

Opening Thoughts

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Editor-in-Chief



Neighborhood Fear

FEAR OF THE unknown, writes H.P. Lovecraft, is “the oldest and strongest kind of fear.” Unfortunately, I learned that lesson well last month as my family and I found ourselves at the mercy of a burglar who for whatever reason chose not to come upstairs.

The reason I am sharing this story now, coinciding with this week’s JT cover story on the meteoric rise of crime here in Baltimore, is that too many of our fellow residents in Charm City, from the neighborhoods at the center of what has become a larger murder rate than New York City’s to the outlying suburban-like enclaves housing a good portion of the Jewish community in Northwest Baltimore, are living in fear.

For my family, our experience began early one Tuesday morning as we were awakened by our alarm company phoning to alert us that our burglar alarm had been tripped. Groggy and disoriented from the horn blaring downstairs, we quickly realized that something was wrong. The noise of a person fumbling in the dark one floor below us confirmed it, as did the alarm technician informing us that a window had been opened.

We told the technician to quickly call the police. The police did not quickly come.

I remember at one point standing at the top of the stairs, my wife and baby in the bedroom to my right, my seven other children in bedrooms behind me and to my left, horrified at the thought that should this intruder choose to come upstairs, I had no way short of hurting myself on top of him or her in defending my family.

It took about 15 minutes for the first police cruiser to arrive. By that time, whoever had forcibly entered my house had gone, and while the

several officers who secured the house and investigated the crime did their jobs admirably, I realized that this is not how policing is supposed to work in modern-day America.

As you’ll read in our reporting, one possible explanation to the fact that it can take police officers stationed in the Northwestern District a quarter of an hour to respond to a burglary in progress in the middle of the night is a redeployment of forces to areas closer downtown when the almost daily flare-ups of deadly gun violence occur. Understaffing, lack of resources or incoherent strategy, though, might also be responsible.

Whatever the reason, Baltimore and the people who call her home deserve more; they deserve to feel safe, whether from the threat of drug dealers poisoning their children and ruining their streets, the threat of bullets indiscriminately claiming the lives of the innocent as well as the guilty or the threat of their homes becoming a free-for-all for burglars, who, while apparently not violent now, may become so in the future.

It’s telling that one officer suggested that I purchase a gun, noting that a homeowner can access his or her weapon in seconds while it can reasonably take the police many minutes to use theirs. It’s an argument we’ve come to expect from the gun-rights movement, but it’s not one that you would expect to hear from an officer sworn to keep the peace, as it amounts to a tacit acknowledgement that at certain times, the police may not be able to do their job.

Whether I should buy a gun is a separate question, but it’s clear that we can all do more to demand safety and security for all Baltimoreans. Neighborhood watches can help, but we must also expect more from our leaders. No one, absolutely no one, should have to live in fear. Jr

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