

Black/black crime

Part IV

Things are so tough on a brother nowadays. I got child support hanging over my head and rent is facing everytime I go home. It's gotten to the place where I don't want to go home. At least in the streets I can make a little money. You see, I tried to look for a job but there is nothing out there and when I find something I can do the man behind the desk won't hire me. So, what's a man to do? I'm not going to starve and my children are not going barefoot. I'm going to make me some money. If I have to steal, rob or sell dope, I'm going to have it in 1983.

—Black male, 28 years old

Grassroot News, N.W.—The above account is taken from a black male standing on the streets. It is an example of the mentality of a so-called criminal. In this section on black-on-black crime we'll look at the criminal—the brother or sister who steals, robs and rapes the community. Regardless of the victim, if they catch you wrong, they will take advantage of you. But who are these men, and why do they do what they do?

"Well, I thought I was an adult at 13 because I started doing what I wanted to do. When I first entered high school I started smoking weed and later I was popping reds and yellows. The next thing I knew I was 16 years old shooting heroin. I wasn't into a whole lot of crime at this stage but selling a little drugs on the side. I guess it wasn't a little thing because I fell deeper into the illusion or trap that I was doing something slick or cool. My brother (a convicted drug dealer) didn't help me any as a role model. Here he was driving a big car, always had money and never going to work. This was an incentive for me to say, 'Hey, I can do the same thing!' So, what started me on my downfall was role models because all my role models were doing a little bit of everything wrong.

"Getting into the fast life is like being in the desert. The next thing you know you are looking for those mirages. Once you get near it you find that you have to go a little farther. The next thing you know you are so trapped up in the illusion that you lose contact with how hot the sun really is. You lose contact with reality."

This young man said he started shooting heroin to belong to a certain group. "My reasons were selfish. Here I was 15 and 16 years old

with others my age handling three to four thousand dollars a day. It was for the flash. Just to high-side. It was easy for me to get two to three ounces of dope. I entered a little world all to our own. We even had our own vocabulary. We were selling dope like it was legal. As long as we paid the police they left us alone. They had to know what we were doing. Everyone else sure did."

He told me during this time that he didn't have to break into people's houses. "But my other associates did. They would come to me with items that they stole. Sometimes from around the corner. I didn't have to buy it because there were plenty of good church-going people who would spend \$50 dollars on a color T.V. stolen from their neighbor. It didn't matter if your name was on it or not. They still bought it. I'm sure they thought they were beating the system but all they were doing was beating themselves because you never know when the next hot T.V. would be yours."

This conversation confirms the fact of the correlation between drugs and crime. Many of the criminal-minded had drugs on the mind when they took from their neighbors. Not food, clothing or rent. Just pleasure.

But this is just one example or one look into the mind of a so-called criminal. Larry Baker, an OSP inmate who has spent much of a lifetime behind bars for one reason or another, says other criminals who are unlucky enough to get caught commit their crimes on an impulse.

"Most of the violent crimes are committed on the spur of the moment. These crimes are never really thought out. Most of the blacks who commit crime, after they commit it and are caught, are sorry they did it. Once they get hooked into the criminal justice system, the crime they committed gets lost in the process. When they get to prison it becomes a matter of survival. They would have forgotten what they did to wind up in prison. In prison you lose responsibility. Everything is given to you. It is only a matter of time before they lose responsibility for the crime. Why, they even forget why they did it, or who they did it to. There is no one along the way, from the time that they are arrested to the time they are spending behind bars, to remind them or question why they did what they did. The system is not set up to question or remind the guy about what he did."

One statement was made to me by a man who spent 9 years in Walla

Walla: "Some brothers just serve time. They don't let time serve them."

The brothers who are released say the community does not get involved in the prison so it's easy for them to pick up their old ways. One prison guard put that thought in perspective: "The reason why the community doesn't get involved with the men behind bars is as soon as they are released, if they want to start doing what they did to get up here, they are going to do it to the community. These guys are not going to the West Hills to do their dirt, they are going right back in the black community to do it. So why should the community open up their arms to men that will steal, rape and rob them? People aren't fools and they want to keep what little bit they have."

Currently, there is a lot of talk about the disproportionate number of Afro-American men behind bars. One thought came from the black judiciary of Portland as to why: "Because they keep screwing up. They do not send anyone to Salem

who does not belong there. Besides we do not give time until they commit four or five crimes. Or should I say until they get caught four or five times. I think racism gets them arrested more often because you can see them more often. But you've got to understand that these guys commit crimes where it's easy to get caught. They sell dope and you really do not know who you are selling dope to. They burglarize homes and believe it or not they solve a lot of burglaries. You've got to sell it to someone and that person gets caught and tells where he got it from. Most blacks who are in prison are in for burglary and dope. So the reason why there are a high number of black men in prison is that they themselves commit crimes that are easily apprehended."

Although many perceive their plight to be one of survival, there is still no excuse for these men and women who prey upon their community. There are other channels if their children are without. If they can be made aware of all the wrong they can make an effort to learn

about the right. As the black community slips into the 1980s we can ill afford the tangible and intangible price of black on black crime. There is no excuse for it. As Malcolm X, who rose from hoodlum, thief, dope peddler, and pimp to become one of our greatest leaders, once said: "I believe that it would be almost impossible to find anywhere in America a black man who has lived further down in the mud of human society than I have; or a black man who has been any more ignorant than I have been; or a black man who has suffered more anguish during his life than I have. But it is only after the deepest darkness that the greatest joy can come; it is only after slavery and prison that the sweetest appreciation of freedom can come."

Now Grassroot News is not saying everyone should be like Malcolm X, but it would not hurt. What we are saying is to become aware of your oppression and what it is doing to you. Only then can you fight it much like antibodies fight disease.



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Lillian White of Gresham and Edward Card of Portland are among the December winners in the Washington State Lottery. White won \$600, and Card \$100. Card will be in the mid-February drawing for \$1 million.



Peninsula Senior Center schedules free health screen

Free health screening and information for senior citizens is being offered at the third annual "Peninsula Senior Center Mini-Health Fair," Tuesday, January 25th, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A variety of health screening tests and demonstrations are planned for the day. The Seventh Day Adventist Mobile Screening Van will be on hand to give blood pressure, glaucoma, lung function and blood sugar tests. Anyone interested in having blood sugar tests done should not eat for two hours prior to test. Project ARM van will also be stationed at the Senior Center to give hearing tests. Project Smile will conduct oral cancer screening checks. Wayne Hatch, pharmacist, will be giving information on drugs. Vada Grimsrud will do some talking on Crime Prevention and Neighbors Against Crime. Nutritional infor-

mation and blood pressure tests will be given by the University of Portland School of Nursing. Dr. Gordon Wolfe will be answering medical questions. A free foot clinic will be offered by the Army Reserve Clinic.

Other agencies have been invited to attend. All the participating agencies are providing their services at no cost to senior citizens. Last year over 100 seniors attended the Mini-Health Fair. Most came in the morning; we would like to encourage more people to come in the afternoon as well since tests will be given up to 3 p.m. For further information call Debra Dewey, Information and Referral Specialist, at Peninsula Project ABLE 286-8228. Special transportation arrangements can be made in advance if necessary for North Portlanders to attend. Notice must be given by 12 noon Friday, January 21st.

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