

Black on black crime: Portland, Oregon

by Lenita Duke

Grassroot News, N.W.—A man slaps the mother of his child. Another pries open the basement door and takes the television, amplifier, receiver and a piggy bank from the home of his next-door neighbor. It's ladies night at a downtown nightclub and you set your purse underneath the table to dance. A woman in the next booth spies on your activity and when you return you assume you danced your last dance because your purse along with the money for your light bill is missing. A man dogs a young woman in his care, pushing her out as he drives down the street. A few days later her friends catch him in the streets and beat him to death.

These examples of crime are both fictitious and factual. Committed on those who can least afford it, who are extremely vulnerable, and are largely uninsured, they are examples of black on black crime in Portland. And unless we raise the consciousness of the Afro-American community in Portland this insidious element contained and perpetuated like a malignant tumor will eat us from the inside out.

Jasper Ormand, clinical psychologist, says the economic and political oppression suffered by black people in America is the cause of black on black crime. "This oppression heaped upon black people in America is so long-standing that black on black crime is a symptom of the social ills. Until we make an impact on those social ills we will probably continue to see black on black crime. We shouldn't focus on the symptoms without focusing on the causes."

When a brother or sister is caught wrong there is no way for them to rationalize their crime. Ormand says, "Quite often we are looking at irrational behavior. It's not that they are sitting around talking about committing crimes. It's an impulsive irrational act. People are acting out of pure impulse and frustration. You don't think about going to S.W. Portland. You look around at what is convenient. Another factor is that people are confined to a certain area in Portland. They function in a vacuum. Their reality is focused inside this space. If you are angry, frustrated, helpless or hopeless you manifest those negative feelings right there within the context of that vacuum."

Ormand concludes that this behavior in black people is not inherited. "Racism is systematically projected in every institution in America and this produces a sense of self-hate. And from time to time it takes its toll. A lot of anger and frustration will be taken out on those people within your vacuum. These people are like you and you begin to believe those messages coming from institutional racism. The power and consistency of that message will take its toll and one day when the economic and political oppression reaches a certain point in one's life black on black crime will erupt."

Ronnie Herndon, co-chair of the Black United Front, corroborates this viewpoint. "Anytime you force a group of people into poverty and you keep them in poverty the way America has done to black people they will turn to criminal activity. This happens all over the Western world. Whenever you find a lot of person to person crime you will find that it's committed by the poorest people in that society. This is why you find so many black people involved in crime. We've been forced into a miserable poverty-ridden condition."

Herndon says the reason for black on black crime is that it's easy. "Most crimes are committed closer to home. This is the area they are familiar with. Portland is unique because of the high unemployment rate among black teenagers and adults. The whole history of racism in Oregon has made it difficult for black people to get and hold onto jobs. Business has actively sought to keep from hiring black people. Unions have worked hard to keep blacks out of their organization. And these actions were in times of a healthy economy. In times of depression it is almost impossible. If you don't have money you don't have resources. And if you can't earn money people will have to take it."

On an international level, Dr. Chancellor Williams wrote in *The Destruction of Black Civilization* that, "Offenders do not know they are enlisted in the white man's army to slowly destroy the race. The War takes many unsuspecting forms, including the big and increasingly widespread use of narcotics among blacks. . . Blacks who are so ready to make criminal attacks on their own people are, unconsciously, striking out against the unbearable

situation of what appears to be permanent disunity and, therefore, the utter helplessness of a race whose liberation from oppression can be achieved only by united initiatives of its own.

"Hence, like caged animals, they strike at what is nearest to them—their own people. They are actually trying to kill a situation they hate, unaware that even in this, they are serving the white man well. For whites need not go all out for 'genocide' schemes, with which they are often charged, when blacks are killing themselves off daily on such a larger scale."

Dr. Frantz Fanon complements this theory in *The Wretched of the Earth*. "The colonized man will first manifest his aggressiveness, which has been deposited in his bones, against his own people."

Rev. Herbert Daughtry, president of the national Black United Front, applies this theory to Afro-Americans in the 1980s. "Everyone seems to know we're in a war but us. There is no way you can cut out essential services like hospitals, schools and social programs unless you intend to destroy the people. When you are allowed to put in and take out of an environment what you please you can predict the behavior of the people residing there. It will either kill them off or so arrange their behavior they will kill one another."

