



Behind the Wall

by Larry Baker #35021
O.S.P. Correspondent

"Behind the Wall" would like to dedicate this week's column to the latest edition of *Ebony Magazine* (August 1979).

Ebony is the country's largest Black owned publication. This month *Ebony* brought before the people of this nation the plain truth about Black crime and the treatment they receive in the criminal justice system, and the incarcerated Blacks in this nation's jails and prisons. The special issue goes one step further, it describes the causes, the consequences and the cures.

Never before has this Correspondent ever read anything that describes so specifically why the Oregon justice system and the incarceration of Blacks is *not* working. I highly suggest all readers obtain a copy. It is enough to shock the conscious of the top people who work in the criminal justice field, in this state, as well as the Oregon public.

Black leaders are beginning to take a closer look at the damage being done to their people, it is hoped that Oregon's Black leaders do not make any more excuses to by-pass the problems of crime and prison.

The question this Correspondent examined after reading *Ebony's* "Black on Black Crime" is, "What is happening to Blacks in the Oregon justice system and prisons? Is this another form of extermination of Black people?"

"Behind the Wall" wishes to print the publisher's, John H. Johnson's, statement in *Ebony's* August 1979 special issue.

"Black on Black Crime has Reached a Critical Level that Threatens our Existence as a People"

This is a special issue on an explosive issue of special concern to every man, woman and child in Black America. It is a special, in-family issue on Black on Black Crime. And it is perhaps the most important special issue, from the standpoint of the strength and stability of the Black community, that we have published in the last 16 years.

We do not, needless to say, approach this subject lightly. As a matter of fact, this is an issue we wish we didn't have to publish. But, wishes apart, it is an issue we had to publish if we were going to keep faith with that long line of dreamers and martyrs who brought us thus far along the way.

It is our belief, and it is the basic premise of this issue, that Black on Black Crime has reached a critical level that threatens our existence as a people. It is a threat to our youths, to our women, to our senior citizens, to our institutions, to our values. And although we are not responsible for the external factors that systematically create breeding grounds for social disorder, we cannot avoid the internal responsibility of doing everything we can to solve a problem that is rending the fabric of our lives. THE FACTS BEFORE US ARE CLEAR AND DANGEROUS.

....Homicide is a major cause of death among young Black males,

and most of these murder victims are killed, not by racists or members of the Ku Klux Klan, but by other young Black males.

....Tens of thousands of young Black men and women, the flower of our youth, are riding conveyor belts leading from petty crime to reform schools to prisons to major crimes to death and/or the penitentiary.

....Black communities from the Atlantic to the Pacific are becoming locked and divided camps, beleaguered and fearful place of bars, guards, alarms, metal gates and bolted doors.

....Crimes by Blacks against Blacks are costing Black Americans and Black American businesses and institutions billions of dollars. Dr. Andrew Brimmer, former member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, says that "a significant share of the hard income and a sizable proportion of the wealth that the Black community has struggled to accumulate are being dissipated through the wastage of criminal offenses. Moreover, the cost of crime is by no means evenly distributed in the nation at large. Instead, the poorest members are far more likely to be victims—especially in cases of personal violence. Thus, the segment of the Black population which can least bear the costs of crime is most often forced to carry a disproportionate share of what amounts to a criminally imposed levy."

This is the general situation, and the situation is getting worse. For people are getting used to an intolerable situation, an indifference to Black pain and the spilling of Black blood is growing. And so today, as in the 19th century, there is no flesh in America, as Frederick Douglass said in another connection, as cheap as Black flesh.

For a long time now, many Black leaders have remained silent on this issue for fear of playing into the hands of men of bad faith who use every Black misdeed to malign all Blacks. But the facts and figures cited in this issue have nothing at all to do with the social characteristics of Black people. We are not now, and we have never been, more criminal than other groups: we are simply exposed more often to environments that have produced high levels of social frustration and social disorder in all groups. It is instructive in this connection to consider the words of Stanley Feldstein and Lawrence Costello (The Ordeal of Assimilation): "Throughout the 19th century, a high percentage of paupers in American cities were foreign-born. Moreover, since there was a close relationship between poverty and crime, it was not surprising that a high incidence of crime existed in immigrant neighborhoods. The notorious Five Points of New York City was an area of heavy Irish concentration. In 1860, when half of the city's population was foreign-born, about 80 per cent of those convicted of crimes were immigrants." Considering the abnormally high



levels of Black unemployment and the inhumane social conditions forced on most Blacks, it is not at all unusual that some Black individuals turn to crime. What is unusual under the circumstances, and worthy of long thought, is that most Blacks of all ages and social conditions are decent, lawabiding people.

This special issue is dedicated to the overwhelmingly majority of Blacks, who are the victims, not the perpetrators of Black on Black crime. And it is addressed primarily to the perpetrators of crime who are, more often than not, victims of their own crimes and of a society that condemns them to lives of frustration and rage and emptiness. Beyond all that, it contains a message for forces and persons outside the Black community who are ultimately responsible for perpetuating intolerable social conditions that are clear and present dangers not only to Black America but also to White America.

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August

On Aspiration/On Responsibility

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.
William Blake

On Conservatism

People are conservatives when they are least vigorous, or when they are most luxurious. They are conservative after dinner.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

On Conservatism

What is conservatism? Is it not adherence to the old and tried, against the new and untried?
Abraham Lincoln

On Ancestry

I don't know who my grandfather was; I am much more concerned to know what his grandson will be.
Abraham Lincoln

On Talk

Words once spoke can never be recall'd.
Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon

On Truth

Be so true to thyself as you not be false to others.
Francis Bacon

On Time

Time ripens all things; no person is born wise.
Cervantes