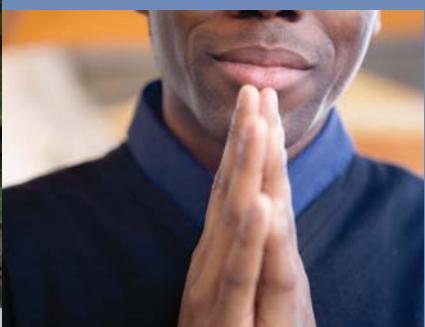
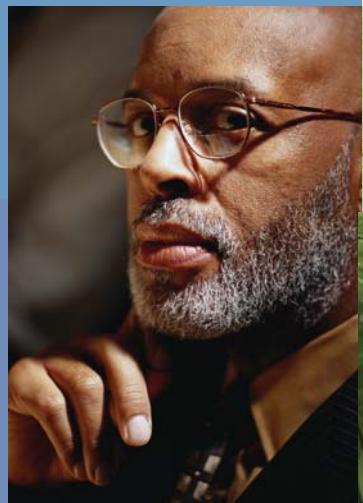




Summit on Crime Prevention in Black Communities

2010 Report



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Attorney General
Bill McCollum





**Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice**

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FLORIDA ATTORNEY GENERAL BILL MCCOLLUM



August 30, 2010

Dear Readers:

For 25 years, the Preventing Crime in the Black Community Conference has promoted positive solutions to the crime and social ills confronting African-American neighborhoods and communities. Participants have taken these program models and replicated many in their local crime prevention and community improvement work.

This year, a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice (Bureau of Justice Assistance) provided a unique opportunity to assemble a panel of criminal justice and community leaders from the national and state level. The goal was to discuss and identify the top crime prevention issues facing the black community in a more deliberate manner and link them with evidence-based program examples.

This report is a summary of those discussions. Our expectation is that it will become another tool to help practitioners on the front lines better concentrate and prioritize their efforts. It is also designed to assist those making policy and funding decisions understand what is truly necessary to address issues in the African-American community.

I sincerely thank those who gave their time and resources to participate in the summit and the Bureau of Justice Assistance for recognizing the need to collect this information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill McCollum".

BILL MCCOLLUM
Attorney General of Florida



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Florida Office of the Attorney General would like to acknowledge and extend our sincerest thanks to the participants in this Summit. Because of their concern and commitment, each allowed themselves to become fully engaged in discussions on this issue.

We also acknowledge the involvement and significant contribution of the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Juvenile Justice Research Institute.

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Dr. Phyllis Gray-Ray, Executive Director
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Finally, we would like to acknowledge contributions of Christopher Watler, Project Director, Harlem Community Justice Justice Center; Dr. Donna Elam, Chair, Florida Human Relations Commission; David C. Anchin Center, University of South Florida; and Dr. Narayan Persaud, Chairman, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Florida A&M University. They provided a framework for our discussion and the benefit of their insights in preparation of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Crime in the Black community is a complex societal problem that has generated much discussion and debate over the years. While academicians, policy makers and the lay public often band together in seeking ways to address this persistent problem, solutions once considered innovative quickly fade against the backdrop of increasing crime rates. In the midst of changing social, political and economic realities, crime continues unabated as effective solutions become increasingly elusive. Carefully crafted programs, and charted courses of action for crime resolution, crumble in the face of failed outcomes and the realities of a burgeoning prison population. It is with this awareness in mind that the Office of Florida's Attorney General organized its first annual Summit on Crime Prevention in Black Communities.

Sponsored by the Florida Office of the Attorney General and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), and the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Summit attracted a diverse group of participants from various parts of the country. Summit attendees included: community activists, leaders and organizers; law enforcement officers and representatives; religious leaders; prison officials; academicians; students; and the lay public, all reflecting representation from varying community sectors and cross-cutting professions concerned about crime and crime prevention. By bringing such a diverse group together, Summit organizers wanted to ensure meaningful discourse and dialogue on crime in the Black community, a day of discussion that would provide valuable insights into this protracted societal problem.



