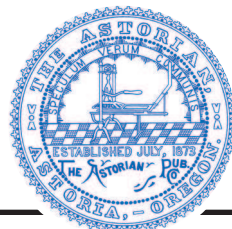


OPINION



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OUR VIEW

Understand racism to grasp crime numbers

When I read the Chinook Observer article about the KKK posters that had been posted around Astoria, I was nervous. The KKK? Here?

However, when the culprit was revealed to be a 20-year-old kid from Ocean Park, those nerves subsided and annoyance took its place. I do not know this person (nor would I like to) but while



ALLISON
BAIR

I was reading the article in which he is interviewed, a caricature of him formed in my head.

A young, isolated white guy; probably owns a lot of guns (or wants to); probably sees himself as some sort of self-made intellectual (may even brag about his inter-

net-quiz IQ); probably doesn't like the idea of higher education (it's a liberal conspiracy); thinks the rest of us are sheep.

It really goes to show how cool this guy is when he called both neo-Nazism and communism "gay," and "hating blacks because they're black is autistic." How edgy.

He also used the word "normie" to describe "normal" people. This immediately confirmed his internet habits for me: a Reddit and 4Chan dweller.

Both Reddit and 4Chan welcome unpopular, offensive, graphic, and/or otherwise disturbing content. I wrote about the /r/Incels (involuntary celibate) subreddit in March of last year, in the wake of the Parkland shooting and how the subreddit worshipped Elliot Rodgers (a murderer with a manifesto) as their hero. These websites are also inextricably linked to the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally, which ultimately ended in a murder carried out by a white extremist.

It's so easy to find like-minded individuals on these sites because they are both



Members of the Ku Klux Klan participate in cross burnings after a 'white pride' rally in rural Georgia in 2016.

100 percent anonymous, so anyone is free to spew their bile and attract other incels/racists/homophobes/whatever much easier than in the real world. And this kid is just one of probably dozens (or more) people who have the same mindset on our peninsula. Maybe he didn't get exactly what he wanted from it, a robust group of racists who could get together for hood-sewing parties, but we're still talking about him. In fact, I'm giving him free press right now.

Regardless of how the alt-right finagled its way onto the peninsula, I'd like to address one specific claim that our young friend made. One that he seems to hang his racist justification hat on: "Acknowledging that blacks in America over-represent (sic) violent crime is just plain truth."

Funny. A simple Google search tells a very different story. I guess when you

consume only media from Breitbart, Info Wars, and the like, the facts become somewhat muddied. Who knew?

It is true that if you look only at prison makeup, it would be easy to draw a false conclusion about crime rates: black people make up roughly 13 percent of the United States population, and white people make up 64 percent. Black people make up 40 percent of the prison population, and white people 39 percent. This is a misleading piece of information however, because all it tells us are arrest and conviction rates, not the crime rates. Data is great, but it's only a small piece of any puzzle as complex as issues within society. Without taking into consideration the undercurrent that is "systemic racism," no one can even begin to grasp race relations in the U.S.

Here are a few relevant examples of

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systemic racism that I encourage everyone to look into:

In the justice system: stop-and-frisk laws, excessive arrests and sentencing, the "Just Say No" campaign, crack vs. powder cocaine sentencing laws, three strikes rule, etc.

In housing: the Federal Housing Administration and "redlining" loans, not investing in infrastructure in communities of color, putting fewer food stores and more liquor stores in majority-black neighborhoods, heavily advertising alcohol and cigarettes in these same neighborhoods, etc.

In education: less funding to communities of color, harsher treatment/suspension/expulsion rates for black kids (this is apparent beginning in preschool!), the school-to-prison pipeline, fewer scholarships and more debt in higher education, etc.

Look into each of these things, because I do not have time to elucidate now.

The bottom line is that systemic racism and race relations are such huge, almost unfathomable concepts. Saying something like "...blacks in America over-represent (sic) violent crime is just plain truth," is dangerously misleading.

There are hundreds, probably thousands, of books dedicated to the topic of race, crime, systemic/institutional racism, and America. I wonder how many of them our friend with the KKK posters has read?

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WHERE TO WRITE

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• **U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden** (D): 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. Web: wyden.senate.gov

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EDITORIALS AROUND OREGON

A rare victory for open records

Albany Democrat-Herald

There is good news from this legislative session regarding public access to public records, and that's a rare enough occurrence these days that we thought it was worth noting.

We've written before about Senate Bill 609, which would require anyone requesting public records to outline, "with particularity ... how the requester intends to use the requested records." Current law does not require people requesting records to offer any justification for making their requests.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, introduced the bill on behalf of former Rep. Deborah Boone. Boone told The Daily Astorian reporter that she wanted to make sure that only "legitimate" requests for records would be honored. But the bill itself didn't specify that — and it didn't say who would be responsible for making the decisions about what requests were legitimate and which ones were not. Boone likely wanted to curb so-called

"fishing expeditions" by the news media and members of the public — requests for government records that are needlessly broad and not very specific.

But here's the problem: The government has no business whatsoever asking people making requests for public records why they want access to those records. If it's public, it's public — and that should be the end of the story. In cases where a government entity might have problems dealing with an overly broad request for records, it's certainly within its rights to suggest ways that a search could be narrowed — but members of the public making those requests are under no obligation to say why they want the records.

The good news here is that Boone has asked Johnson to let the bill die, and that's what should happen here — although you never know for sure that a proposal is completely dead until the Legislature adjourns later this year.

Boone, as it turns out, was the subject of a records request from The Oregonian newspaper that yielded 1,800 or so pages

of her own correspondence. (Boone said she had asked for the bill to be drafted a few days before the newspaper made the request.)

The newspaper, as part of a broader investigation into state campaign finances, was curious to find out why she had continued to fundraise after announcing her retirement from the Legislature. The newspaper discovered, in part, that Boone had used her state email account to contact state agencies about issues that involved family members.

The Oregonian also used the records to examine a curious campaign finance practice in Oregon: the so-called "pass-through," in which donors give money to an officeholder with instructions to pass the dough along to another candidate under the officeholder's name. In an interview with The Oregonian, Boone described a pair of donations from last year that appeared to come from her but came instead from other donors. Boone said the practice is commonplace in the Capitol.

It's a practice that may violate state law. But even if it's legal, it doesn't look good. Legislative leaders need to take a long long at reforming this practice, and the sooner, the better.

But making a case for campaign-finance reform in Oregon is not our main purpose today. Instead, we offer details about this because the investigation offers yet another reason why it's important that public records remain accessible to the public. Forcing people seeking records to state why they want the records easily could have created a chilling effect — and, in theory at least, could have given the government entities holding those records incentives to stonewall requests.

Over the last couple of years, Oregon has started to regain some momentum toward revitalizing its open records laws, after decades in which advocates for openness lost ground every time the Legislature met. Senate Bill 609, in a single stroke, would have jeopardized all those gains. It's a good thing that the measure appears to be dead.