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October 2025 | Volume 54, Number 10

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## Lawlessness Is a Choice

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*The following is adapted from a speech delivered on September 30, 2025, at Hillsdale College's Blake Center for Faith and Freedom in Somers, Connecticut.*

**WHILE BEING** interviewed on a recent podcast, Texas Democrat Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett decided to opine on crime, a topic on which she apparently considers herself to be an expert. Her nutty conclusion was this: "Just because someone has committed a crime, it doesn't make them a criminal."

I can see how this logic would have a wide range of uses for politicians: "Just because someone told a lie, it doesn't make them a liar"; "Just because someone took a bribe, it doesn't make them corrupt." It's a bit like the thought experiment: "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" If a crime is committed and no one is responsible, was there actually a crime at all?



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Of course, it's nonsense. A criminal is defined precisely as a person who has committed a crime. But when Crockett chooses her own definitions, she is simply echoing a progressive shibboleth that has turned blue cities across the country into lawless hellholes. It holds that people who commit crimes have no agency—that they are helpless victims of circumstance. Therefore, any attempt to hold them accountable by arresting them or putting them in jail is unjust—it further victimizes them.

The obvious result of this logic is that criminals are emboldened and their real victims become helpless hostages to lawlessness.

It is a short step from Crockett's logic to the justification of defunding the police as a way to "make communities safer." That communities become safer by having fewer police is, of course, a lie, but defunding police is what progressives have been doing since the anti-cop, BLM-Antifa riots of the "Summer of Love" in 2020.

As a former police reporter, I've seen how soft-on-crime policies hurt the very people progressives pretend to care about. It's precisely the most vulnerable in our big cities who need the most policing and have the least resources to protect themselves from mayhem.

Living in New York City off and on over the past three decades, including in the pre-Mayor Rudy Giuliani era when it was a dystopian hellscape of crime and no-go zones, it's striking how quickly soft-on-crime policies at

the state and local level destroy your day-to-day sense of safety. Progressive criminal justice "reforms," such as defunding the police, ending cash bail, refusing to prosecute misdemeanors, letting thousands of convicted felons out of prison early, and slashing the prison population, are the most obvious contributors to the escalating violent crime problem in blue cities.

In 2014, Bill de Blasio was elected Mayor of what he boasted was "the safest big city in America." He championed all sorts of progressive policies, from bail reform to decriminalizing offenses such as public urination and marijuana possession—and eventually the New York City Council defunded the NYPD to the tune of \$1 billion.

As predicted by everybody with any understanding of human nature, it did not take long for the city to become scary. There was a surge of mentally ill homeless people accorded the so-called freedom to sleep on the streets, and open-air drug bazaars popped up all over the place. This was followed by a surge of violent crime, including a spate of people being pushed in front of subway trains. Shoplifting became so normalized that convenience and drug stores had to lock up toothpaste.

The decriminalization of pot and public urination has only turbocharged the sense of chaos and disorder in blue cities. It marks a rejection of the famous "broken windows" theory that was the key to turning New York City around under Giuliani. The theory holds that addressing minor crimes, such as vandalism and public intoxication, creates an atmosphere of order and lawfulness. By contrast, the policy of ignoring so-called minor crimes encourages disorder and lawlessness.

People don't knowingly or willingly vote for their quality of life to deteriorate. But this is the progressive template, whether in the cities they control or on a national level with the open borders policy that, under the Biden

**Imprimis** (im-pri-mis), [Latin]: in the first place

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administration, brought in 20-25 million illegal migrants, many of them criminals.

It is common sense that law and order is an 80-20 issue. You don't need a pollster to say so, although according to a recent AP-NORC poll, 81 percent of Americans across political persuasions say crime is a "major problem." The other 19 percent must be either criminals, progressive politicians, or both.

In a world not defined by Jasmine Crockett, it makes no sense that progressives would remain stubbornly on the wrong side of their own voters. But their unhinged hostility to President Trump's successful crime crackdown in Washington, D.C., suggests that that's where they are.

In the first three weeks after Trump sent the National Guard into the nation's capital, Attorney General Pam Bondi reported 1,528 arrests and 156 illegal guns seized. Nearly half of the arrests were of illegal migrant criminals, including violent felons convicted of rape, child molestation, assault, and robbery with a deadly weapon.

The D.C. crime rate plummeted across the board as a result, with violent crime down 30 percent in the first month after federal troops were deployed on August 7, according to the White House. The Metropolitan Police Department was even more bullish, citing a 40 percent drop in violent crime when compared to the same period last year, including a staggering 82 percent drop in carjackings.

D.C. residents, most of whom are black, expressed relief at being able to live without fear of being robbed or assaulted. Yet left-wing pundits on

CNN and MSNBC called Trump a "dictator" and said his crackdown on "so-called crime" is racist and a "military occupation." Bondi had to fire two of her staff members—left-wing paralegals who hurled foul-mouthed abuse and a Subway sandwich at federal officers who are bringing order to D.C.

