

Black Murders

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helped to provide money for programs to fight crime. But that's no longer the case.

"Right now, with the economy in a pretty rough shape, lots of cities are making major slashes, major cuts in their police forces, as well as in the very programs that were successful even at the federal level. There's a move to cut back on the after-school programming," Fox says. "Those were some of the best strategies that paid off in the 90s."

No one has to tell Carlesea Williams those strategies are no longer in place.

Her son, Nucommus Staya Williams, 20, was shot eight times almost four years ago as he stood in front of McKinley High School in northeast, Washington, D.C. An associate, Jesse Harrison, 24, was convicted and sentenced to 37 years to life in prison for the murder.

"His beef wasn't even with my son. It was with another guy that my son was seen talking to," she says.

At a recent memorial for homicide victims and a special service for their families in D.C., Carlesea wept and cradled a photograph of her son at the Holy Christian Missionary Baptist Church for All People.

"I have a shrine in my front room in his memory. Just things that belonged to him like his work shoes, his tennis shoes," says Williams, a counselor at the St. John's Community Center. "I miss him so much...I have a broken heart. I acknowledge it. I'm going to have it for the rest of my life."

And so will a lot of other parents in the nation's capital.

According to figures recently made public by the FBI, the District of Columbia led the nation last year with 264 homicides, an increase of 14 percent since 2001. With 45.8 homicides per 100,000 residents, Washington leads Detroit, which had 42 per 100,000 residents and Baltimore with 38.3.

Among modern industrialized

countries, the U. S. ranks number one in homicides, according to a study by "The Home Office," the government department responsible for international affairs in England and Wales.

The agency's Web site shows the U. S. homicide rate per 100,000 at 6.2, well ahead of Scotland with 2.1, Sweden with 2.0, Belgium with 1.7, Greece at 1.6, England and Wales with 1.4, and Ireland at 1.3.

"I can't take another funeral! I cannot take another funeral as we sit back and just act as if we're helpless and watch our children just die and die and die!" said community activist Rahim Jenkins at the special service in D.C.

"The number one thing that happened to us is racism," declared Rev. Willie Wilson, pastor of the Union Temple Baptist Church and the keynote speaker at the D.C. church service. "Almost 40 percent of our people are living under the poverty line. Racism is alive and well."

Not everything can be attributed to racism, says U.S. Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.), who has helped organized a series of conferences to explore the plight of Black males,

including one held last week in Washington.

"It's our belief that we must get to the core of what we call negative behavior," Davis says. "People commit homicides because it gives them a sense of power, the ability to do something. And so, if we can catch some of these feelings and negate some of these behaviors, then of course we can negate some of these homicides."

Dr. Carl C. Bell, chief executive officer of the Community Mental Health Council (CMHC) and professor of psychiatry and public health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, says, "There must be several comprehensive strategies. Each city has a different pattern and must look at each issue of violence."

Experts agree that much of the violence has been fueled by drugs.

More than 3.9 million people who need treatment to get off of drugs cannot receive treatment for lack of space in treatment centers, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

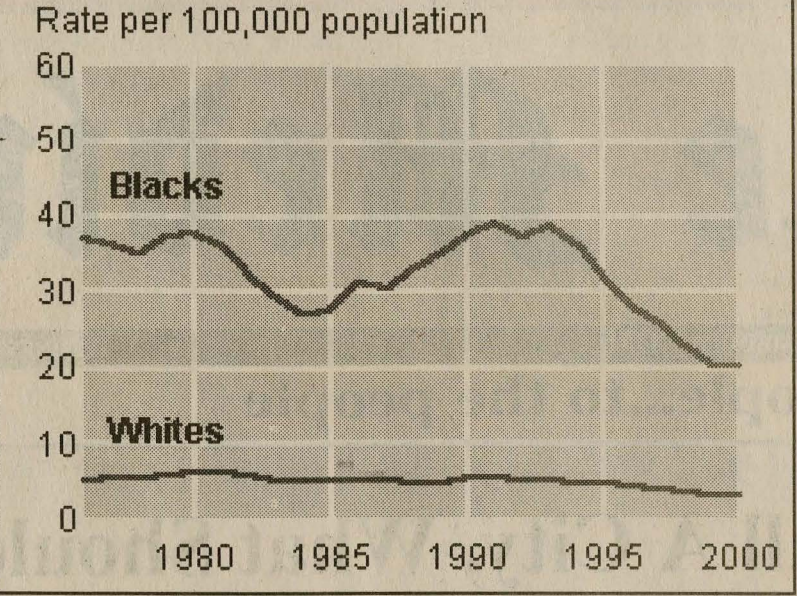
Expanding drug treatment programs is a key to reducing homicides, says Scott Steinhart, spokesperson for the New York Division of Criminal Justice Services, an agency working to expand its "Road to Recovery Program," designed to prevent non-violent drugs offenders from returning to lives of crime.

"Programs like 'Road to Recovery' do reduce crimes. District attorneys and courts deserve to have powerful tools at their disposal and this new initiative makes that possible," he says.

According to a report by the New York Division of Criminal Justice Services, people who go through drug rehabilitation are 687 percent less likely to return to prison two years after leaving the program than those who do not participate.

Houston Mayor Lee Brown has spent four decades in law enforcement, serving as police commissioner in Atlanta and New York City as well as director of the

Homicide victimization by race, 1976-2000



White House Office of National Drug Control Policy in the Clinton administration.

"We find that the twin evils - guns and drugs - continue to contribute to the problem in a large degree," Brown explains.

He says the answer is three-fold: More gun control laws, more anti-drug programs for children, and more drug treatment for those already addicted to drugs.

