

Black on Black Crime Risk Project

PSY 302 - Personality

Timothy Powell

March 17, 1999

THE BLACK-ON-BLACK CRIME PLAGUE

It's the ultimate murder mystery: Why do blacks kill each other so much more often than members of other races do?

BY THOMAS MOORE

New Orleans, Tuesday, March 2, 8:54 p.m. On the third floor of a new, racially mixed apartment building about 3 miles from the French Quarter, Ken Brown, age 24, knelt on a wall-to-wall carpet, praying to God that if he ever got out of his living room alive he would never do another cocaine deal again. His friend, Michael Howard, 20, was on his knees beside him. Both came from black middle-class families, and neither had been in serious trouble with the law before. But they had become mixed up in cocaine, recently driving in from Los Angeles with an estimated 7 kilos worth more than \$210,000 on the street. That's how they found themselves facing death at this moment. Two black gunmen stood behind them, holding a shotgun and a pistol to their heads, while two others searched the apartment for drugs and money.

Up to now, the business had been good in Brown and Howard. Too good, Brown, a stumpy kid with shrewd eyes and a wicked set of Gucci jeans, was taking home as much as \$6,000 a week. In the five heady months since he quit his job as a short-order cook on a Mississippi streetball, he had made enough to invest in three cars, a customized



THE SUSPECT Police say "Bam," a free-lance enforcer for drug dealers, shoved his way into the apartment with a 20-gauge shotgun.

pickup truck, two apartments and lots of gold jewelry. Women flocked to him. Friends had become devious, and established dealers had taken notice, too. "I guess," says Brown, later recalling what happened that night, "some people got jealous."

If he had any doubts about whether he was going to die, they evaporated when he heard one voice say, "Leave it around good so they know it's a killing." Police say the intruders, including a well-known free-lance enforcer who went by the nickname "Bam," had pushed their way into his apartment only minutes before, and now they were pouring cocaine around for the police to find. The reasoning on the street is that

the authorities don't pursue drug shootings as vigorously as other murders, and if the killers are caught, juries won't come down as hard on them. Brown, figuring his chances of surviving a jump from the balcony were better than hanging around, suddenly bolted through the sliding screen door toward the balcony railing. Glancing back, he saw Howard break a fall, scold behind him and then stagger as pistol shots and shotgun blasts exploded. Brown felt a stinging in his back. His legs started to give out on him as he reached the railing. His three adrenaline and primal self-preservation carried him up and over in a headlong dive into the night.

Luck went with him. He missed a concrete sidewalk by a couple of feet, according to Rosa Mocklin, the detective handling the case, and a heavy rail had cushioned up the ground, breaking his left arm in the fall and bleeding from a shotgun wound in his back. Brown dragged himself into some bushes to hide. The killers stormed down the stairs after him, searched frantically for a moment and then fled. When Brown ran back up to his apartment, he found policeman Christy Williams, who lived in the complex, pointing a .38 Smith Howard was sprawled on the floor, his body stretched

"YOU ACHE WITH THE NEED TO CONVINCING YOURSELF THAT YOU DO EXIST IN THE REAL WORLD, THAT YOU'RE A PART OF ALL THE SOUND AND ANGUISH"

- RALPH ELLISON¹

Perhaps no other man has spoken more true words than that of this author about the plight of the black man and problem of black on black crime. In this quote Ellison was commenting about violence as a way for black men to assert their existence to themselves. However, this assertion carried with it deadly consequences and it is these consequences that haunt the streets of our inner cities. All across our country the words crime and black men have become synonymous. Between 1978 and 1987 alone 20, 316 young black males were the victims of homicide². And each year that number continues to grow. The problem has begun to reach such epidemic proportions that many members of the African-American community have begun to wonder if this plague upon our people will ever end.

¹ Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

² "Homicide among young black males - United States, 1978-1987." *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Jan. 9, 1991: p183.

When Brother Kills Brother

Black-on-black violence is an unspoken but growing national scourge

David McTear, 31, was hit for his basketball and with his brother, Michael Jackson, who was killed in a Chicago Bulls basketball game and stopped at a housing project on the west side of Chicago to see a girlfriend as they approached the back entrance of a public housing apartment. A group of youths scolded them. DeLoria approached tentatively, then turned and ran. One of the youths quickly drew a .38-cal handgun and shot him. "We had a good kid coming along," said DeLoria's grandfather. Now that he was becoming a man, the kid came out and brought his rifle out. "I had no way of knowing he would be turned in," he said.

Four-year-old Demetri Beans was playing on McKinley in front of his home in north-central Los Angeles. In the front yard of a neighboring house, James Barrett, 13, was arguing with his girlfriend and her brother. Police say Barrett drew a .22-cal revolver. The bullet he fired struck Beans in the head. The boy was rushed to Maria Luther King Jr. High Medical Center, where the average daily admission to the trauma center include four gunshot wounds, three stabbings and three cases of "blunt trauma" to the head. Beans died on the operating table. For Dr. Arthur W. Fleming, the chief of surgery, it was nothing new. "This is the closest thing to a combat hospital that you'll find in peacetime," he says.