"There was a time when it was a rarity to find a young person in jail. Now you can go from the Atlantic to the Pacific and you will find young blacks, Latinos and Hispanics are the inhabitants of the prisons. Don't let anyone talk to you about black on black crime. Let's talk about white on everybody crime. We never stole any gold mines, oil wells, communities or nations. Because they control the information, what we have in our community is penny-ante manifestations of the behavior patterns the society has predicted for us."

I read this passage to a sister who declined to be identified and her response was, "If I come into your house and take all your food out of your cupboards, remove your money and cut your heat and lights off, don't you think I can guess what your next move will be. That is what Rev. Daughtry is saying. You can't look at a negative structure and expect to get a positive reaction. We are like rats in an experiment. The

man helps us form a pattern and we help keep it. Just like in the Unthank park area. We are buckled-up in there. It's just like a concentration camp."

Roosevelt Robinson, Deputy D.A. in Multnomah county, defines black on black crime in Portland: "Any offense that interferes with personal property like vandalism, theft, and larceny. Also any crimes that fall under the person-to-person types of crime like assault and the more serious type, homicide. In a sense there is more black on black homicide considering the amount of black people in Portland." (According to the Portland Police Annual Report in 1982 there were four homicides committed by youth under 18, three were committed by blacks. For adults the total was 25 and 11 were committed by blacks.)

Robinson addresses the suspicion that the criminal justice system shows more leniency toward a black assailant whose victim is also black than one whose victim was white. "It's impossible to say that the criminal justice system is lenient toward black on black crime. There is no objective way that can be determined. When you look at the sentencing procedure, which includes a pre-sentence investigation, these procedures determine how much time a defendant will receive and not his race, economic or social standing. The D.A. can recommend a certain time behind bars but the court is not bound by that recommendation."

One case recently which was the tip of the iceberg of leniency toward black on black crime was the Morris/Croxton affair where Ben Croxton beat his live-in lady to death and left her body in the apartment for two days. "I thought the whole community should have turned out to protest the system giving that animal a slap on the wrist," a woman said off the record. "This fool had a reputation of using his size to intimidate women. The one item that was never brought up was Ben's connection with police intelligence. You have to have connections to do such a cruel thing and be able to get back on the streets in two years."

(Continued next week)



Young man escapes with television set belonging to his neighbor. A ready customer waits. (Photo: Richard Brown)

Reagan promises military aid

(Continued from page 1 column 6) percent currency devaluation was forced by the International Monetary Fund which provided loans to prevent Costa Rica's default of U.S. bank loans.

Social deterioration is already

showing in Costa Rica's education systems, traditionally one of the nation's most developed institutions. Undernourishment makes it impossible for children to attend school and reduction of family income has forced young people to quit school

to work.

When he was elected in February of 1982, Luis Alberto Monge said, "In the present situation in Central America, we would like the United States to take into account not just military and security aspects, but also the economic and social problems which underlie the whole crisis we are going through."

Its economic crisis has allowed Costa Rica's foreign policy to be manipulated by the U.S. and the U.S.-controlled IMF. Costa Rica hosted the recent regional meeting—from which Nicaragua, Grenada and Cuba were banned and which Mexico and Venezuela declined to attend—that ended in a resolution to put added military pressure on Nicaragua.

Reagan chose Costa Rica for his statement that any nation "destabilizing its neighbors by protecting guerillas and exporting violence" cannot be a friend of the U.S.

Reagan continued that Central American "self-determination" is challenged as "agents of unrest seek to impose new forms of imperialism and tyranny we threw off many years ago." Reagan seemed oblivious to the fact that "imperialism" may justifiably be used to refer to the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, to Western Europe and in Latin America "imperialism" immediately calls forth the image of Uncle Sam and "el imperialismo yanqui."

El Salvador

El Salvador is the smallest of the Central America nations. Reagan met with Alvaro Magana, the interim president, a figurehead. The real ruler is Roberto D'Abuisson, leader (Please turn to page 5 column 1)

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