



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

POLICE

## Vancouver riot - Disappointing, but not surprising

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Yesterday, when I spoke with Constable Jana McGuinness of the Vancouver Police Department about the city's preparations for post-game crowd control, she insisted that their kinder and gentler, [Meet and Greet](#) approach was foolproof. She guaranteed that there would be no repeat of the city's 1994 riot, just as confidently as Canuck forward Daniel Sedin predicted victory. Reportedly, the police had learned from earlier mistakes, and were equipped with best practices for managing the throng expected in the downtown during and after the decisive hockey game.

Pressed further about worst-case contingencies, Constable McGuinness explained that the population was different -- more mature -- than in 1994. As evidence, she pointed to the well-mannered crowds during the 2010 Winter Olympics hosted by Vancouver. She rejected my suggestion that the way in which a city identifies with its local sports team, especially on the rare occasions that it competes for a championship, is fundamentally different than how a multi-national crowd reacts to a wide array of competitions held every four years.

Maybe I was misreading the official posturing, but it surely reminded me of the arrogance displayed by some of the Vancouver hockey players. The Canucks were too good to lose, and the fans too civilized to misbehave.

Apparently, no plan is foolproof when certain drunken fools take to the streets to release their disappointment and rage by throwing bottles and breaking windows. Unfortunately, mob behavior is contagious, spreading as fast as the fires that were set by angry fans in downtown Vancouver last night. A darker side of collective behavior, fan rioting has occurred in all major sports and in all parts of the world.

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson has expressed his disappointment over the post-game lawlessness, as has Constable McGuinness. Although the low-key best practices for crowd

control may work well for political conventions, religious rallies, and rock concerts, they apparently fail when confronting hoards of deeply disappointed, frustrated, and liquored-up fans. For that, a very different and more formidable strategy may be needed.