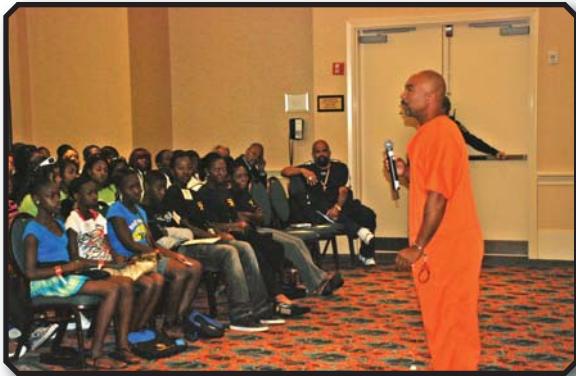
SUMMIT'S FOCUS

For the entire day of May 25, 2010, organizers and participants of the Summit focused on generating discourse on crime and crime prevention within the Black community. Specifically, the intent was to derive at least five criminal justice issues that would address and potentially aid in the resolution of crime in the Black community. To guide the day's discussion and solicit responses and feedback, Summit organizers invited Christopher Watler from the Harlem Community Justice Center to serve as facilitator; and two speakers, Dr. Donna Elam from the University of South Florida, and Dr. Narayan Persaud from Florida A&M University, to provide overviews of crime in the Black community.

PRESENTATIONS

Donna Elam, Ed.D

Dr. Elam began her presentation by stating that she is interested in the cause/effect relationship of crime. She stressed that there are multiple causes of crime, most of which could be traced to the structural relations in society. America's *structural relations*, she articulated, gave rise to inequality, which separates people on the basis of race, ethnicity, wealth, etc., all of



which contribute to *structural discrimination*.

Elaborating on the concept of structural discrimination, Dr. Elam explained that societal inequality was created through discriminatory policies and practices such as enforced segregation and unequal access to capital, credit, political power and quality education. Discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and gender continue to further structural discrimination and inequality. Removing these discriminatory barriers will help neutralize inequality. Inequality, however, is hard to eradicate because of its visible and invisible dimensions. The visible dimensions can be addressed through serious political and economic policy considerations, not superficial solutions, as is common practice.

The invisible dimensions of inequality are more difficult to address because they are hidden within the institutional and structural relations of society. The defining institutions of society influence what is seen and unseen, and this includes problems such as crime. With regard to Black on Black crime, the multitude of causes must be investigated before arriving at a just and comprehensive solution. Crimes in the Black community vary by one's perception, "positionality," and world view, and these influence how we address and control the causes of this growing problem.

Dr. Elam noted that education is an important solution to Black on Black

crime. The acquisition of education by African-Americans would enable them to become better prepared for labor market participation, to compete for well paying jobs and becoming productive citizens.

Narayan Persaud, Ph.D

In his opening remarks, Dr. Persaud asked Summit participants to focus their attention on available statistics on crime as it relates to African-Americans. "A cursory examination," he stated, "reveals the following."

- 70 percent of all Black babies born today are born to single mothers.
- One out of every three Black males born today will be arrested and spend time in jail or prison.
- African-Americans make up more than 33 percent of all arrests in a given year. Four out of every five drug offenders arrested are African-Americans.
- Over 70 percent of motorists pulled over and searched by the police are African-Americans.
- African-Americans are approximately 12 percent of the nation's population yet they make up nearly 40 percent of the inmates in state and federal prisons.
- About 8.1 percent of Black males ages 25 to 29 are in state or federal prison.
- More African-American juveniles are waived to adult courts.¹

Referring to the above statistics, Dr. Persaud went on to explain the discriminatory patterns inherent in societal relations that gave rise to the overrepresentation of African-Americans in the prison system.

¹ Robertson, Matthew B. (2009). *Justice Blind? Ideas and Realities of American Justice* (3rd ed.) Prentice Hall.

Most African-Americans in jails and prisons today are arrested for drug or drug-related offenses. Drug dealers, pushers and users are not exclusively African-American, yet they are the most prosecuted and imprisoned group. Lack of access and opportunities to societal resources, coupled with varying levels of discrimination, have placed African-Americans at a disadvantage. Denial of access to capital, discrimination at all levels of education, lack of adequate legal representation and limited political representation have all contributed to rising crime rates within the Black community.

Dr. Persaud stressed that poverty and crime are complexly intertwined, and that while many *advocates* promote education as a solution to the problem, such a claim is too simplistic. Too many young Black children are labeled as having learning disabilities of some sort, neglected academically, or instructed in a mode that alienates them or impedes their learning. Culturally competent educators and culturally relevant instructional materials are not mainstays in our educational institutions, which must accommodate society's diverse cultural groups. Teaching a child how to read fluently and do math are not guarantees of future success. Environment, family, role models, etc., all influence educational success.

"What are the factors that influence a child's education?" Persaud asked rhetorically as he proceeded to identify the following:

- Parents' level of education
- Parents' occupation
- Family income
- Children's socialization
- Quality of preschool/school

The vast majority of Blacks in jails and

prisons today come from disadvantaged families headed by single parents with minimal income and low levels of education. "How is that for fostering educational success?"

