

Black-on Black Crime: Crying With and For My People

There are two primary purposes for these reflections. First, is to bring greater awareness to a disturbing social problem which continues to negatively impact Black communities locally and nationally. Second, enhance reconciliation by offering comfort and hope to the many hurting and concerned citizens of our community. It is my heartfelt prayer that this will lead to a process of forgiveness and positive change in the lives of our youth and their families.

"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (Jer 8:20-22 KJV)

The woeful lament of Jeremiah resounds throughout the pages of his prophetic writings. With a face wet with tears, this Old Testament prophet's words bled with grief for the wounds of a community being destroyed without an awareness of a remedy. Like the horrible social ills which brought a sorrowful alarm to that sensitive and godly servant, the recent tragic deaths of young Black men have wounded a community of families and friends in rural West Tennessee.

Current research data show that Black-on-Black crime is a DAMNING reality in our community. According to government statistics, homicide is the leading cause of death among African-American males aged 15 to 34. Additionally, between 1976 and 2004, black offenders killed 94 percent of the Black murder victims. These statistics indicate that it is time to stop blaming "the white man" and take responsibility for our own community problems. Where is the moral outrage for the destruction of black youth at the hand of other black youth?

What Jeremiah saw and experienced in ancient Israel wounded him deeply. He cried out with his people and he cried for his people. As parents, educators, religious and civic leaders, are we willing to cry with and for the youth of our community? In rural West Tennessee, I was raised with a Christian worldview that enabled me to value and respect all life—friend and foe alike. I am crying out to every (of all ethnic background) parent, leader, educator, and citizen to reclaim the faith that has sustained our families and community in former days.

Ironically, as our nation and the world grapples with the tragedy of Ferguson and daily struggles of war and terrorism, the same cycle of violence and killing lurks on the quaint streets of small town Brownsville. While senseless violence and death are tragic in any cultural context, the devastating impact on the kinship bonds of small rural communities, like Brownsville, reverberates with intense and unrelenting pain. As with war, it is impossible to measure the hurt and suffering done to our families and children. As with war, healing will not come soon or easily. Yet, we must not linger in bitterness and revenge; rather let us labor together in humility and love to rebuild healthy children and communities.