

Free justice: the case of oakland, california essay sample

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Introduction

Criminal justice has since been a long-standing issue in the city of Oakland, California, not least because of its effectiveness in combating crime. In fact, Oakland currently stands as perhaps the most crime-ridden city not only in the San Francisco Bay Area (SFBA), but also throughout California, with alarming rises in homicide and robbery cases. Such owes largely to the ineffectiveness of the Oakland Police Department (OPD) - a matter this essay seeks to elaborate through reviews on the articles written by Robert Gammon for the East Bay Express and Jonathan Mahler for The New York Times.

The Contemporary State of Criminal Justice in Oakland

The perceived incompetence of the OPD in deterring rampant crime in Oakland stems from the Riders scandal, apart from the fact that it has received little support from the city government with its budget and personnel constantly reduced in time. The Riders scandal was a case brought against the OPD before the federal district court that accused four police officers of civil rights violations through unlawful detention and beatings against 119 complainants, many of which have drug-related cases. Resolved via a settlement in 2003, the Riders scandal led to the issuance of a consent decree for the OPD, obliging it to reform its operations to facilitate criminal justice in Oakland. Yet, with Oakland still suffering from the debilitating effects of rampant crime, one may lead to surmise that the OPD may have been deserving of federal receivership - a threat it evaded in 2012 following a court compromise that led to the appointment of a compliance director,

which reported directly to the federal district court with the power to oversee matters on the office of the police chief and spending for the OPD. Despite said development, the reduced capabilities of the OPD in terms of budget and personnel continues to place their competence in doubt (Gammon). The OPD came under further scrutiny during the Occupy Oakland protests in 2011. Described primarily by the objective to overthrow capitalism, the Occupy Oakland protests proved a rather eclectic mix of issues that criticized civil rights violations and rampant crime in Oakland, among many others. Initially met with positive response from the local government, the Occupy Oakland protests was dispersed in its latter stages, with the OPD heavily involved in using brutal means for clearing the protest sites. Such proved an aggravating matter to the already-estranged relationship between Oakland residents and the OPD, which has turned out to be a major deterrent to the smooth facilitation of criminal justice in Oakland. The city government, for its part, has since bemoaned the lack of economic opportunities that has plagued Oakland residents, although it has since tried its best to promote Oakland as an investor-friendly city, amidst civil unrest and rampant crime (Mahler).

Conclusion

The successful conduct of criminal justice relies on a strong coordinative relationship between residents and the police force tasked to oversee them. Yet, such a connection does not exist in the case of Oakland residents and the OPD, as shown in the articles of Gammon and Mahler. Oakland residents, particularly those who took part in the Occupy Oakland protests, have shown

a clear sense of frustration over the way criminal justice is expedited by the OPD, as apparent in their calls against civil rights violations and criticisms against capitalism, which they see as a force that has bounded them away from progress. Although it remains to be seen how Oakland would reverse its current situation on criminal justice, harmony between Oakland residents and the OPD remains the ideal scenario.

Questions

- (Gammon) Should the OPD descend towards federal receivership if it continues to fail in carrying out its reforms under the consent decree?
- (Mahler) Can Oakland residents still mend their estranged relationship with the OPD in light of the now-concluded Occupy Oakland protests?

Works Cited

Gammon, Robert. " More of the Same from OPD?" East Bay Express. East Bay Express, 19 Dec. 2012. Web. 6 Oct 2014.

Mahler, Jonathan. " Oakland, the Last Refuge of Radical America." The New York Times. The New York Times Mag., 1 Aug. 2012. Web. 6 Oct 2014.