TRUMP FULFILLED HIS PROMISE TO SECURE THE BORDER WITHIN THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF HIS SECOND TERM. BUT NOW COMES THE HARD PART: DEPORTATIONS. YOU WOULD THINK EVERY AMERICAN WOULD WELCOME THE REMOVAL OF THE SORTS OF CRIMINAL DEGENERATES WHO RAPED AND MURDERED LAKEN RILEY, RACHEL MORIN, AND 12-YEAR-OLD JOCELYN NUNGARAY. BUT NO! ICE AND BORDER PATROL OFFICERS ARE UNDER ATTACK FROM VIOLENT, ORGANIZED MILITANTS WHO THROW ROCKS AT THEIR VEHICLES, SLASH THEIR TIRES, AND OBSTRUCT THEIR MOVEMENTS. OFFICERS HAVE ALSO BEEN DOXXED AND LABELED FASCISTS.

Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser, who had been remarkably cooperative with the federal intervention, nonetheless testified on September 18 that Trump's National Guard deployment had nothing to do with the newly safe streets. She would rather be seen as unmoored from the truth than publicly admit that more cops and more arrests reduce crime. The hostility to law and order runs deep in a party that has made defunding the police an article of faith.

Trump is plowing ahead regardless, vowing to expand his D.C. policies to high crime cities like Chicago, Memphis, and Baltimore, which he called a "hellhole." He is onto a popular issue and has shown that crime crackdowns can rapidly improve American lives. Ultimately he hopes to shame big-city mayors into cleaning up their own cities before he sends in the troops.

When asked by a reporter if he would consider sending the National Guard into Republican-run cities that

are “also seeing high crime,” Trump replied: “Sure, but there aren’t that many of them. If you look at the top 25 cities for crime, just about every one of those cities is run by Democrats.” Cue apoplexy from the usual suspects, but he was right. If anything, he understated the problem. A 2022 report by the Heritage Foundation, “The Blue City Murder Problem,” found that 27 of the top 30 cities with the highest homicide rates were run by Democrats.

UNITEDHEALTHCARE CEO BRIAN THOMPSON WAS ASSASSINATED IN MANHATTAN LAST DECEMBER, ALLEGEDLY BY LUIGI MANGIONE, WHO SPOUTED LEFT-WING CRITIQUES OF CORPORATE GREED AND HAS BECOME A FOLK HERO TO THE LEFT. WHEN MANGIONE APPEARED RECENTLY IN COURT, SUPPORTERS CHANTED, “FREE LUIGI,” AND CHEERED WHEN THE JUDGE DROPPED SOME CHARGES AGAINST HIM. THE PUBLIC OUTPOURING OF SYMPATHY FOR MANGIONE AND THE CALLOUS ATTITUDE TOWARDS HIS VICTIM, A MIDWESTERN FATHER OF TWO TEENAGERS WHO WORKED HIS WAY TO THE TOP, SEEMS TO HAVE ALTERED THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON VIOLENCE.

Now, inexplicably, New York City is set to elect a far-left mayor, Zohran Mamdani, who wants to decriminalize misdemeanors and divert money from cops to social workers. The Democratic Socialists of America platform he ran on when he was elected to the New York Assembly in 2021 called for decriminalizing *all* drugs, letting illegal immigrants vote and hold elected office, and dealing with 26-year-old criminals as youth offenders. Now he plans to make New York a double sanctuary city for illegal aliens and transgenderism, mirroring the catastrophic soft-on-crime policies of Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey.

Mamdani wants to ban ICE from removing violent criminals and predators, and he wants to spend millions

of taxpayer dollars to create more “LGBTQIA+ Liaisons” in schools to brainwash more kids into thinking they are trapped in a body of the opposite sex. He also wants to codify transgender guidelines to force girls to share bathrooms with biological males.

Lawlessness and disorder are not inevitable in big cities. Giuliani demonstrated this 30 years ago in New York, and Trump has now proved it again in D.C. But the dwindling per-

centage of voters in New York who bother turning in a ballot for the mayoral race are determined to be the turkeys who voted for Thanksgiving.

The law-and-order paradox is even more stark when it comes to illegal migrant criminals. When Trump claimed on the campaign trail that other countries had opened their jails and set the inmates loose on America, it seemed like

hyperbole. But among the bad hombres that DHS Secretary Kristi Noem and Border Czar Tom Homan have been arresting, there is an enormous preponderance of murderers, rapists, and child molesters.

You would think that we have enough home-grown criminals without importing new ones. But that is what Joe Biden and whoever was wielding his autopen decided willfully to do for four years while the nation’s media turned a blind eye.

After years of gaslighting and excuses from the Biden administration, Trump fulfilled his promise to secure the border within the first 100 days of his second term. But now comes the hard part: deportations. You would think every American would welcome the removal of the sorts of criminal degenerates

who raped and murdered Laken Riley, Rachel Morin, and twelve-year-old Jocelyn Nungaray. But no! ICE and Border Patrol officers are under attack from violent, organized militants posing as protesters who throw rocks at their vehicles, slash their tires, and obstruct their movements. Officers have also been doxxed and labeled fascists.

