

The Washington Post

When policing is self-defeating

Jonathan Blanks

October 26, 2018

In Charles Lane's Oct. 23 op-ed, "The goal of fair and consistent incarceration," he wrote: "In one significant respect . . . the problem in the United States may be underincarceration."

Mr. Lane cited the remarkable investigation The Post published on homicide clearance rates and highlighted the paltry numbers in cities that suffer disproportionately high numbers of murders. It was instructive that Mr. Lane cited the low clearance and high homicide rates in Chicago and Baltimore, because both cities' police forces have long, notorious histories of using excessive force, egregious misconduct and corruption.

Part of the reason clearance rates are so low in those cities is investigators cannot get cooperation from residents and witnesses in murder investigations. In communities that distrust and resent police because of abusive policies and corrupt officers, murderers may act with impunity.

Of course everyone wants killers brought to justice. But the inability to apprehend murderers is a symptom of a broken justice system, and simply locking up more of the "right" people isn't going to solve the larger problem of self-defeating policing.

Jonathan Blanks, Washington

The writer is a research associate in the Cato Institute's Project on Criminal Justice.