

LOCAL NEWS

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Injunction debate gains traction

So I'm walking down Fruitvale and I'm wearing a Titans cap and going to a party at Ignacio's house, am I going to get arrested? Of course

not. I'm white and wearing a suit. But would my brothers and sisters in this struggle?"

— Michael Siegel, defense attorney for Abel Manzo and adviser to other suspected

Nortenos named in Oakland's request for a preliminary injunction against members of the Fruitvale gang.

In case you missed it, this is what Michael Siegel — who took over the legal crusade against the Fruitvale gang injunction from his father, civil rights lawyer and mayoral adviser Dan Siegel — said at the public safety committee meeting last week.

Some people laughed and clapped. What were they cheering about?

On just about every level, these remarks demonstrate the simplistic reasoning and — to be quite honest — cluelessness of many of those protesting the Fruitvale gang injunction. A complete failure to grasp the devastation caused by all the shooting and killing. I continue to marvel at how people can work themselves into a frenzy to protect convicted criminals yet demonstrate no regard for their victims.

Siegel was criticizing the criteria that police use to identify gang members. Among other factors, these include the color clothing that those suspected of being gang members wear and who they associate with.

Siegel pooch-pooched the connection between the wearing of colors and gang affiliation.

Yet anyone who knows anything at all about gangs knows that members wear certain colors. Nortenos favor red clothing just like the Bloods.

We're not talking about a young lawyer with a well-known civil rights attorney for a father who decides to slap on a Tennessee Titans' cap to show support for his favorite team. We're talking about violent young men using certain colored clothing to announce their allegiance to a gang.

The use of colors as well as tattoo markings with gang insignia are some of the factors that authorities consider — among several which include previous criminal convictions and current associations — to establish reasonable proof of gang affiliation.

Are they being unfairly targeted because they are Latino? No?

Are we talking about youth being unfairly criminalized?

No, again.

These are adults who have come under scrutiny because of their own criminal behavior. Thirteen of the 40 suspected gang members have since been re-arrested. Some on charges of armed robbery, assault on a police officer and attempted murder. In other words, these are not misunderstood youngsters who just happened to be wearing red because they think it's pretty.

In order to survive, gang members need a place to congregate. The goal of the injunction is to disrupt the illegal activities of certain individuals in a so-called

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safe zone. They would also be subject to a 10 p.m. curfew.

Some have questioned what effect the departure of City Attorney John Russo might have on a preliminary gang injunction — should the judge award it. Russo, whose office has shepherded the city lawsuit through the court, is one of three finalists for the job of Alameda city manager.

However, even if Russo does leave, there appear to be more city council members favoring the injunction than opposed.

For the past several months, opponents have dominated the debate.

But last week, saner voices began to emerge. Perhaps it's because Judge Robert Freedman is set to rule on the city's lawsuit any

day now.

Christine Ralls held up a photo of a 14-year-old boy who was shot dead near her Fruitvale home in 2009 — mistaken for a gang rival. "We say, 'Basta.' Enough," she said.

Frank Rose chastised injunction opponents for "fighting for the people who created the problems, the gangs."

"If you think you're protecting somebody, you're just making the gangs go on and on and on and on," Rose said. "You should be ashamed of yourselves."

Rose is right.

The victims are the ones everyone should be concerned about — not those whom authorities have reasonably identified as the perpetrators of the violence.

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