

The Real Solution To Solving "Crime" Is Building Strong Communities

By: Laci Hamilton

It doesn't require much deliberation to realize that burglary, rape, murder and other harms have reached proportions in some American cities that make literally anyone a potential victim. Take slain 22 year old Detroit woman Christina Samuel, who was fatally shot on the city's east side around 11:45 p.m. on Christmas Eve 2014.

She was sitting in a car with her 24 year old friend, when two people wearing hooded sweat shirts walked up to the car and began shooting. Christina was shot multiple times and died at the scene; her friend's injuries weren't life threatening.

May of that year Christina graduated from Indiana Tech with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, she wanted to work with youth in probation and planned to get her master's degree.

Her pastor Theodore Peck Jr., of Miracle of Faith Ministries remembers hanging her report cards on the bulletin board at the church. She kept all A's, all the time. "She was a very intelligent young woman," Peck said. "She was a very honest, trouble free lady." A joy to her mother Tracey Toston, inspiration to her eight siblings, badge of honor to her community, murdered without provocation.

Though burglary, rape and murder aren't confined to inner city neighborhoods such as Christina's, it is concentrated there. And while most people, Christina's family included, call for greater police presence to address such dangers, conversely, when a neighborhood is marked by wanton harms, violent or otherwise, it reflects more on the quality and commitment of the residents than it does on the presence or lack thereof of law enforcement.
[Kwasi Akwamu]

While it is common for most people to demand an increase to police ranks in

an effort to combat predatory behavior, and for politicians to campaign on a platform promising to deliver more police, such a goal does not represent a sound and reasonable solution. Nor does sending everyone proven to be responsible for such actions to prison. Both police and courts are on the back end of the problem. Neither will bring Christina back, or will likely prevent others from being victimized. All this dysfunctional behavior is the consequence of a collapse of the community. So the question is: How do we reconstitute communities that have no resources, that have no jobs, that appear to have no future?

Kathleen Cleaver of the original Black Panther Party says that we cannot reconstitute communities without the use of resources that have been taken out of those communities. She agrees with Jesse Jackson, that there must be a Marshall Plan for America.

At the end of World War II, Europe was devastated. America did not say, "oh, well, Europe you must pick yourself up by your bootstraps, be responsible." No. America said, "we have wealth. We're going to rebuild this community." American inner cities are communities that have to be rebuilt and have to be invested in. The problem is, as law abiding and career determined as the Christinas of the world are, they don't have the political power to make this happen, and the corporations have no interest in making it happen; and the local, state and federal governments are in the pocket of the corporations.

So what we need is very fundamental change of political direction, in order to restructure communities. Meanwhile, we continue a lot of private small-scale things that people are already doing, because the situation is so immediate, critical, desperate. Develop block clubs, internal economies, skill banks, mentorships, neighborhood clean-ups, and invest in intellectual decolonization, a prerequisite for the creation of successful political decolonization and cultural reconstruction strategies.

Strong communities experience less internal predatory behavior. Developing

the internal strength of the community ultimately depends on restoring neighbors as the basic unit of the 'hood. It depends on our ability to create an atmosphere of unity and trust between one another, and to this end there are no ready-made models or path of least resistance. Members of their respective neighborhoods just have to get up and begin wherever there is general consensus. The people themselves have to agree that that's what they want to do and that there's nothing more important. With the understanding that building strong communities is generational work. Placing the destiny of any community in the hands of the law enforcement provides a disservice to this end. It is a passive and irresponsible approach to problem-solving, and a dead-end answer to danger and harm.

"Trying to convince a single mother of a young child that calling the police is not the answer to the open market drug dealing that has taken over her block," write Kwasi Akwamu, "isn't easy." And "without any other options she must call or wait the imminent danger that will clearly result if she ignores the situation." The main point I'm trying to make, is that the death of our young people, of any person, is unacceptable.

There are some real and extreme hardships in cities and neighborhoods all across America, many leading people to acts of desperation. In an atmosphere of alienation, where everyone in the neighborhood seems to be out just for self, people are going to seek a way out of their unbearable situation with the knowledge most accessible to them. If that knowledge is that it is not their responsibility to ensure there is a safe atmosphere that meets the mutual needs of all residents, they are going to continue to look to law enforcement to come in and sweep up the pieces of shattered lives. But if that knowledge includes that "crime" is the by-product of larger socio-economic problems, and that it is virtually impossible for us to successfully confront those socio-economic problems as individuals, the sooner we can begin to understand that the real solution to "crime" is building strong communities.

- - - - -

**Stop Snitching: Does it really reduce crime in the community?, 2010, Kwesi
Akuamu**

Interview with kathleen Cleaver: The Two Nations of Black America, 1997