

The Los Angeles Police Department was one of the first adopters of predictive policing, launching a system in 2011 the Los Angeles Strategic Extraction and Restoration program, or LASER. LASER came with the promise that using data-driven policing would enable them to remove bad actors from a community with laser precision, relying on data to identify hotspots for illegal activity . The program also included the generation of individual risk scores, with a high enough score landing a person in a “chronic offender” database . These people became the first that police would look to when identifying suspects, and were subjected to constant police surveillance and abuse [1]. In addition to the problems with the execution of the program, by using historical data, this system just strongly reinforced current policing habits and emboldened police to act based on an “objective” data-based system [2]. It created an environment where entire communities were criminalized, and resulted in people being displaced. The LASER system, including the chronic offender database, was shut down in 2019 after strong public backlash. As the LASER system was retired, the LAPD introduced a new system that it called data-informed community-focused policing. This new system received similar backlash at its launch, but no major action has been taken against it so far [2].

The Ted Talk proposes a hypothetical fully segregated society as a thought experiment, and how data-driven policing in a situation like that would create a cycle of heavy focus on minority neighborhoods. Though to a much lesser extent, I feel this situation mirrored that hypothetical to the point that the parallels strongly reinforce the points made in the Ted Talk. Big data was used in a way that directly negatively influenced minority-dominated communities, without consent or disclosure. As we move further into the development of artificial intelligence and integration of algorithms to predict behavior, cases like LASER do not provide the public with confidence in these algorithmic prediction systems. As the Ted Talk states, skepticism of

practices like these will be essential in the future to ensure our safety and placing blind trust in big data is what led to the mistreatment of those placed on the chronic offender list. Hopefully the future of big data will be accompanied by more awareness and accountability regarding the ethics of its use, and more situations like this don't occur.

References

[1] J. Bhuiyan, "LAPD ended predictive policing programs amid public outcry. A new effort shares many of their flaws," *The Guardian*, Nov. 08, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/07/lapd-predictive-policing-surveillance-reform> (accessed Feb. 03, 2024).

[2] Stop LAPD Spying coalition, "Automating Banishment," *Stop LAPD Spying Coalition*. <https://automatingbanishment.org/section/2-architecture-of-data-driven-policing/#Operation-LASER>