

DEFINING THE ISSUE
The Impact Of Hate Crimes

The President Must Act

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Racial prejudice motivated 4,710 cases of the 8,049 hate crimes reported by the FBI in 1997. Prejudice about religion accounted for 1,385 cases and 1,102 cases were attributed to bias about sexual orientation. African Americans accounted for 39 percent of all the victims targeted because of their race.

What can we do — as individuals and as a community — to stop this vicious cycle of bigotry and hate? The Metropolitan Human Rights Center (MHRC) will host a Community Dialogue addressing hate crimes on Thursday, March 11, in the US Bank Meeting Room of the Central Library from 11:30 a.m. — 1:30 p.m. The Central Library is located at 801 SW 10th Avenue (between Yamhill and Taylor) in Portland. The dialogue is free and open to everyone.

Detective David Yamasaki of the Portland Police Bureau Bias Crimes Unit will participate in the dialogue — defining what a hate crime is according to Oregon Law and speaking about the Bureau's follow-up after a hate crime has been reported. People will have an opportunity to share personal experiences and explore ways to strengthen a framework that addresses hate violence.

To register, call Linda Hunter, 823-5136 (Voice TTY). If you are a person with a disability and need hrs accommodation, please call at least 48 hrs in Advance.

Murder Verdict A Sad Victory

NAACP President and CEO Kweisi Mfume said, "The guilty verdict in the James Byrd, Jr. Murder trial is a sad victory in this, the first step of a troubling judicial ordeal. No one should ever be subjected to heinously wrenching type of act that Mr. Byrd experienced during the final moments of his life. This slaying shouts across the world of the urgent need for Congress to strengthen and pass anti-hate legislation."

The NAACP anticipates that The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999 will be introduced soon in the House and Senate. The bill would amend the federal criminal codes to set tougher penalties for persons who willfully injure or attempt to injure anyone because of his/her perceived race, color, religion, national origin or sexual orientation.

Mfume said, "The predatory nature of this horrific crime by John William King, who was known to have a white supremacist background and training, should be thwarted in every possible way. Hate is still a very destructive force in America and requires the strongest sanctions and penalties that the law can provide." Mfume went on to say that, "Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Byrd Family. We hope this is the first of three guilty verdicts that will help begin to ease the terrible burden they have had to bear since their beloved father, brother and son was viciously dragged to his death last June in Jasper, Texas."

Gentrification — For Better Or Worse?

Gentrification has been defined as the restoration and upgrading of deteriorated urban property by the middle classes, often resulting in the displacement of lower-income people. How has gentrification affected your neighborhood?

The Metropolitan Human Rights Center (MHRC) and SE Uplift Neighborhood Program will facilitate a Community Dialogue on Gentrification, Tuesday, March 16, from 6:30 pm — 9:00 pm at Brentwood-Darlington Center, 7211 SE 62nd (between Duke and Flavel). The dialogue — open to everyone — is an opportunity for information exchange, clarification of viewpoints and working together for the common good.

To register, contact Linda Hunter at 823-5136 (Voice TTY). If you are a person with a disability and need accommodation, please call at least 48 hours in advance.

America must take heed. The anger among African Americans and Hispanic Americans over the lack of respect, the indignities, and the physical abuses, and deaths they endure from some — too many — white rogue police officers is close to the boiling point.

That is the clear message of the fierce and widespread public anger provoked by the killing early this month of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed, law-abiding immigrant from West Africa, by four white New York City plain clothes police officers.

From Riverside, California to New York City, blacks and Latinos are being victimized by the police. The names of some of these victims have made headlines because of extraordinary violence involved: Jonny Gammage, Rodney King, Abner Louima, and now, Amadou Diallo.

Indeed, just last week, in Pittsburgh, a white police officer was arrested for the December shooting death of a black motorist who had slowed down to gaze at a drug arrest. Apparently, the policeman had decided that

rubbernecking is a capital offense if your complexion is black or brown.

Horrific cases like these capture headline coverage. But day in and day out, there are voluminous low-profile encounters that undermine trust and foment tension as well.

In New York City in the aftermath of the officers' ferocious assault — Diallo was struck by 19 of the 41 bullets fired at him as he stood at his door in a narrow hallway — the stories of the abuse residents of the city's predominantly black and Latino neighborhoods routinely endure have come flooding forth.

This month several columnists in the city's newspapers have chronicled the often wrenching experiences of adults and teenagers in black and Latino neighborhoods who were stopped and frisked by the police on the streets on nothing more than "suspicion."

In the past two years, officers of the city's elite street crimes unit stopped and frisked 45,084 people. But that action resulted in only 9,546 arrests — meaning that 35,000 people were stopped and frisked on the streets because these officers guessed,

wrongly, that they were carrying guns.

Of course, it is not only in New York City, nor only to a few, unfortunate individuals that these, at the least, infuriating and humiliating, at worst, deadly, racial encounters with white police officers happen.

These patterns of police misconduct, including the notorious practice of the racial profiling of black and Latino motorists, have plagued people of color for years.

