

ged. These fears have created a self-imposed curfew for many—depriving citizens from their freedom of movement.

There has been a marked upsurge in the purchasing of home protective devices such as alarms, light timers that go on and off to appear that someone is home, and even bars on windows and doors.

Although both Black and White Americans share the same concerns for crime, Blacks are much more vulnerable. Black Americans' vulnerability is most alarming when we consider the incidence of violent crime. The National Center for Health Statistics reports that Black males between the ages of 15-44 have an extremely high probability of being murdered. In this age group, homicide is the second leading cause of death for White males but is the number one cause of death for Black males. NCHS further reports that the murder rate for Black men 15-24 years old is 66 per 100,000; the rate for White men in the same age group is 12.4 per 100,000. In the 25-44 age category the murder rate for Blacks is 106 per 100,000; for Whites—14.8 per 100,000.

There are a number of reasons why Blacks are subjected to far more crime than Whites. Studies such as the Figgie Report conclude that the roots of crime—especially Black on Black crime—are firmly implanted in their communities. Most crimes are committed by both Blacks and Whites within their own neighborhoods. As a rule, criminals do not drive miles away, commit an illegal act and return to their homes. A great number of crimes are executed within a one-mile radius of the perpetrator's residence.

In depressed areas, many Blacks who commit crimes are trapped in their communities with limited resources, hence limited mobility. The underlying pressures of high unemployment, mis-education and a pervasive mood of hopelessness and despair cause many Blacks to violently lash out at each other. Recently, the New York City Police Department reported that Black males were most often arrested

for murder and were also the most likely murder victims.

Low income Blacks and senior citizens are also more vulnerable to crime than their White counterparts. Many Blacks in depressed areas cannot afford the sophisticated electronic devices for crime detection and/or prevention that suburban Whites can easily obtain. In addition, many Black communities across the nation do not enjoy an equitable level of police protection. With budget cuts across the board for police departments nationwide, manpower is being reduced. There is an old saying in the Black community that the "Police are never around when you need them." This saying held true even when our police forces were adequately staffed. Today, however, even Whites complain of slow police response to crime in their own neighborhoods. Keeping this in mind, the outlook for police to aid law-abiding Blacks is very bleak.

Crime in America has reached such epidemic proportions that in cities throughout America both public officials and private citizens are examining the causes of crime and possible solutions. In the Figgie Report, 14 cities were profiled with each providing information about crime in their areas, its causes and how they plan to deal with it. Regarding crime causes, community leaders in the 14 cities cited seven major reasons.

At the top of the list is what is considered the **failure of the criminal justice system**. Many feel that those who are arrested for criminal behavior are not being punished sufficiently. There is a general attitude held by a large segment of the country that bail and parole policies, plea bargaining, court delays, judicial leniency and over-protected rights for the accused have created the notion that crime pays. This present attitude represents a direct about-face from the formerly held sociological approach.

Today, rehabilitation is being replaced with retaliation as a crime deterrent. Many feel that rehabilitation has been attempted but does not work. Police are being pressured to make

more arrests. Judges are being pressured to mete out stiffer sentences, and restoration of the death penalty and mandatory sentencing are becoming the cry of the land. While caught up in this fervor, few have seemed to notice that these measures have also been tried before (as with the rehabilitation method) and did not work either. For the most part, this hard-nosed approach will largely serve only to pacify the minds of those who clamour for such actions.

Dr. Edward Peeples, a medical sociologist at Medical College of Virginia, states, "Violence is nothing new—in the Middle Ages you could count on it that if you walked down a road, you'd get knocked on the head and your bag of money stolen. But now, we are angered by crime and think we should be shielded from it by the veneer of civilization."

U.S. District Judge Robert R. Meringe feels that too many people have been imprisoned. He feels that some—the career criminals—should be imprisoned but others only if they will be rehabilitated.

But what has developed as a result of public outcry is more arrests, more convictions and stiffer sentencing with decreased police manpower, judges to try cases and prison space to hold offenders. In short, the criminal justice system is having a nervous breakdown. Reaction has replaced action with root causes being only lightly attended to if not ignored completely.

**Loss of traditional family values** has been cited as another major cause of crime. Community leaders throughout the country blamed a lack of discipline, love, stability, support and supervision within the family. Many feel that moral training—once a prime responsibility of families, schools and churches—has completely broken down. Since most violent crimes are committed by youths, there may be some validity here. In Seattle, Washington, for example, 50% of street crime is committed by kids from 11-17 years of age.

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Women learning the use of firearms in St. Louis. Photo from the Globe-Democrat.