

On Black Violence by Mel Reeves

Written by Mel Reeves ID4199
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Often with the best intentions, many African Americans have effectively joined our worst enemies in proclaiming "Black-on-Black" violence to be the main problem afflicting Black America. "There is no such thing as black-on-black violence, there is just violence," says the author. Violence is real, but misdiagnosing the problem diverts attention from the real source, "a lack of will on the part of the US government and its ruling class to grant real opportunity to all of its citizens." Those Blacks that turn away from struggle against the propagators of inequality come perilously close to blaming their own people for the mayhem. Yes, violent crime is up, but so are all the social indices that lead to homicidal crime in the inner cities. Confusing cause and effect is politically suicidal, and only tends to confirm racist claims that Black American culture is, at root, "pathological."

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"The term 'black-on-black violence' is a misnomer. There is no such thing."

There are too many wrong headed ideas circulating when we talk about crime in our community. Lately there has been a myriad of newspaper and magazine articles about so-called "black-on-black violence." Let's be clear, I am not saying violence does not exist in our community, I am saying there is no such thing as black-on-black violence, there is just violence.

Nationwide, there have been lots of marches and candlelight vigils bemoaning violence in Black communities. Often, the pitch seems to be: Instead of focusing on civil rights, we must concentrate on the *real* source of black peoples problems - "black on black violence."

No one can doubt there is an excess of violence in Black America. The U.S. is a violent place, in general. We all feel the need to deal with the problem. But, like all problems, it can only be solved through patient and intelligent analysis. What lies at the core of the problem?

Misdiagnoses only tend to exacerbate our ability to do deal with the scourge of violence in a rational manner. The real source of the mayhem is a lack of will on the part of the US government and its ruling class to grant real opportunity to all of its citizens. If you think I exaggerate, just look at the over \$700 billion projected to be spent on defense and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for next fiscal year. They are not sure where all the money is coming from but they have willed to spend it.

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People who do not mean us well and misguided black folks constantly point to inner city casualties of crime as the source of their own victimization. Even the term "black-on-black violence" is a misnomer. There is no such thing - it is a construct. According to David Wilson of the University of Illinois, the term surfaced in the early 1980's in conjunction with the policies of the Reagan era, which severely cut the social welfare net. Ironically our only "black president," Bill Clinton, further damaged the social safety net.

During the Reagan years, conservative pundits began to hone in on black youth and the black family as the prime source of "pathology" in America. It was also during this period that many black conservative writers began to make their mark, by repeating the same mantra - while the enemies of black humanity cheered on the attacks. As cuts dug deep into welfare benefits and social services, more and more articles and books appeared on the subject of black "criminality." Amos Wilson's, *Understanding Black Adolescent Male Violence* became a handbook for understanding the pathology of the urban black male. All this served to justify the government's abandonment of the people most in need of services.

Is there too much crime and killing in our inner cities? Absolutely! According to a study released by the Violence Policy Center, a gun-control research group, there are 19 black murder victims per 100,000 people compared to five per 100,000 for the general population. In Pennsylvania the numbers are 30 per 100,000.

"There is no such thing as black violence any more than there is such a thing as youth violence or Italian violence," writes Mike Males in his book *The Scapegoat Generation, America's War on Adolescents*. Ultimately violence at its source does not originate from the youth or the perpetrators, but from the conditions of either poverty or racial stigmatization.

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Violence among black folks has lots of causes. Frantz Fanon, the renowned Martinique-born psychologist, observed the behavior of colonized Algerians. In his book *The Wretched of the*

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Earth, Fanon noted that the oppressed began to accept the ideas and perspective of their oppressors. They begin to believe and internalize the lie that they are indeed inferior.

Innovative and revolutionary minded educator Paulo Friere, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, postulated that not only do the oppressed begin to assimilate the ideas of their oppressors, but begin to see the oppressor in one another.

The March issue of *Essence* magazine featured a story titled "Number One with a Bullet: Inside America's Murder Capital," in which law enforcement officials gave the following explanations for the increase in violence: the worsening national economy, a dismal education system and cutbacks in social services. Other experts cited the "ready availability of guns and drugs and the relentless glamorization of violence."

Unfortunately, too many find it easy to simply blame the victims. Without a doubt there needs to be more personal responsibility taken and more effort by folks in the inner city to improve their lot. Many are indeed trying, but they desperately need help. But if we continue to blame them and if we are not careful our enemies will begin to see this as proof that "these" people don't need any help. After all, the popular thinking is: they are not victims of their environment, but victims of their own moral depravity, their primitiveness, their impulsiveness, their predisposition to violence, their genetic proclivities.

I can hear these enemies of black progress asking, Why should we increase services in the inner city? What's the use, they will say, since this is how "those people" have always been, it's their culture. Why should we waste resources on them, like providing the resources needed to actually educate inner city youth, or spend social service monies, or create jobs and job training?

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Many of us have already fallen into the racially rigged trap that makes middle class blacks less inclined to reach out to our less fortunate brothers and sisters who catch some of the same hell we do, but have less resources, both psychological and material, to fight back and resist their demonization. History teaches us that you can ignore people you demonize, and sometimes

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you can kill them or allow them to be killed, because clearly they deserve their fate.

Some have described the struggle against violence in our communities as "the civil rights issue of this era." They may be right, but not in the way they intend it. We should cease the Stop the Violence marches that amount to anti-black propaganda - the victimizers aren't listening, anyway. Instead, we should initiate forums and dialogues to talk about what we can do. We should form more groups like [Men United](#), in Philadelphia, where real efforts are being made to keep the peace and connect young men and women to services.

There is something quite sinister behind many of these "black-on-black crime" marches and rallies. They keep us from doing anything concrete and prevent us from aiming our fire where it really belongs: at a government that continues to allow parts of our country to die before our very eyes.

Our brothers and sisters living in America's inner cities do indeed need the help of a movement. But not one that sets them up to be demonized and dehumanized.

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