

PORTLAND OBSERVER

Black-on-Black Violence at Crisis Level

By Jerry Garner

The killing of a Black male by another Black male in a parking lot on Union Avenue a few weeks ago illustrates the growing problem of violence among African-Americans.

There can be no blinking away from the fact that African-Americans are disproportionately involved in violent crime - both as offenders and victims. Although African-Americans constitute only 13 percent of the U.S. population, they make up 48 percent of the prison population. Some of this can be attributed to bias in the judicial system.

However, the reality is this, in violent crimes committed by a single person, the victims in a quarter of the cases claim that the attacker was African-American.

Black-on-Black homicide is currently the leading cause of death of African-American males ages 15-44 and it is estimated that homicide may be responsible for one-third of all the causes of death of Black males in this age range.

Nationally, African-American males are at risk of being murdered ten times more than White males, and Black females are five times more likely to be murdered than White females.

The typical violent crime involves two young African-American males who know each other and get into petty altercations, which in many cases leads to serious injury because they both have weapons.

In some killings the victim is an innocent bystander. For example:

• Ben Wilson, a 17 year-old basketball star, was shot in the abdomen, as he walked with his girlfriend, by a gang member in Chicago last year. Wilson died a few days later.

• Keisha Jackson, age 13, was on her way home with a group of friends after spending the evening roller skating in Detroit. As the group walked by, a 16 year-old Black youth saw the group and squeezed the trigger of his stolen .32-cal. handgun. The bullet struck her in the brain, and she died a few days later.

• Steven Watts, a former football star in Chicago, was gunned down by a Black gang member as he walked home from a high school dance.

Why are Blacks disproportionately involved in violent crimes—both as offenders and victims? Why do African-Americans kill each other at a higher rate than other ethnic groups in the U.S.? What can the Black community and society do in general to reduce the rate of Black-on-Black homicide?

The answer to this problem is very complex said a local mental health counselor. "It is very difficult to point to just one cause to explain the high homicide rate among African-American males. Personally, I think there are many factors. To reduce it to just one factor is reductionist thinking. By this I mean to take a complex phenomenon and say that it is caused by a single factor," said Dr. Oiodi T. Osuji.

Dr. Osuji is acting Executive Director of the North/Northeast Community Health Center in Portland. Dr. Osuji has a M.S. degree in Counseling and Psychology from the University of Oregon and a Ph.D. in Public Administration from U.C.L.A. Dr. Osuji's interests are in mental health problems among minorities.

Dr. Osuji said before one can discuss the causes of Black-on-Black violence, the conditions of African-Americans in the U.S. must first be examined. He said if one does the above, they will find that we are a minority people, we are basically powerless people and that

we are subjugated people. These conditions, said Dr. Osuji, tend to lead one to become frustrated.

"If you think about it, human beings like to feel they are in control of their own environment and want to participate in the governing of the society and the sharing of the wealth." Dr. Osuji said, "This gives individuals a sense of selfworth in that they are contributing to the well-being of that society. For many African-Americans this is not the case."

"America's society has consciously constructed an environment which African-Americans feel like they are outsiders and not part of the mainstream. Consequently, African-Americans feel discriminated against, powerless, and many feel angry to what has been done to them. Instead of directing this anger at the establishment who caused this sense of powerlessness, many Blacks and other ethnic minorities vent their anger at each



Dr. Oiodi T. Osuji

Photo by Richard J. Brown

other." Dr. Osuji called this phenomenon "displacement of anger."

Displacement means that due to the consequence of directing their anger at the source (White Racism) some African-Americans direct their anger at those they perceive as powerless, therefore, they react against other African-Americans. "I am not saying that displacement is the only cause of Black-on-Black violence, but it could be a factor. However, I would say that some Blacks react violently towards other African-Americans because of the stored anger which they have against the majority culture," said Dr. Osuji.

Dr. Osuji said many African-American males who are victims of Black-on-Black homicide suffer from frustration as a result of being chronically unemployed. He said when a person is unemployed, his or her self-esteem is low, saying that society expects people to be productive and to have jobs.

"When one loses respect for oneself (which happens to many African-Americans) they are more likely to lose respect for those like themselves. Therefore, making it easier to destroy that which you don't respect," said Osuji.

Besides the factors given by Dr. Osuji on the possible causes for the high rate of Black-on-Black violence, some psychologists (mostly White) attribute Black-on-Black violence to the "subculture of violence theory."

