself such a bastion of West Coast liberalism, would do well to realize that the political sentiments of Pennsylvania and Kentucky aren't as far away as some of us would love to believe.

Weber says that, from his perspective, the social and political situation in Eugene has gotten worse over the years. "I think a lot of these people are frustrated," he says of site members.

There's a strong tendency for comment threads to devolve into shouting matches over national politics. "There's a lot of anger out there. I think politics and the presidency is out of control. It's so undignified," Weber says. "People just want to argue about Trump. This whole thing has just become such a joke. If you think about it, if you're for Trump, your joke's just different."

The level of fear, despair and anger revealed on *LCMU* seems at once to reflect reality and somehow reinforce

and amplify a particularly grim vision of it, creating a feedback loop that seems, at times, ready to ignite into mob violence. If faith in politics and faith in law enforcement are declining, the fact that ordinary citizens are taking matters into their own hands is understandable, if a bit frightening.

On the upside, *LCMU*'s real-time posts offer immediate access to situations with real impact, as when an accident jams up traffic or an ongoing emergency creates a public-safety threat.

For instance, when an armed man with a gun was reported running loose in west Eugene the evening of May 3, causing a major police lockdown, several Facebook posts updated residents almost immediately. But when I turned for more information to a local news channel, they were running an interview with the University of Oregon golf coach and a weather update. Cut to commercial.

The downside, however, is not to be ignored, because the snake of discontent tends to eat its own tail. The phrase "taking the law into your own hands" rarely has positive connotations. We are a community whose citizens are armed to the teeth. Judging from the evidence of *LCMU*, we are also angry, scared, cynical and itching for a fight.

On the advent of the 25th anniversary of the 1992 Los Angeles riots, let us not fail to recall that many African-Americans frustrated over perceived racial bias in the Rodney King verdict turned their lethal anger on Korean-Americans in their neighborhoods. People died. And then, as coverage of the verdict and riots hit the airwaves, smaller riots spread across the country. For a while, it looked like civil war might erupt.

To all appearances, the powder keg of public discontent is a lot closer to ignition than it was in 1992. It's not hard to imagine that the fear and loathing that is often evident on *Lane County Mugshots Uncensored* could, given a proper spark, turn into a very unregulated militia hitting the streets. And then, posted and reposted in real time, escalating from there. ■



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