



CAPITAL IDEAS

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More of California's Big Cities on the Way to Becoming Next Detroit

BY KERRY JACKSON

Two waves have rolled through California in 2021. One so hot that high temperature records were set throughout the state. The other so chilling that stores have shortened their hours and even closed altogether to avoid it.

By now, the video of a shoplifter last month filling what appears to be a plastic garbage bag of the items of his choice at a San Francisco Walgreens, then pedaling off on a bike as customers and a security guard watched, has gone viral. Its capacity to shock, however, has since been surpassed by the video of at least 10 thieves running out of the San Francisco Neiman Marcus in open daylight on July 6 taking with them as much stolen merchandise as they could handle.

The Walgreens suspect was eventually caught – while “clearing shelves of cosmetics and placing the merchandise into a duffel bag” at another store, police said. The Neiman Marcus thieves remain free.

Retailers' response to the shameless thieving in San Francisco has been to close stores – Walgreens has shuttered 17 in the city – or shorten business hours – Target believes forgoing four hours of sales is preferable to losing tens of thousands of dollars to theft, and is now closing its stores in at 6 p.m. rather than 10 p.m., because “for more than a month, we’ve been experiencing a significant and alarming rise in theft and security incidents at our San Francisco stores,” a company spokesperson said.

“Crime,” says the self-identified photographer and reporter who posted the Neiman Marcus video on Instagram, “is legal basically” in District Attorney Chesa Boudin’s San Francisco.

Truth is, it’s tough all around in California. Across the Bay, Oakland Police fought their way through “12 hours of nonstop chaos” over the July 4 weekend. Between 6:30 p.m. Sunday and

10 a.m. Monday there were seven shootings in the city. A 48-year-old man died, the city's 67th homicide of the year. A 35-year-old male was shot and killed the morning of July 6, found at a homeless camp. Later in the evening, another man was shot and killed while driving home. There were only 39 homicides in Oakland by this time last year.

To the south, San Jose Police recently recovered nearly \$100,000 worth of allegedly stolen goods. A suspect was arrested in May, and officials believe he is "the middleman for an underground network for stolen goods," according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Still farther south, the growing brutality recalls another era remembered for its violence. Los Angeles officials reported in June that homicides in the city had increased to 162 from 129 over the same period in 2020, while shootings reached 651 compared to 434 last year. Though reported sexual assaults and robberies have fallen, overall violent crime is up by 4.3%, according to Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore, with aggravated assaults growing 9.5%. Over the July 4 weekend, Los Angeles police "recorded 12 murders and the Sheriff's Department another four," says *Los Angeles* magazine.

The capital has not been spared, either. Sacramento is ranked 10th by the National Retail Federation in its list of cities with the worst retail crime. (Three California cities are in the top 10, with San Francisco fifth, Los Angeles No. 1.) But violence has risen, too. "As of June 2, there were 24 homicides in the city this year, compared to 16 through the same period last year," the *Sacramento Bee* reports. "Through May, there were at least 200 firearm-related assaults, more than a 120% increase over the first five months of 2020."

Meanwhile, San Diego police are asking for the "public's help to fight the 'disturbing surge' in violent crime."

Earlier this year, the question was asked by PRI in the *Daily Caller* if San Francisco and Los Angeles could become the next Detroit due to rising crime.

Given the recent trends in San Jose, Oakland and others, perhaps the question now should be could any, or all, of California's major cities become the next Detroit? (Gamblers should still put their money on San Francisco and Los Angeles, where the district attorneys have been so lax in prosecuting crimes that both are targets of recall efforts.)

The historical narrative says that Detroit was one of America's greatest cities. At one time it ranked as the fifth-largest municipality in the country, and the global capital of automobile manufacturing. Its name was synonymous with progress. It was often said that as General Motors goes, so does the nation.

But in the present, "Detroit's violent crime leads the nation," according to the local media.

"Progressive" economic and regulatory policies – identified by economist Thomas Sowell as "increasing taxes, harassing businesses, and pandering to unions" – have wrecked nations and can do the same to cities. While these factors contributed to Detroit's decline, they were not, howev-

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er, solely responsible. The Motor City was hollowed out in part by the flight of residents fed up with the crime. Sowell said the riot of 1967, which killed 43, injured nearly 1,200 and damaged more than 2,000 buildings, “marked the beginning of the decline of Detroit to its current state of despair.”

Don’t think it can’t happen here.

Proposition 47, “pushed by George Gascón,” then San Francisco’s district attorney, now the top prosecutor in Los Angeles, and passed by voters by a 60-40 margin in 2014, rolled out the welcome wagon for thieves. Among its several provisions was to allow shoplifters to steal as much as \$950 in merchandise without being charged for a felony. It created a class of criminals who have been “going into stores with a calculator so they can make sure that what they steal is worth less than \$950,” says Sacramento County Assistant Chief Deputy District Attorney Robin Shakely.

It has also created conditions in which an ordinary shopping trip can turn into a dangerous encounter with thieves.

While shoppers have been sharing aisles with shoplifters, the “defund the police” movement has “inspired” some policymakers to surrender to the extortionist demands of rioters. The Los Angeles City Council, for instance, has slashed the Police Department’s budget by \$150 million. Oakland cut its police budget by \$17 million.

Not all, though, have yielded to the mob. San Francisco Mayor London Breed proposed last year shifting \$120 million away from law enforcement, but it appears funding will be instead increased in coming years. Sacramento is considering a \$9.4 million increase on police spending, and San Diego has passed a budget that sends more money to law enforcement, despite pressure to starve the department of resources.

What could have possibly caused an apparent re-evaluation of the campaign to defund the police?

Could be that videos of thieves playing on a loop was a persuasive argument against demands to treat criminal behavior as a nuisance that, like a cracked sidewalk, just has to be tolerated.

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