This theory says that the urban ghetto environment produces a type of murderer that is characteristically a young African-American, lower-class male who is quick to respond to narcissistic injury with lethal aggressive intent. This type of murderer was felt to be predisposed to using lethal aggression as a means to an end, and criminal violence to obtain material goods which would ordinarily be out of his reach. Thus the etiology of this type of murderer was said to have its roots in a sub-cultural and social milieu that encourages physical aggression.

This theory has been criticized by many. One critic of the theory is Dr. Carl C. Bell, M.D., Medical Director, Community Mental Health Council and Associate Professor at the Clinical Psychiatry-University of Illinois.

Dr. Bell gave a presentation entitled "Black-on-Black Murder: A Critique of the Subculture of Violence Thesis—A Chicago Example" in Washington, D.C. at the Society for the Study of Social Problems in

1985. During this presentation Dr. Bell said, "Though the descriptive nature of this type of murderer is an accurate portrayal, the etiology

which is focused in subcultural dynamics is questionable and leads to inappropriate rationalizations for murder; thereby discouraging further research and hindering the development of intervention strategies."

Dr. Bell went on to say that research on African-American psy-

chiatric and nonpsychiatric populations done at the Community Mental Health Council (CMHC) in Chicago by the Altered States of Consciousness (ASOC) research team, casts serious doubt on the proposed "subculture of violence" etiology of Black-on-Black murder by offering a more tenable explanation for the characteristics of African-Americans who murder.

Some Black-on-Black violence could be attributed to psychiatric disorders. This theory raises the question: Are mentally ill patients more predisposed to violence? Some say that murderers who are acutely psychotic have a higher incidence of comas. Researchers found that of 108 subjects 49 reported having had at least one episode of a coma. Out of these 49 subjects, 25 reported the coma they had experienced was moderate (lasting more than 30 minutes) or severe (lasting more than 24 hours) intensity. Although the population in this study was not examined for the prevalence of violence, these findings indicate a clear direction with respect to the study of the cause of Black-on-Black violence.

Dr. Bell said the high incidence of coma in the Black population is consistent with epidemiologic observation that head injury is more prevalent in lower socio-economic groups. "If one considers the relationship of head injury, neuropsychiatric impairment, and coma to be subsequent episodes of violence (e.g., homicidal aggression or suicidal behavior), the importance of the ASOC research finding as an explanation for Black-on-Black violence that runs counter to the subculture of violence theory becomes clearer," said Dr. Bell.

Both Dr. Bell and Dr. Osuji agree that prevention of Black-on-Black murder will depend on alterations in the current dynamic interactions between the African-American population's environment, interpersonal milieu, and intrapsychic matrix.

As Dr. Osuji says, "Poverty, lack of adequate medical care, inadequate nutrition, inadequate housing, and inadequate educational opportunities will significantly influence values and attitudes about worth of human life."

Although the problem of Black-on-Black violence should be the concern of the entire nation, African-American churches, civil rights organizations, lawmakers, and the media must become more socially active in reducing Black-on-Black murder. Unless this occurs, thousands of Blacks will continue to exterminate their own race, which is the first step towards extinction.

Oregon State Bar Committed to Affirmative Action

by Jerry Garner



Lee Coleman, Director of the Oregon State Bar Affirmative Action Program—The Program "...is an effort by the Bar to increase the number of ethnic minority attorneys practicing law in Oregon."

Photo by Richard J. Brown

In 1973 there were only 19 minority attorneys who were members of the Oregon State Bar out of a membership of 4,400. Recognizing the under-representation of minority attorneys and law students in the state, the Oregon State Bar created an Affirmative Action Program.

The Oregon State Bar's Affirmative Action Program is an effort by the Bar to increase the number of ethnic minority attorneys practicing in Oregon," said Lee Coleman, Director of the Affirmative Action Program.

Coleman, who has a B.S. in Public Administration and Juris Doctor degree from the University of Ore-

gon, said since the program was implemented in 1973, the number of minority attorneys and students has increased significantly.

For example, before the Affirmative Action Program, minorities made up less than 1 percent (48%) of the Bar's total membership. By 1985, minorities comprised 2.1 percent of the total Bar membership, or 160 out of 7,916 attorneys. In 1985-86, minority enrollment in Oregon's law schools increased to 6.5 percent of the student population, or 105 of the 1,604 students enrolled, compared to 4.2% in academic year 1976-77 or 66 of the 1,572 students enrolled.

