

Detroit woman faces 15 years in prison over graffiti incident

Tyler Van Dyke
8 April 2017

Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan and his administration continue to pursue vindictive penalties in cases involving graffiti. Dozens of charges have been laid against graffiti artists since Duggan, a Democrat, took office in 2014.

In the most recent incident, Gabriela Gibson, 27, faces three felony charges carrying 15-year prison sentences. She is charged with lying under oath when questioned about the tagging of a long abandoned building on Detroit's east side. Her license plate information was allegedly captured by an eyewitness while she was driving away from the scene after spray-painting faces on the building.

Prosecutors claim to have found information about other graffiti incidents while searching Gibson's phone and text messages. Two other individuals, Nathan Koorhan and Craig Kowalski, face similar charges. Both face up to 10 years in prison for breaking and entering, and "malicious destruction" of one of Detroit's many abandoned schools.

Detroit, America's largest poor city, has been a target of graffiti for decades.

The three defendants are the latest victims of the crackdown against non-violent crimes by city officials.

The Duggan administration has also been issuing thousands of tickets to property owners in Detroit, giving them only seven days to remove graffiti from their buildings or be fined. Some residents, caught in the bureaucratic morass of the deeply underfunded and understaffed city, have been fined without being adequately warned about removing the graffiti.

Retired postal worker Freddie Jones, Jr. told the *Detroit Free Press* that the city had sent a crew to remove the tags off the side of his building and fined him \$1,121 just three days after he was warned.

"They're doing it to get money," Jones told the *Free*

Press, "Had I been given an opportunity I would've done it no problem. I wasn't even allotted the opportunity to clean up my own property."

Another small business owner, Roosevelt Hendrix, barely avoided paying a \$1,500 fine. He told the *Free Press*, "We just got lucky, man. I think we got lucky by doing it ourselves because \$1,500--who has \$1,500 for some graffiti, man? ... \$1,500 for nothing?"

Buildings where graffiti has been removed will often be tagged again in a matter of days.

The Duggan administration continues to try and present itself as "returning democracy to Detroit," while working behind closed doors to turn the city of Detroit into a haven for big investors and speculators.

Duggan is up for re-election this year and will no doubt use his bullying policing tactics as an example of how he has helped the city by cracking down on petty crime. This is known as "broken window policing" or "quality of life policing," the premise of which is that if small crimes are responded to harshly this will deter more serious crimes from occurring. The unconstitutional "stop-and-frisk" program in New York City is associated with this approach.

Duggan, a longtime proponent of "broken window policing," said in 2003, when he was Wayne County prosecutor, "I consider these quality-of-life crimes serious issues," and commented further that "They will have a ripple effect on other crimes."

The "theory," of course, is both unfair and anti-democratic and has no essential effect on conditions and crime rates that are the product of the overwhelming decay and devastation of America's inner cities.

As great numbers of people realize full well, the true "vandals" in Detroit, guilty of "malicious destruction" on a vast scale, are the auto and other giant

corporations that have destroyed hundreds of thousands of decent-paying jobs over the past 35 years, reducing the city's population to levels of misery seen in so-called Third World countries. Duggan and the Democrats have presided over the social carnage, acting with one goal in mind: to suppress popular anger and protect the wealth of the city's elite.

The imposition of tougher penalties for petty crimes, including the brutal treatment of Gibson, is intended to intimidate the population and muzzle potential opposition. Both the graffiti artists and the property-owners threatened with fines are victims of the same social process.

Duggan has received wide bipartisan support for his re-election bid, with many politicians and corporate figures already announcing support for him.

Rep. John Conyers (Democrat), whose wife, Monica Conyers, resigned from the Detroit City Council after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery, said of Duggan, "I am endorsing Mayor Duggan for re-election because he has shown a real talent for improving core city services."

Conyers commented "EMS and police response times are now timely. 60,000 new street lights are on. Thanks to President Obama, new buses are on the road making their routes on time. Garbage is picked up on schedule, new jobs are opening up and 11,000 blighted houses have been torn down." Aside from offering an entirely false picture of life in Detroit, Conyers' comments inevitably bring to mind the well-known apology for Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini that at least he "made the trains run on time."

Detroit NAACP President Wendell Anthony recently commented that "I'm not here 'cause he's the white mayor, I'm here 'cause he's the right mayor," and offered his backing to the Duggan campaign.

BluesPAC, the political action committee of health insurance corporation Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, sent out a letter in late February to "more than 1,000 Blue Cross employees ... asking for donations of \$1,000 for corporate officers, \$500 for vice presidents, \$250 for directors and \$100 from managers and others to support the Mike Duggan for Detroit Committee," according to *Crain's Detroit Business*.

Duggan has also obtained the support of Wayne County Executive Warren Evans, Wayne County

Sheriff Benny Napoleon, the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and Millwrights along with Detroit's various police and firefighters unions.

Duggan served as Wayne County Prosecutor from 2001 to 2004. Soon after leaving that office he took a position as president and CEO of the Detroit Medical Center. After DMC was sold to Vanguard Health Systems in 2010, Duggan walked away with more than \$2.4 million, along with sizeable stock options.

After an attempt to run for mayor of suburban Livonia in 2011, Duggan decided to campaign for mayor of Detroit in 2014. Because of his reputation as a cost cutter, Duggan secured the backing of major sections of Detroit's ruling elite.

Among those donating the nearly \$2 million to the 2014 Duggan mayoral campaign were political action committees associated with Quicken Loans CEO Dan Gilbert; Ford executive Bill Ford; Compuware founder Peter Karmanos; Roger Penske and executives from Vanguard Health Systems. All of these firms and individuals have continued to prosper under Duggan's administration.



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