

WHY UNARMED YOUNG BLACK MALES ARE FREQUENTLY SHOT

Certain Cultural Patterns In The Black Community Has Created A Perception In The White Community Of An Association Between Young Black Males and Violent Crimes

LAS VEGAS, NV, UNITED STATES, May 22, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- By Jack Levine

A discussion on why unarmed young black men are frequently shot, is long overdue. Scientific research studies indicate that the root cause of this phenomenon is the perception that there is, in fact, an association between African Americans and violent criminal behavior. This translates into an instinctual fear on the part of many whites, including police officers, that is generated by a distorted assessment of the threat posed to them when confronting a young black man.

This fear is not entirely without some statistical justification. While blacks only comprise 13% of the U.S. population, they comprise 29% of those arrested for violent crimes. In black neighborhoods, homicide remains the most common cause of death for African American men, aged 15 to 34. As a result of these statistics, many white Americans strongly associate violent crime with African Americans.

The publicity surrounding the vicious beating of Rodney King; the shooting of Trayvon Martin; the shooting death of Michael Brown; the death of Freddy Gray and, many other reported incidents, have attracted national attention. The more recent shot-gun shooting death of 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick Ga. on February 23, 2020 at the hands of two heavily armed white men, who were "tailing" Arbery, while he was jogging has most recently engaged the nation.

In 1993, the Rev. Jesse Jackson reportedly once told a Chicago audience, "there is nothing more painful to me at this stage in my life than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start thinking about robbery -- then look around and see somebody white and feel relieved." Scientific studies have demonstrated why this is so. In these studies, white college students were shown images of black men and white men and asked to identify whether an object being held was a gun, or something else. The studies demonstrated a marked reduction in accuracy on the part of the participating white students, causing them to mistake ordinary objects for guns, when shown a black face and, some other object, when shown a white face.

This study may explain the fatal March 2018 Sacramento police shooting, which occurred at night, with limited visibility, in which a 22-year-old African American, Stephon Clark, was

confronted by two police officers, responding to a 911 call, Clark was instructed: "Show me your hands." At that moment, Clark was merely holding a cell phone in his hand, which was mistakenly perceived as a weapon by the police officers.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that racial bias training for police officers, by itself, will have any effect on the perception that there is a correlation between violent criminal behavior and young black men. Studies that have been conducted on the incarceration of African Americans convicted of various crimes, support this correlation. In 2014, a study conducted by the NAACP showed that African Americans, while only 13% of the general population, constituted 34% of the nation's prison population, a rate more than five (5) times that of whites.

Although this disparity may, to some extent, be accounted for by racial prejudices that may exist in our criminal justice system, the only way to change this perception of a correlation between crime and African-Americans, is for the black community to undertake a major effort to institute cultural changes. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. pointed the way in his "I Have a Dream Speech": "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

Social scientists believe that building character, begins at an early age by children adopting their parents as role models, with fathers being the principal role model for male children. With 77% of African American children born out-of-wedlock and, raised only by their mothers, the opportunities to develop good character are thereby greatly reduced. Instead, young black males, raised in single parent homes, may by default, look to street gang leaders as models to fill the void left by absent fathers. Because of what appears to be a tolerance in the black community for black fathers abandoning their children, this cultural tradition must change if we are to eliminate the unfortunate perception of a correlation between young African-American males and criminal or violent behavior.

In addition, the drop-out rate of African American school children must be drastically reversed. In a 2005-2006 study conducted by the NAACP, the high school dropout rate for black students was reported to be over 50%. The nation-wide drop-out rate for black college students in recent years has remained steady at approximately 65%, compared with a drop-out rate of only 38% for white college students. Understandably, those without either a high school or college education have greatly reduced prospects for obtaining a job that will adequately support themselves, or a family. This inevitably leads to a feeling of low esteem for many black youths and a multi-generational reliance on welfare benefits and food stamp which entrap many into a life of poverty.

Although few would doubt that pockets of racial prejudice still exist in America, perhaps it is time that the African-American community looks inwardly, as well as outwardly to identify the sources of racial prejudice. Also, in addition to Police Departments stressing racial sensitivity in their personnel training programs, perhaps the leaders of our black communities should organize neighborhood meetings to stimulate discussion on these issues and try to understand

the real reasons for some of the perceptions that large portions of the white community have unfortunately developed.

If these measures are undertaken, when Black Lives Matter organizes their next demonstration, instead of angrily vilifying the police, they should, perhaps consider marching through our inner cities with slogans on their banners and signs: "We have met the enemy, and they are us?"

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