Coleman said, "The Affirmative

Action Program functions both as an advocate for the interests of potential and present minority attorneys and law students, and a resource for individuals and groups working to further those interests."

The program offers a host of financial programs to assist minority law students. They are: the Conditional Loan Program, Emergency Student Loans, and Tutorial Grants to law schools. The Bar also offers a separate "Minority Scholarship Program." This is a separate non-profit corporation established by the Affirmative Action Committee to raise funds from private sources for student scholarships.

Coleman said these scholarships are conditional and repayment is waived if the recipient becomes an active member of the Oregon State Bar within one year of graduation. The Bar also offers minority law students employment opportunities through their Summer Clerkship Program and Job Placement Assistance Program.

In an effort to give minority students an opportunity to meet with potential employers, the Bar sponsors an annual Minority Students and Attorneys Retreat. Another purpose of the retreat is for students to meet others who support the efforts of the Affirmative Action Program and a time to meet other minority law students.

The Bar's Affirmative Action Program is funded by dues paid by members of the Oregon State Bar; it is the only program of its kind in this country. Besides Director Coleman, the program is staffed by a secretary and has a 25-member steering committee comprised of attorneys, law students and representatives of minority attorney organizations.

Volunteers Build Bunk Beds For Needed Northeast Children

by Jerry Garner

A group of church members from the Amity Assembly Church of God, Amity, Oregon, donated their time last Saturday and built six bunk beds for Grandmothers Against Drugs (GMAD). The bunk beds which sell for \$40 each, or \$80 a pair, will be sold to low-income families in the Northeast area.

GMAD was created last December to provide moral and financial help to grandmothers who are left to care for their grandchildren due to drug addiction by their children, according to Vera Benson, founder and Director of GMAD.

Walt Jaquith, one of the volunteers, said he donated his time to make bunk beds for the children because of his belief in God. "We're doing this because of Christ and Christianity. The Bible tells us this is the type of religion that is acceptable to God. Religion isn't just going to church and being pompous; the type of religion God accepts is to care for the people who are in need. So when we hear of a need, it touches our hearts and makes us want to reach out as followers of Christ."

Linda Simpson, another volunteer, was helping GMAD and Vera Benson. "We both serve the same God and Savior. It makes us all brothers and sisters working together for one common goal and that is to show people that Jesus is the only answer in this troubled world. It doesn't matter if you're in a poor community or a rich community."

Benson said the Amity Church members are very helpful to this community. In the past, they've donated clothing to the back-to-school clothing drive. "We provide

clothing to needy children, especially those who attend King's School."

Benson feels that the African-American community in Portland should do more to help those in need in their community. "I feel that this community should get involved. I know that everyone has their programs, but I feel like there are many members, but one body. It's not a one-person program, it's the community's programs."

Benson said she tries to work with all community programs. "I've worked with almost every agency in Oregon. Our agency, the House of Refuge Mission, matches funds with every agency and church, we have no boundaries. However, many organizations do not get involved in programs that benefit the needy in our community."

An example of this non-involvement by the community, says Benson, is her back-to-school clothing drive. "Last year I wrote every black church in the community asking them to contribute to the drive. Not a single church responded. All of the response we received came from outside of this community. Last year the 700 Club donated \$500 to the back-to-school drive; this year they gave us \$1000. We also get help from the House of Zion in Woodburn. They bring us food, clothes and help us in every way they can with the children at King School."

"This year I tried to get some churches in the community to participate, and just as last year, none responded. Benson was asked to explain the non-involvement by the local churches. She replied, "I feel that they don't have time to work with people who don't have name

familiarity. The people in the community are looking for people with big names. If you have a big name, then you have big publicity. It all depends on who you know. I am not after this; I am trying to help people. This is a true Christian program, even if someone comes here and tells a lie to get help, they still receive assistance."

"I am not asking these organizations to abandon their program and come here because we need the support. I feel that different organizations within the community who are concerned about the children could work together in an effort to serve more who are in need of decent school clothes."

"I think the lack of networking among different social organizations in our community is counterproductive. Unless we get together, the social problem facing our community will only get worse. We were taught during slavery to compete against each other. Dr. King said to us, 'We shall overcome.' It's time for us to overcome this envy and jealousy."

PCC Fall Term Classes

Start September 22

Fall classes will start Monday, September 22, at five Portland Community College campuses and other locations throughout the five county college district.

A total of 4,860 classes are being offered this fall, according to figures released by the PCC Department of Research and Planning.

Information requests should be directed to 244 6111.