Recently, an ICE officer was seriously injured when he was dragged down the road by a car driven by a criminal illegal alien resisting arrest. In January, a Border Patrol agent was ambushed and slaughtered by members of a vegan transgender cult on a murderous rampage across the country. On September 24, there was a sniper attack on an ICE facility in Dallas. That followed a July 4 shooting attack on an ICE facility in Alvarado, Texas.

The job is made more dangerous by sanctuary city laws, whereby authorities refuse to hand over violent criminal illegal aliens for deportation. DHS and ICE are conducting operations right now in Chicago, but Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and Mayor Brandon Johnson are doing everything they can to obstruct these operations.

I went on a pre-dawn raid in Chicago recently with Secretary Noem and more than 100 heavily armed Border Patrol and ICE agents. We rode in armored vehicles with helicopter and drone support to execute a felony arrest warrant on a single criminal illegal alien who had previously been deported but returned under Biden and has convictions for violent assault. It was an extraordinary commitment of resources for one criminal—although, as often happens with these raids, it netted an additional four illegal migrants who were also in the house.

Given the challenges of each deportation, it seems unlikely that Biden's toxic border legacy can be reversed in four years, so we may be stuck with extra mayhem from foreign criminals beyond the next election cycle.

Trump's latest law-and-order crackdown comes in the wake of the assassination of Charlie Kirk. On September 22, the President designated the violent anarchist group Antifa as a domestic terrorist organization. The 22-year-old leftist who shot Kirk in the throat as he was answering a question about transgender violence at a crowded campus event in Utah had carved Antifa slogans and transgender references onto his shell casings. Despite Jimmy Kimmel's claim, the killer was not a "MAGA Republican." He was a radicalized leftist with a trans lover who was also a "furry"—someone with a sexual fetish involving dressing up as an animal. The assassin told family members that Kirk was hateful and that "some hate can't be negotiated out."

Kirk's murder has brought to the fore the leftist political violence that has engulfed this country in recent years. Only two months ago, Kirk warned that "assassination culture is spreading on the left," citing a poll showing that

forty-eight percent of liberals say it would be at least somewhat justified to murder Elon Musk. Fifty-five percent said the same about Donald Trump. The left is being whipped into a violent frenzy. Any setback, whether losing an election or losing a court case, justifies a maximally violent response.

The latest wave of violence began with the deadly BLM-Antifa riots of 2020, which were tacitly encouraged by Democrats like Kamala Harris and Tim Walz as a way to destabilize then-President Trump. Then, of course, Trump was the target of two assassination attempts last year. There was the arson and vandalism against Tesla dealerships to intimidate Elon Musk and punish him for supporting Trump. In May, Israeli Embassy staffers Yaron Lischinsky and his fiancée Sarah Lynn



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Milgrim were assassinated, allegedly by a left-wing Palestinian activist, outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C. Even the arson attack on the home of Pennsylvania’s Democratic Governor Josh Shapiro was perpetrated by a left-wing, pro-Hamas, anti-Israel activist.

UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson was assassinated in Manhattan last December, shot in the back in cold blood, allegedly by wealthy leftist Luigi Mangione, who spouted left-wing critiques of corporate greed and has become a folk hero to the Left. When Mangione appeared in a Manhattan courtroom recently, a crowd of supporters chanted, “Free Luigi,” and cheered when the judge dropped some of the charges against him.

The public outpouring of sympathy for Mangione and the callous attitude towards his victim, a midwestern father of two teenagers who worked his way to the top, seem to have altered the political discourse on violence. “Violence is never the answer,” was Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren’s verdict on Mangione. “But people can only be pushed so far.” Warren’s colleagues doubled down on their dehumanization of Trump and his supporters, branding them as fascists and Nazis. All that was needed for tragedy to ensue was an unhinged person to take them at their word.

With their dehumanizing rhetoric and soft-on-crime policies, progressives create permission structures that excuse crime and violence, remove accountability, and blur the distinction between right and wrong. As if that

weren’t enough, in New York they have also created powerful disincentives for good citizens to protect themselves or others from crime.

A case in point was the persecution of former U.S. Marine Daniel Penny, who subdued a homeless, mentally ill man, Jordan Neely, as he was threatening to kill passengers on a New York subway car. Neely died soon after police arrived, and Manhattan prosecutor Alvin Bragg charged Penny with homicide. Penny was acquitted by a jury, but not before being portrayed by the media and others on the Left as a racist vigilante, despite the fact that passengers testified how scared they had been and how grateful they were that he had intervened.

It was a tragedy that there was no Good Samaritan like Penny in the light rail car in Charlotte, North Carolina, where 23-year-old Ukrainian refugee Iryna Zarutka was murdered with a knife by another homeless man with a lengthy criminal record. But that was the point of prosecuting Penny: to make an example of him and dissuade other valiant young men from protecting women like Iryna.

The intense blowback against Trump’s efforts to restore law and order rams home the point that it is a deliberate choice by progressives to preserve lawlessness in their cities. When you think about it, the strategy seems to have paid off, if all you care about is power, since progressives have a generational stranglehold on the cities with the worst crime.

From that skewed perspective, maybe Crockett isn’t so nutty after all. ■