Elderly Black grandmothers, revered by grandchildren and respected by their children, are seldom viewed as crucial in the fight against delinquency and crime. The influence and wisdom of these individuals should be utilized in the fight against crime in the Black community.

For many young Black men today, "a simple act as driving while Black can result in being stopped, searched, and arrested," said Persaud who then asked Summit participants to think on the following, which he cautioned would be radical and controversial, but—"I am not new to controversy. Controversy, if constructive, can be quite beneficial and result in profound changes."

- ◆ Are we criminalizing young disadvantaged parents through the welfare and child support systems?
- ◆ Why aren't "dead beat" moms and dads sentenced to vocational training that will make them employable and provide opportunities that will improve their lives, instead of jails and prisons?
- ◆ Why is our society willing to sentence



young disadvantaged men to boot camps for purposes of instilling discipline? Why not make military service an option in the discretionary sentencing process? The military not only instills discipline but offer opportunities for training, education and income. Serving the military used to be **mandatory**, now, prison is **mandatory** for certain crimes, and for longer durations.

DISCUSSIONS ON BLACK ON BLACK CRIME

In assessing the problem of crime in the Black community and proposing possible solutions, most of the Summit's participants focused discussion on the conditions that give rise to and sustain criminal activities, followed by a debate on initiatives that have and could be undertaken to address and resolve crime. Emerging out of the discussion and debate are five major criminal justices issues relating to the family, community, law enforcement, church and school, all linking back to each other in a dynamic display of aberrant social conditions and behaviors.

(i) Family: Summit participants agreed that Black families, especially disadvantaged families, are at a crossroad. The vast majority of these families consist of single parent households, which lack stability and other prerequisites for economic success in the rapidly growing and increasingly competitive global society. Rapid technological advances have distanced many poor Black mothers from labor market participation due to under education and/or lack of training. As a consequence, they are pushed further into poverty and dependency. Marginalized from mainstream society, such families have a greater

proportion of children who are:

- ✓ frequently abused;
- ✓ seldom socialized with educational success in mind; and
- ✓ overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Programs established to assist children from single parent Black families are frequently poorly conceptualized and inadequately funded. They regularly focus on the symptoms and not the causes that most likely lead to deviant and criminal behaviors.

(ii) Community: Disadvantaged Black communities, out of which most crimes emerge, lack stability. Employment opportunities are almost nonexistent, business establishments are scarce, and public schools are underfunded, poorly staffed and instructionally ill equipped. Extracurricular activities as outlets are sparse or nonexistent leaving the young to the negative influences of the street.

(iii) Community Policing: Community policing was trumpeted as a very effective form of crime control in depressed neighborhoods, especially by law enforcement officers. To be successful, community residents' "buy in" of this form of social control is crucial and often takes time and effort. While community policing appears to be simple on the surface, police-residents' suspicion and distrust can



be more deep seated, resulting in greater communal disruptions and disharmonies. Especially in situations where law enforcement officers conduct surveillance or arrest residents with some regularity, community residents often view officers as intruders.

(iv) Role of the Church: Even though the church has lost some of the control it once had in the Black community, religion continues to be integral to Black culture and Black life. Religion served as a solidifying force for Blacks during their times of great struggle and continues to be seen as an influential force in Black existence and solidarity. Religion has a vital role to play in the resolution of crime and delinquency in the Black community.



(v) Education: Education is very deficient in many disadvantaged Black communities. Too often young Black children are stereotyped, tagged with learning disabilities and marginalized in the public school system. As stated earlier in this paper, culturally competent educators and culturally relevant instructional materials are not mainstays in our educational institutions that must accommodate American society's diverse cultural groups. Denied quality education from preschool through high school, Black children are left behind academically. Many find themselves

unable to compete successfully in the labor market in their adulthood. Statistics on delinquency and crime have shown that low education level is strongly correlated with unlawful conduct.

Proposed Solution: Overall, Summit participants agreed that there is no single solution to delinquency and crime in the Black community. They proposed that any viable program, to be successful, must link the individual, family, community, education and religious institutions in an interwoven network of interrelated activities and services that focus directly on the problems of the individual and family as a unit. It should not focus solely on the at-risk individual, devoid of a familial or social context.

It was the recommendation of the Summit participants that the Bureau of Justice Assistance expand its funding guidelines and priorities to support programs that specifically target the family and its multi-faceted composition. The central premise of these programs should be to take an inclusive approach to strengthening the family structure. A particularly important aspect of this is the family's involvement and interaction with law enforcement and the community.