"No demand, no supply," Brown says. "But, there are no easy solutions. There's no silver bullet."

Hubert Williams, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Police Foundation, says law enforcement officers can play a role before there is a death.

"The police need to have ways to engage the community. They need to be more service-oriented. They need to work programs out for youth. They need to try and help women who have troubles, victims of crime. They need to have ways to engage the community that's not directly related to a criminal act as potential for producing a windfall of opportunities for the police department."

No solution will be successful without the involvement of the Black church, says Rev. Melvin Williams Jr., pastor of the Temple of Judah in Richmond, Va. So far, 83 people have been killed in Richmond this year, a 40 percent increase over last year.

Williams is organizing a "We Declare War" community-wide protest, the fifth anti-crime march he has organized in 15 years.

"Marches let the youth of today know that the church wants to be involved with them and the direction they're taking in life," explains Williams. "The church as a whole has really not been active in going to the streets to proclaim the Gospel as we should. God blesses us, we move out of the inner city to the suburbs, we don't look back and don't go back. Well, we declare war - war on poverty, war on drugs, war on unrighteousness."

If successful, such actions might reduce the number of parents grieving over the loss of a child, most often a son. However, that does nothing to ease the pain of Sandra Beverly, whose youngest son, Anthony, was shot 22 times last year in a church parking lot in northeast D.C. His body was riddled with bullets from 9-millimeter and 44 colt handguns.

Beverly acknowledges her son's involvement in street life. "I'm not saying my son was an angel," she says. "But, he was my baby." Police have made no arrest in his murder.

The driver of a school bus for handicapped children in the D.C. Public Schools, Beverly says. "I still scream out crying at night. I cry out sometimes in the day time."

SHA

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Carl Livingston, associate pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Seattle, addresses SHA's board of directors Monday night. Staff Photo/Chris B. Bennett.

who are consistently turned away instead of being hired.

Clarence Bennett, an unemployed African American carpenter who lives less than one-mile from New Holly, claims that he has repeatedly gone to the New Holly construction site week after week with tools in hand to inquire about work, but has never been hired. He even applied directly at the general contractor's office as well.

"I wonder why I'm not getting hired, when I see new workers coming onto this site," he said. "I even know all of the supervisors names now."

"The contractors are out of Portland, Oregon, the sub-contractors are out of Portland, Oregon, and they're getting all that money, and taking it back to Portland," said Frederick Simmons, an unemployed union electrician and board member of the Northwest Labor Employment Law Project (LELO).

Organizers are also concerned that not only are people not being employed, but they are also concerned that the homes being built are too expensive for many Seattle area residents to afford. And while the projects are increasing the overall number of housing units available in the area, there has been no increase in the number of units earmarked for low-income residents beyond what was already in place before the redevelopment projects began.

"Our estimates show that it costs about \$100,000 to build each home, but they sell for \$250,000," said Eddie Rye, Jr. "The land is already owned by the government, so there is no reason in the world to sell those houses for \$250,000 other than to force Black folks and low-income residents out of the city."

According to SHA, 29 job placements have come out of the Rainier Vista Jobs Plus program. Of these 29 employees, 5 were African. 1 Arabic/Somali, 7 African Americans, 2 Native Americans, 2 Asians, one Hispanic, and one

Caucasian. 19 out of the 29 employees were laid-off or terminated for a retention rate of thirty-five percent, the industry average is thirty-three percent.

The High Point Job Connection program has made 10 placements consisting of: 4 Africans, 3 African Americans, 2 Pacific Islanders, and one Asian.

The New Holly Career Development Center employed 53 people consisting of: 30 Asian/Pacific Islanders, 16 Africans, 2 African Americans, 4 Hispanic/Latinos, and one Caucasian. Of those employed, twenty-two resigned/quit, 10 were terminated by the employer, three no longer work as substitutes, and one was laid-off.

SHA also claims that they have a memorandum of understanding with LELO that will commit them to having 100 percent of new-hire jobs on HOPE VI projects filled by local, low-income residents; encourage residents to apply for apprenticeships positions as they become available; and to provide resources and work readiness training for new resident workers.

However, LELO maintains that they (SHA) have failed to reach an agreement with LELO's family wage jobs project after two months of negotiations. In August, LELO submitted a six-point hiring and retention plan to SHA calling for them to prioritize residents of public housing, unemployed and low-income workers from the surrounding communities and the homeless for livable wage jobs rebuilding The HOPE VI projects.

"We want the SHA board to make a real commitment to addressing the poverty and high unemployment among diverse low-income residents in Southeast and West Seattle by adopting this plan,"

"The best welfare program is a good job," said Livingston.

Jennifer Potter, chair of the SHA Board of Directors, stated that the Board will work with the coalition in an effort to help resolve their issues.

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young achievers



Lisa Lam

Arbor Heights Elementary

Age: 7

Favorite School Subject: Lisa likes to learn new words. Junie B. Jones is her favorite book.

Hobbies/Interests: She likes to read, clean up her room, and play tetherball.

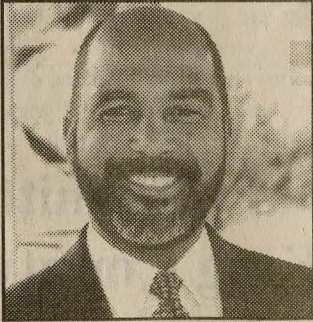
Proudest Achievement: Her artwork

Ambition: She would like to be a kindergarten teacher or an artist.

How She'll Get There: By working hard for good grades, and practicing to be an artist.

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