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CHANGE: LAW AND ORDER IN THE CITIES 2022



DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

As I visited cities across America between May 15 and June 15, 2021, I felt very secure walking around 70 towns and cities. I had a couple of incidents but nothing major. Most of my career has been spent working in less than stellar areas and performing community development tasks. I am familiar with the routine of hard-core teenagers and unstable homeless seeking to be aggressive.

Most times, people like to talk a good game as you walk by, and many of these people are operating at some level of diminished capacity. So, most times, you have to ignore the names and characterizations offered and keep on walking.

There was some looting during the summer race riots, but there were no shoppers/pedestrians on the street. Officials ordered us to stay in our homes, and most of us did. Protestors were there by themselves, and I firmly believe that if there were people on the streets, the severe nature of some of those actions would never have taken place.

The last few months have shown a disturbing trend with the cities not being safe on many occasions. Imagine you are in a jewelry store with your fiancée, and all of a sudden, 20 men with hammers show up and start stealing all of the valuables. You are getting out of the way and hoping that somehow that the robber does not want your watch.

I was in a bank once during a robbery. Someone carrying an automatic weapon and now currently serving life wanted my watch, and being me, I was not

inclined to give it to him. However, the FBI told me he was a five percent Muslim who was robbing and killing in the name of Allah, and there was a death threat on me if I testified. I normally am not good in those situations, but I would have to think twice about the way people are now being routinely killed.

Lately, in Philadelphia, there has been a rash of killings. My wife worked at Temple and gets text alerts of violence in North Philly. I recommend you stay away from Broad Street between Susquehanna and Norris. Sometimes, multiple people are involved and seem to have some antecedent event to the violence.

The crimes that concern me the most now are car-jackings. Being asked to give up your car by having a gun pointed at you provides an incentive to hand over your keys. Recently a congresswoman was car-jacked. It was a bad thing to do because all government cars have a tracking device. Apple Air Tags may be the calling of the day for car owners driving in the city.

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DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

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The looting and protests were random, and much of the new criminal activity was planned. Although there is some randomness to the car-jackings, you often hear the story that "we were driving around looking for someone to rob," so there is some level of spontaneity.

People have been quick to adapt by arming themselves and shooting and killing the carjackers, but not everyone carries a gun, so it has not had much impact. Armed and shooting groups of people seem to have some beef with the other group, which reminds me of the killings during prohibition. Different groups trafficking people or drugs sometimes get territorial in most cases and are not particularly happy with being disrespected.

People are leaving the cities where crime is out of control, and they are migrating to smaller towns and returning to life in the small towns. Cheaper rentals and a stronger sense of community draw them from the city.

The residential base is weakening, and there will be fewer shoppers at some of the retail stores in the city. Couple the lessening of the residential with the move

to a remote workplace and the reduction of office work. There could be serious implications for retail survival in the city.

This change for cities could lead us back to a time in the '50s when cities had to reinvent themselves. "Urban renewal" played a part in creating "space" for cities to evolve by eliminating older vacant buildings and, at times, creating large areas of urban open space, but not in a good way.

Somehow with the rise in crime in the cities, I keep thinking about "Escape from New York" and wondering when the next Snake Plissken will come to save the next congressman that has their car hijacked. Maybe a senator or a supreme court justice will have to give up their car because a group of gang members needs a cold car for a deal, or someone is late for dinner.

The direction of policy and action in the cities needs to be adjusted to retail and the ambiance of shopping districts and amenities. I do not see leadership evolving correctly to deal with these issues.

Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at barrycassidy@comcast.net.



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