Coley Fowles, 32, was often known as the loudest man in the North Soccer League. He was a star player on the Fort Lauderdale Strikers from the team's founding in 1977 until its dissolution two years ago. Fowles kept in shape by playing in amateur leagues, as he was doing one night two weeks ago during a pickup game at Thule Colony Park, outside Miami. As ball time neared in the sport's eighth, a noisy quartet of several hundred fans from the game erupted in jubilation. The game was charged onto the playing field, firing wildly at witnesses in their light and anyone else who got in the way. Fowles, who once carried a quarter horse for 80 yards, could not



Jacksonville
William ("Big Willie") Jones, 32, broke up a basketball game. One of the players went home and loaded a shotgun, then killed Big Willie with four blasts.

for a staggering number these days have something in common, something that has become part of a frighteningly familiar but largely unspoken national scourge: the epidemic of violence by young blacks against other young blacks.

The leading cause of death among black males ages 15 to 24 in the U.S. is not heart disease, not cancer, not any natural cause. It is murder by other blacks. More than 1 out of every 3 blacks who die in that age group is the victim of a homicide. Across America, particularly among the adolescents in the nation's urban ghettos, brother is killing brother in a kind of racial fratricide. More than 40% of all the nation's murder victims are black, and

more than 60% of the nation's murder victims are black. The 4,000 or so Americans who died from violence of that kind in 1981 alone equals the number of black servicemen killed during the twelve years of the Vietnam conflict.

The statistics add up to a horrifying equation. In America today, a white female has 1 chance in 606 of becoming a murder victim. A white male has 1 chance in 186. A black female has 1 chance in 124. A black male has 1 chance in 29.

The problem is particularly acute in major cities where black gangs proliferate. In Chicago in 1983, 417 of the 727 homicides were blacks killing blacks. Between July and November last year in Detroit more than 100 children—their names were never listed—were shot. All but two were black.

The Watts riots of 1965 caused 34 deaths. That figure is currently equaled every 28 days across black Los Angeles. "The uncomprehending fact," writes Charles Siferman, author of *Criminal Violence: Causes/Consequences*, "is that black offenders account for a disproportionate number of the crimes that violate the most fear." This fear is felt by all Americans, but the anxiety felt by blacks is more intense, more pervasive, more real, for they are the ones who suffer most from violence. The white fear of black violence, recently personified by Silway Niganda Bernard Goetz, does not reflect reality: only 5% of the nation's 1,300 one-on-one slayings in 1982 involved whites killed by blacks.

The issue of black-on-black violence is a delicate and sensitive subject, one that is often left in silence by the growing number of blacks who have made it into the middle class and by traditional civil rights leaders who prefer to speak out on other issues. "Today we are faced with a new American dilemma, and that is especially difficult for black leaders and members of the black middle class," says Glenn Lacey, a proponent of public policy at Harvard. "The bottom equation of the black community has compelling problems that can no longer be buried solely on white nature and which force us to confront

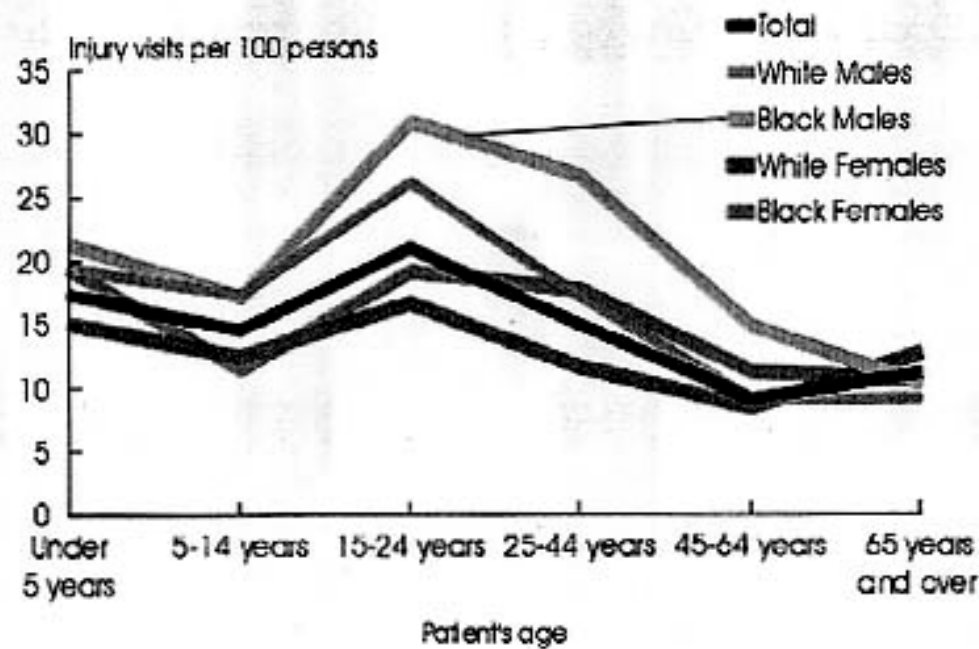
Articles such as the one to the left have only just begun to call attention to this problem. But even the limited information contained within these headlines is enough to reveal the seriousness of this problem:

"THE STATISTICS ADD UP TO A HORRIFYING EQUATION. IN AMERICA TODAY, A WHITE FEMALE HAS 1 CHANCE IN 606 OF BECOMING A MURDER VICTIM. A WHITE MALE HAS 1 CHANCE IN 186. A BLACK FEMALE HAS 1 CHANCE IN 124. A BLACK MALE HAS 1 CHANCE IN 29."

