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OPINION

Will Measure 114 and Firearms Legislation Heighten Racism in Oregon?

Last year, the respected Black researcher Dr. Carol Anderson published “The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America.” This remarkable book detailed how racist local law enforcement agencies weaponize firearms legislation to oppress Black communities.

In November, Oregonians will face new firearms legislation, Measure 114. What will it do and should we fear unwanted racist consequences?

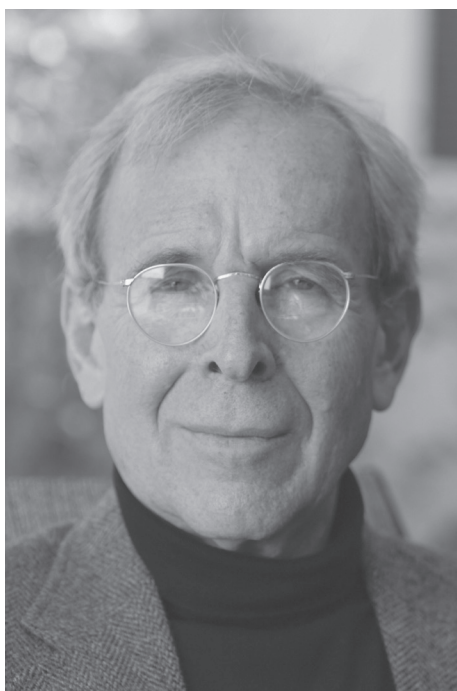
Measure 114 requires any seller or purchaser of firearms in Oregon to first obtain a permit. Permit applicants must successfully complete a background check and a live-fire training and safety class.

Could local law enforcement agencies use Measure 114 against Black communities?

Black voters have reason to suspect the worst. As Dr. Anderson documents, local law enforcement agencies have used the Second Amendment, plus “stand your ground” laws and firearm permits to sustain White domination.

For example, the Second Amendment was intended to ensure local armed White militias could successfully suppress slave rebellions. And they did.

Another example is Florida’s “Stand your ground” law. Laws like these allow



Samuel Metz, MD, retired physician in Portland

citizens to shoot and kill those perceived as a threat. Local law enforcement agencies in Florida use this “justifiable defense” law to excuse ten times as many White men killing Black men as Black men killing White men.

And many of us remember that after his home was firebombed, Martin Luther King Jr. applied for a permit to keep a gun in his house. His local sheriff refused to issue a permit, claiming King lacked “a good reason.”

How does Measure 114 fit into this horrific history of oppression?

First, background checks will be conducted by state and federal agencies, not by local law enforcement.

Second, training programs will be certified by the state, not by local law enforcement. While any organization may host the training (e.g. community colleges, gun clubs, churches, even book groups) the curriculum must meet state standards and receive state certification. Local law enforcement plays no role.

Lastly, Measure 114 will require that local law enforcement agencies, either the chief of police or sheriff, “shall issue” the permit to applicants who meet the requirements. Note the word “shall” – not “may.” There’s a difference: In states using the phrase “may issue,” local law enforcement agencies need not issue the permit, even when all requirements are fulfilled. The case of Dr. King’s 1956 application is only one instance. But in “shall issue” states,

local law enforcement agencies must issue the permit if requirements are met. There is no discretion, option, or subjective assessment. Applicants meeting requirements get their permit, according to Measure 114.

Thus Measure 114 reduces potential risks of abuse to Oregon’s Black communities. But what are benefits?

Background checks and safety training reduce firearms deaths. In Oregon, they can save Black lives. How? The rate of firearms deaths is six times higher among Black Oregonians than among White Oregonians. While shootings of Black men by police make headlines, most firearms deaths in all communities result from suicide, homicide, domestic abuse, and misuse by children. Any reduction in firearms deaths in Oregon will have an outsized and positive impact on Black communities.

Full disclosure. I’m White. It is not my place to tell Black Oregonians what to think or how to vote. So this message is for my White colleagues: Measure 114 will save lives of children, women, and men of all races, and especially those in communities of color.

I endorse Measure 114. I urge all Oregonians to endorse it as well.

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