

Homicide is the leading cause of death among young Black

The recent needless death of Redskins football player Sean Taylor spotlights the horror facing Black men in the United States. As tragic as the story of this young man and of countless others, as well the images produced by them are, homicidal death is nothing new to the Black community. Homicide is the leading cause of death among young Black men aged 18 to 34. Black men have the highest rates of death, incarceration, and unemployment in this country. While Blacks make up a mere 14% of young men in the U.S., they represent over 40% of the prison population. The percentage of young Black men in prison is nearly three times that of Hispanic men, and seven times that of White men. Not enumerated in that statistic are the countless numbers of Blacks on parole. In the backdrop of homicidal death (let's just call it what it is:



“Blacks killing Blacks”) is the poverty, lack of health coverage and the rising number of AIDS cases among Black people. According to the American Cancer Society, for all forms of cancer, Blacks are more likely to die than their White counterparts. While these facts and figures may cause distress, and they should, distress is not enough. I am tired of watching Black families – which, significantly, consist primarily of mothers alone – mourning the death of their children. As much as I would like to distance myself from the violence and the pain, my consciousness, and my sense of rationality, says enough is enough. These are our children. Our sons. Our citizens... And our responsibility.

We have traditionally erected memorials to honor those slain in war. I suggest we start erecting memorials in our Black communities across America. In June of this year I was in Washington, DC, and I had

the honor of seeing the War Memorials. I can recall standing at the Vietnam Memorial and having a sense of awe at the sacrifices paid by so many. I thought of our troops in Iraq, those fighting and those that have died, and I realized that we have not yet learned our lesson; war and violence is never the answer. Maybe if people could read the names of Black men slain on their city streets and hear their stories, concern would turn to action, and action to solutions. These young Black men are more than a statistical calculation. They each have a soul, and they must be taught to dream again. I am convinced that the prob-

lem will not be solved solely by the Black leadership or the Black community. This is a national crisis with national consequences. One cannot talk about Black homicide without addressing Black inequality, disparity and marginalization. We either get directly involved in the solution or we start building memorials, because Black men are vanishing. Michael Owens
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