They are not unconnected, isolated incidents; and their cumulative impact on constructive race relations all across the country is devastation.

African Americans and Hispanic Americans read newspapers, watch television and tune into radio like everybody else. Word of these senseless encounters and systemic abuses spreads like wildfire throughout our communities. They claim victims all across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Silence will not sooth those who experience, see, and hear of these acts of instant injustice. Inaction fuels mistrust and anger along racial and

ethnic lines, and undermines the credibility of our criminal justice system and the legitimacy of civil authority.

As the all-too-frequent victims of crime, we African Americans want to rid our communities of crime. But surely we also have the right not to be preyed upon by our protectors.

That's why I've appealed to President Clinton to become directly involved in this issue.

In discussing his One America initiative, he's made it clear that he sees racial reconciliation as the centerpiece of his legacy.

Moreover, having presided over a welcome decline in national crime statistics and having led an increase in federal assistance for local law enforcement, he has the credibility to force this needed dialogue and force a balanced solution.

We at the National Urban League believe that, among other things, the President should:

Utilize his Office to draw national attention to this crisis and urge that elected officials, law enforcement officials and community leaders work together to devise genuinely

effective solutions.

Convene a White House summit this spring; and press those invited — mayors, police chiefs, civil-rights and community groups, young people, and others — to find constructive answers.

Instruct the Justice Department to conduct public hearings around the country to ferret out evidence about the patterns of police misconduct, excessive use of force and abuse of civil liberties.

And, direct the Justice Department to form a task force to devise guidelines for state and local law enforcement agencies that employ tactics like New York's elite street crimes unit. The purpose would be to prevent the offensive practices and protect civil liberties without undermining effective law enforcement.

In President Clinton's — and America's quest for improved race relations, there is no way to sidestep the searing issue of police misconduct and abuse.

There simply cannot be One America if law enforcement officials have license to split America apart.

A Call for Investigation into Killings Across the Country

Tuesday, February 16, Rev. Jackson traveled to Riverside, California at the invitation of the Tyisha Miller family and community leaders to offer them his support.

Tyisha Miller was a 19-year old African American woman brutally killed by 4-6 white police officers on December 28, 1998.

Here is what we know about the case so far:

On her way home with a friend, Tyisha's car got a flat tire and she pulled over to the side of the road. A short time later, a white gentleman stopped, put on the spare tire for her, and escorted her to a gas station where they called the family to pick her up.

When they arrived at the gas station, Tyisha asked the gentleman to take her friend home, which he did.

Waiting for help to arrive, Tyisha locked herself in her car, reclined her seat, and placed a handgun on her lap for protection. When family arrived, Tyisha was having a seizure. Although, Tyisha had never been diagnosed with epilepsy, her mother is epileptic. They called 9-1-1 for medical help and called home for someone to bring a key to the car.

By the time police and medical personnel arrived, Tyisha was unconscious. The police shook the car to try to wake Tyisha, but were not able to. Tyisha's cousin, who called 9-1-1, told the police that someone with a key was just a few minutes away.

However, instead of waiting for a key and without getting the advice of medical personnel on the scene, the police decided to break a car window to get to Tyisha. When the car window broke, the police fired about two dozen shots into the car striking Tyisha 12 times in the head, neck arms and back.

No shots were fired by Tyisha's

gun. Two minutes after Tyisha was killed, her uncle arrived with a key to the car. Thursday — two days after Rev. Jackson's visit — the Riverside coroner finally released the report from the autopsy on Tyisha. All of the bullets fired into Tyisha entered her body from the rear. The coroner called the death a "homicide."

Local authorities have yet to release the toxicology report on the police officers involved in the shooting. They have not yet indicated exactly how many officers were involved.

The officers are now on paid administrative leave.

This incident in Riverside is not an isolated one. In Southern California, there have been two other race-related killings by police in Claremont, CA and Santa Maria, CA in the last few months. In New York City, the killing of Amadou Diallo is just the most recent incident from a police department riddled with officers who are out of control. There have also been killings in Miami and Chicago in the last couple of months.

Thirty-one years ago, the Kerner

Commission concluded that riots in Watts, Chicago, Detroit and Newark were not sparked by high unemployment among people of color or woefully inadequate schools. In each case, acts of brutality by rogue police against innocent African American victims led to the riots.

Tension is growing in our cities. Unless, clear and decisive actions are taken by the Justice Department and other agencies to remove violent, reckless and yes racist elements in police departments an explosion of frustration and anger is imminent.

Within the next couple of weeks, Rev. Jackson will seek to convene a meeting of civil rights leaders, representatives from communities stunned by police brutality, and top Justice Department officials including Attorney General Janet Reno and Assistant AG for Civil Rights Bill Lann Lee in Washington to make people accountable for their criminal behavior and stop the killing.

Rev. Jackson said, "We all want healing, but for there to be healing, we must clean the glass out of the wound first."



Rev. Jesse Jackson

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