



CITY OF OAKLAND
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City Attorney Press Office:
(510) 238-3148
www.oaklandcityattorney.org

Oakland's Neighborhood Law Corps wins lawsuit against looters

OAKLAND, CA – Two men sued by the City for looting a downtown Oakland jewelry store during a protest last year have been ordered to pay \$25,000 each to the store owner.

“Oakland has a proud tradition of non-violent protest and dissent,” City Attorney John Russo said Thursday. “Those who use protests as nothing more than a cover to trash our town or loot homegrown businesses should consider carefully the court’s ruling. Oakland will not tolerate this disrespect to our tradition.”

The protest on July 8, 2010 following the conviction of former BART police officer Johannes Mehserle was mostly peaceful. However, some individuals used the gathering – and the tragic death of Oscar Grant – as an excuse to commit acts of violence, set fires, loot local businesses and lash out in childish and destructive ways.

In the middle of the protest, the owner of the JC Jewelry store on Broadway tried to fend off a crowd of more than 200 looters who broke through a security gate, kicked in a window, punched an employee in the face and made off with thousands of dollars worth of property.

In October 2010, Oakland's Neighborhood Law Corps sued Terry Williams and Gerald Dugas, two men arrested during the looting (**Case # RG10544005**). Both were caught with gold jewelry stolen from the store, according to police.

Neighborhood Law Corps attorney Tivonna Stern filed an innovative lawsuit against Williams and Dugas under the Bane Act, a California law that allows cities to bring an action to protect an owner's exclusive possession of their property. In a decision posted recently on the Superior Court's web site, Judge Richard Keller ordered Williams and Dugas to pay \$25,000 each in civil penalties, plus \$105 each in costs to the City of Oakland. The \$50,000 in civil penalties will be awarded to the owner of JC Jewelry.

Two other defendants named in the lawsuit were arrested July 8 after they were filmed in the act of spray painting on public property. The lawsuit against them is ongoing. The City is seeking damages related to the graffiti and punitive damages to be determined.

The Neighborhood Law Corps is a unit in the City Attorney's Office that functions like a cross between Legal Aid and the Peace Corps. Neighborhood Law Corps attorneys serve the City for two years at a first year teacher's salary. They are assigned to work with the community and to prosecute slumlords, drug houses and other public nuisances in civil court.

For more about the July 8 riot, please see this [op-ed](#) by City Attorney Russo.
