

# Crime May Not Pay But It Can Make Us Laugh

BY JOHN G. BROWNING

Crime is a serious matter but that doesn't mean that the fumbling misadventures and mishaps of some would-be criminals can't provide us with some amusement. Take, for example, 54-year-old Michael Harrell, of Cleveland, Ohio. Last July, Harrell allegedly walked up to the teller's counter at the U.S. Bank branch at 7993 Euclid Ave. and handed the teller a note demanding money. Unfortunately for Harrell, when the teller looked at the other side of the note, she saw that it was a document from the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles, complete with Harrell's name and address. The teller handed over the money—calling Harrell by name in the process—and then promptly notified law enforcement. Shocking no one, authorities arrested Harrell two days later; the would-be robber pleaded not guilty. It's still unclear if Harrell used some of the stolen money to purchase stationery.

Providing your name and address on the back of a stick-up note is almost as embarrassing as trying to impersonate a police officer and pulling over a car that happens to be full of police. That's what happened last August to 25-year-old Valiery Portlock, of Hicksville, Long Island, New York. According to police, Portlock turned on emergency lights and started blowing an air horn on the vehicle he was driving as he pulled over a van. Unfortunately for Portlock, the van happened to be full of Nassau County detectives. When they identified themselves as real cops, Portlock tried to flee. He was quickly apprehended by highway patrol officers and arrested before being charged with criminal impersonation, reckless endangerment, and fleeing the police. Portlock could

wind up in a real courtroom, facing a real judge and the possibility of time in a real jail; let's hope for his sake he gets a real lawyer.

And speaking of impersonation, if you're going to use a fake ID, you might want to consider making sure the photo on it can pass for you. That would have been useful advice for the unidentified individual who attempted to purchase pot online from a Canadian legal marijuana dispensary. Unfortunately for our stoner friend, his fake ID gave a few clues that it wasn't legit. It was in the name of "Thor Odinson," listed an address of "69 Big Hammer Lane" in Calgary, Alberta, and most suspiciously of all, featured a photo of "Thor" actor Chris Hemsworth. But what really prevented the sale from going through was the fact that the driver's license was expired. Apparently, Thor, god of thunder, doesn't like lines at the Department of Public Safety any more than the rest of us.

Of course, embarrassment comes with the territory for some criminals. After police in Gwent in south Wales in the U.K. posted on their Facebook page the mugshot of wanted fugitive and convicted drug dealer Jermaine Taylor, the public had a field day mocking the 21-year-old Taylor's seriously receding hairline. The photo went viral with more than 84,000 comments and more than 13,000 shares on Facebook, nearly all of them making jokes at Taylor's expense. Comments like "Looks like his hairline is on the run too" and "Maybe he should have been dealing Rogaine, not cocaine" flooded the police department's Facebook page. It actually got to the point that law enforcement warned commenters that they could be facing criminal charges

themselves for harassment. But you know the old saying—"Don't do the crime if you can't take people giving you a hard time."

This next one may be more embarrassing for the courthouse security and jailers than the criminal himself. Last August, 32-year-old Madriekus Blakes, of West Memphis, Arkansas, was convicted on two counts of attempted first-degree murder but during a court recess before sentencing at the Crittenden County courthouse, Blakes just decided to leave and caught a ride home with a juror! After Blakes was seen leaving the courthouse parking lot in an orange Camaro (subtle), the search began. When the same orange Camaro returned to the courthouse the next morning, a juror stepped out and was quickly questioned. The juror (who was excused) admitted to giving Blakes a ride home but insists he didn't do anything wrong because they "did not talk about the case." We've got to do something about those jury instructions...

Finally, lawmakers in Germany may want to reconsider their law giving criminal defendants the opportunity to offer "any last words" after a verdict is returned. Convicted bank robber Michael Jauernik, 71, was found guilty and sentenced to more than 12 years in jail. When given the opportunity to speak, Jauernik had some words to offer—a lot of them, in fact. Jauernik spoke for five days, which beats most political filibusters. That leaves Jauernik only 11 years and 360 days to go on his sentence; hopefully they have lozenges in the prison commissary. **TBJ**



## JOHN G. BROWNING

is a partner in Spencer Fane in Plano, where he handles commercial litigation, employment, health care, and personal injury defense matters in state and federal courts. He is an award-winning legal journalist for his syndicated column, "Legally Speaking," and is the author of the Social Media and Litigation Practice Guide and a forthcoming casebook on social media and the law. Browning is an adjunct professor at SMU Dedman School of Law.