

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

Now Even Harder to Trust the Police

The insurrection response and the cops among the extremists

BY TRACEY L. ROGERS

Having lived and protested in the streets of D.C., I was shocked to see the U.S. Capitol breached by insurrectionists denying the outcome of last year's presidential election.

As an activist, I've gotten scrutiny visiting the Capitol just for wearing politicized attire. So it was truly remarkable to watch as a predominantly white mob, encouraged by the former president, stormed the Capitol building on January 6 with seemingly little resistance.



It was impossible not to imagine that had the mob been black or brown, they would have been brutally counterattacked and then prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

When nonviolent racial justice protestors gathered on the National Mall last summer, they were met by heavily armed police officers in full camouflage. And yet police appear to have literally opened the gates for the white mob.

This should have never happened. But it did. The Capitol Building can, in fact, be breached if you are white — and have a little help.

Guard rails can be removed for ease of entry. You can even pose for selfies with Capitol police officers inside all while possibly plotting to take hostages.

There is something wrong with all of this. While the majority of police that day fought to protect our democracy — one officer, sadly, lost his life — there were still a few too many who did little to nothing.

The rioters planned their attack openly on social media and far-right websites for weeks. The FBI warned the Capitol police days in advance that the Capitol could be attacked. Even requests to the Pentagon from D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser for additional National Guard troops ahead of the rally were denied.

Yet police that day were told to prepare for only a “normal” protest, leaving them vulnerable and easily overwhelmed.

More disturbingly, Rep. Ayanna Pressley, a Black member of Congress, reported that the panic buttons in her office had been ripped out before the attack. These and

other complaints highlighted concerns from lawmakers that members of the Capitol police could not be trusted to protect them.

Then there are the revelations that many off-duty police officers from around the country, including from Philadelphia, where I now live, attended the rally.

Yes, they have a right to free speech. And perhaps not all who attended the rally stormed the Capitol. But knowing that police attended a rally replete with white supremacist banners and Confederate battle flags only diminishes public trust that the police are supposed to rely on.

It's no wonder that some activists are reviving calls to defund the police.

“Tell me again,” activist Bree Newsome tweeted during the attack, “why we can't defund the police and military when they've

shown us today that they don't intend to use any of their expensive gear to protect the Capitol from a domestic invasion?”

I believe it's time to more seriously consider the possibility.

There is plenty of research that shows how defunding police departments nationwide would allow for more social services (health care, education, housing, etc.) that center people and communities. Even the ACLU points out that less policing would actually make us safer.

For me, as a Black American, that point is key. After witnessing this month's events, I more firmly distrust the police.

I remembered when Miriam Carey, a Black woman suffering a mental health emergency, was shot and killed by Capitol po-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Letters to the Editor

Message was Disingenuous

I am a white, 65 year old male. I have been an active member of the Portland NAACP branch for several years. Mr. Mondaine's recent letter in The Portland Observer was troubling to me. This is the first statement from him that I have read since the October Mercury article alleging sexual and other improprieties and his subsequent resignation from the branch. While he was congratulatory of the new officer slate, many things about the article were disingenuous:

It is true, as he states, that branch membership and fundraising increased dramatically under his watch. What he fails to acknowledge is that those increases were in direct response to the racial justice uprising of 2020. Omitting this context helps to portray him as the driving force behind the changes. The reality is that before those events, public engagement with the NAACP chapter was on a downward trajectory.

Regarding his and the branch's involvement in passing the Portland Clean Energy Fund, Mr. Mondaine and the local NAACP were a helpful, but relatively small, part of a large coalition of People of Color led organizations that helped the measure pass.

Finally, and probably most concerning, is that Mr. Mon-

daine presents himself as graciously conceding his position to a leadership that he supports. This could not be further from the truth. He did all he could to silence anyone who presented any kind of challenge to his authority and opinions, including violating NAACP bylaws by dumping people from the Executive Committee and deposing committee chairs. He even attempted to void memberships of several people who contested his decisions - something the branch president has no authority to do. Two of those people currently sit on the new leadership team he claims to support. To my knowledge, he has made no attempt to apologize for his bad behavior or to reconcile with people that he has harmed. His congratulatory words ring hollow.

It further troubles me that there has been so little comment from Portland leaders who formerly were anxious to curry Mr. Mondaine's support and friendship. My hope is that he never again is given the opportunity to lead publicly at any level. His words and actions are not ultimately becoming of a true leader. To the contrary, he has caused deep and extensive harm. Portland will be far better off moving forward without his voice.

Daniel Portis-Cathers
Portland



On New NAACP Leaders

I applaud the new leadership for prioritizing the establishment of ground rules that will foster an open and supportive environment in order to strengthen communication. We were missing that. In the past two years we lost many amazing pillars in the community who resigned out of hurt and disillusionment. Their departure from a dysfunctional setting hurt the PDX chapter. What was left was a fractured chapter where many had lost faith in their ability to “get things done” and work with an embittered community. The Education Committee lost two Chairs, who can speak for themselves about the damage and hurdles created by past lead-

ership, and yet the committee continued to meet. The late Dr. Harris waited two years to see scholarships being created for the youth.

The PDX chapter has been inspired by the election of President Sharon Gary-Smith and the diverse leadership committed to “transparency, clarity and accountability.” They understand the need to bring healing and create an inviting space for those community leaders who left. I was elated to see them return. I am greatly encouraged and look forward to the next two years. There is a lot of work to do, and I am confident this leadership team will rise to the challenge.

Susan Elliott
Portland

Covering Up Misdeeds

I was taught that congrats and compliments directed to others should not be a mere excuse to glorify and praise oneself. The former disrespectful and now disgraced NAACP president E.D. Mondaine, has once again allowed his narcissism to overtake him, and caused him to try covering his misdeeds with false praise.

When he stands before the many he harmed - those vulnerable young and older men and women who risked more unspeakable

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12