It was also the consensus of the group that a one day Summit format did not allow sufficient time to thoroughly discuss the five issues that were identified. The Summit participants also agreed that an additional summit should be held for three days in length to further discuss and identify a course of action and solutions appropriate for each of the areas.

APPENDIX

Crime Prevention in Black Communities SUMMIT AGENDA

May 25, 2010

Rosen Centre Hotel
Orlando, Florida

9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Welcome

Daniel Gilmore, Office of the Attorney General

9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Overview of Day, Group Introductions

Chris Watler, Project Director
Harlem Community Justice Center

10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Overview of Crime in Black Communities

Dr. Donna Elam, USF, FHRC

10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Overview of Crime in Black Communities

Dr. Narayan Persaud, FAMU

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m.

Group Discussion, Identification of Issues, Solutions

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Lunch (on your own)

1:00 pm – 3:00 p.m.

Group Discussion (Develop Consensus on Top 5 Issues/Solutions)

3:00 p.m.

Closing Remarks

Crime Prevention in Black Communities

SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

May 25, 2010

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Orlando, Florida

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Kameron Johnson

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Gordon Bazemore (JJRI) (part of the day)

Huberta Lowman-Jackson (JJRI) (part of the day)

Crime Prevention in Black Communities

SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

May 25, 2010

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Orlando, Florida

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Christopher Watler (FACILITATOR)

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BIOGRAPHIES

CHRISTOPHER WATLER

Christopher Watler is project director of the Harlem Community Justice Center, the community court in Harlem focusing on housing, youth crime, and offender reentry. As director, he oversees day-to-day operations and program development. Mr. Watler previously served as the Deputy Director of National Technical Assistance where he provided information and assistance on community justice initiatives to a broad audience, by leading site visits to the Center's demonstration projects, conducting training, providing hands-on assistance to jurisdictions developing community court and prosecution programs, assisting in the development of community justice curricula, and coordinating partnerships with model community justice programs. Mr. Watler has also served as part of the original planning teams for the Red Hook Community Justice Center and the Crown Height Community Mediation Center. Before coming to the Center, Mr. Watler worked as the Operations and Training Manager at the City Volunteer Corps and as a Community Center Director for the Union Settlement Association, where he supervised programs involving youth and seniors. He holds a Masters of Public Administration from John Jay College of the City University of New York.

DR. DONNA ELAM

Donna Elam is a nationally recognized authority in diversity and cultural competence training for governmental, business, community, and educational agencies.

Dr. Elam has received countless recognitions and awards at the state, national and international levels. In February 2003, she was selected as the recipient of the Prestigious Gandhi, King, Ikeda Award by Morehouse College (Atlanta, GA) during the International Committee of Artists for Peace Conference. She has also been given the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director's Award for her work as a member of the Attorney General's Hate Crimes' Working Committee; and most recently has been recognized by the United States Department of Education for her work in Youth Development and Student Achievement.

In January 2005, Dr. Elam was re-appointed by Governor Jeb Bush to serve a second four-year term on the Florida Commission on Human Relations (FCHR) and holds the Vice Chair position. The Commission possesses policy-making responsibilities to identify and eliminate unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, private clubs, and service at public lodging or food service establishments in the state.

Among her publications are *From the Schoolhouse to the Jailhouse: Can We Stop it?* and *Why They Marched: The Struggle for the Right To Vote* a civil rights book for children which has been recommended by both the Department of Education's "Just Read Florida" Reading List for Educators, as well as the Governor's Reading List for Black History Month. Dr. Elam holds two degrees from New York University, a Masters and Doctorate of Education; and a Bachelors of Science from York College in New York.

DR. NARAYAN PERSAUD

Narayan Persaud, Ph.D., is Professor and Chair of the Sociology and Criminal Justice Department at Florida A&M University (FAMU). From 1996-2006, he served as Director of FAMU Juvenile Justice Role Model Development Program (JJRMDP), a program he designed to educate and train students to become mentors and role models to disadvantaged African-American youth. During his tenure as director of the JJRMDP, Dr. Persaud accompanied and guided his student mentors in their fieldwork, travelling to several neighboring schools and disadvantaged communities, as well as juvenile courts, to provide needed tutoring and mentoring services to at risk African-American youth. Out of this experience came his book, *Mentoring With a Humane Face*. Dr. Persaud is also the author of *Guardian Angels Along My Homeless Path*, the real life experiences of one of his former undergraduate-graduate student.

Prior to becoming a professor at FAMU, Dr. Persaud served as a policy analyst with Florida's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability; and as a higher education analyst with the Florida Senate.



Office of Attorney General Bill McCollum



Report prepared by Daniel Gilmore and Yata Caine
Bureau of Criminal Justice Programs

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