- TIME MAGAZINE³

³ Stengel, Richard. "When Brother Kills Brother." *Time*, Sept. 16, 1985: 32-33.

Figure 1: Annual rate of injury-related visits to Emergency Departments by patient's age, race and sex United States, 1992-1995 (Series 13, No. 131)



Graphs like the one to the left also provide indirect evidence of the genocide plaguing the African-American community. Violence rates amongst young black men are directly related with the peak in emergency room visits occurring at the 15-24 years age bracket for black males. (Source National Center for Health Statistics)⁴

⁴"Age, Sex, and Race Specific Visit Rates." *National Center for Health Statistics*. URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchswww/datawh/statab/pubd/asrsvm.htm> (Nov. 5, 1998).



Boston

Craig S. White, 19, was strolling along a Roxbury street, when three men chased him into a building and shot him. Paramedics removed Craig's bloody clothes.

The problem of black on black crime has been traced back to a number of risk factors. One study found that compared to white adolescent males, young black men are exposed to an excess of risk factors for violent behavior, 1) including exposure to poverty and crime in urban areas, 2) lack of supervision and guidance from two parents and 3) stress and conflict in their families⁵. From a psychological perspective these factors provide at least some evidence that situationism is at work. Situationism can be defined as the idea that situational variables matter more than personality in determining how people act⁶. Exactly to what extent the role of situationism plays in feeding the fire that produces black on black crime one can only guess. But its presence can be seen and felt throughout the inner city housing projects and is further confirmed by the responses of the adolescent black males to surveys in studies.

⁵ Paschall, M.J., S.T. Emmett, and R.L. Flewellin. "Relationship among family characteristics and violent behavior by black and white male adolescents." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, April 1996: p177.

⁶ Carver, C.S., and M.E. Scheier. *Perspective on Personality*. 3rd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996.

Table 1. Comparison of Demographic and Family Characteristics, and Violent Behaviors Among Black and White Males

Variable	Black Males (N = 163)	White Males (N = 397)	Statistic
Grade (%)			
7th	45	21	$\chi^2 = 31.2^c$
8th	55	79	
Area of residence (%)			
Rural	0	47	$\chi^2 = 294.2^c$
Suburban	21	45	
Urban	79	8	
Family structure (%)			
Two parents	39	73	$\chi^2 = 64.8^c$
Mother only	50	18	
Other	11	9	
Attachment to parents			
Mean (SD)	3.25 (1.02)	3.31 (0.79)	$t = -0.65$
Family stress and conflict			
Mean (SD)	2.54 (0.78)	2.35 (0.72)	$t = -2.75^c$
Past-year fighting (%)			
No occasions	59	57	$\chi^2 = 2.33$
One occasion	17	22	
Two or more occasions	24	21	
Past-month fighting at school (%)			
Victim or instigator	29	19	$\chi^2 = 5.9^b$
Victim	20	14	$\chi^2 = 3.2^a$
Instigator	18	10	$\chi^2 = 5.9^b$


^a $p < .10$.

^b $p < .05$.

^c $p < .01$.

As presented in the table to the left, compared to white males in the study's sample, black males were significantly younger and more likely to live in urban areas. Black males were also significantly more likely than whites to live with only their mothers or in some other arrangement. Although black and white males scored similarly on the measure for attachment to parents, black males scored significantly higher than whites on the measure for family stress and conflict. In general, these results indicate a higher prevalence of risk factors for violent behavior among black males than white males in the study's sample. Black and white youth were similar with respect to their past-year fighting, but black youth were significantly more likely than whites to report that they attacked someone or were attacked by someone at school during the prior month⁵

Paschall, M.J., S.T. Ennett, and R.L. Flewelling. "Relationship among family characteristics and violent behavior by black and white male adolescents." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, April 1996: p177



Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community

***Many Partners, One Goal....
Confronting Domestic Violence in the
African American Community***



Upcoming Events

The problem of black on black crime is one that pervades the very heart of the African-American community. However, all has not been lost. New institutes and organization like the one to the left have emerged to tackle this fundamental problem plaguing our communities⁸. Only time will tell what will become of America's black men, but by working together to address this problem we come at least one step closer to extinguishing the ache of Ellison's "Invisible" black man.

⁸ *Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community.*
URL: <http://www.dvinstitute.org/default.htm> (Nov. 5, 1998).