

Forum

Black-on-Black Crime: Statistical Warfare

A few years ago, I was a computer science student at Winston-Salem State University. One day, while sitting in on a probability and statistics lecture on the campus, the instructor, Professor Williams, demonstrated to the class the various interpretations that can be made from the numerical representation of the results of a single survey. I distinctly recall my amazement as she listed on the board the numerous items of information that one could glean from data that, on the surface, appeared to reveal only a few items of information.



GUEST COLUMNIST

By EDGAR A. SIMON JR.

I began to experience a profound suspicion of all the survey results that I had read over the years. This suspicion was accompanied by a certain sense of euphoria over the possibility that maybe, just maybe, the distrust that I'd always had for the so-called statistical facts regarding my people was, in fact, justified.

I visited the library the very next day, armed with my scientific calculator and a strong feeling of determination and anticipation to conduct a little research. My mission was to disarm what I unveiled, theretofore suspecting to be yet another of the disruptive myths which seem to dart along our paths to progress. After studying the various categories of information (or misinformation) and manipulating the available data, I was able to make a few rather interesting observations.

While the author chose (conveniently?) to compare the race-of-offender with nature of crime, I decided to compare race-of-offenders by race-of-victims of major, violent crimes. First, and with relative ease, I discovered that African Americans are reported to be responsible for approximately 53.2 percent of all violent crimes committed in the United States. Of this figure, approximately 51.3 percent are reported to have been committed by youths under 18 years of age. Furthermore, it was revealed that most crimes committed by African Americans are against other African Americans.

Now, a scant perusal of the statistics would have stopped there. However, this only scratched the surface of what was to be realized if one was to diligently scrutinize and compare the figures. A more in-depth analysis revealed that if a white person was to commit criminal homicide, the odds would be approximately 8 to 1 that the person murdered would be white. On the other hand, if an African American was to commit the same act, the odds would be 11 to 1 that the victim would be an African American.

What this, in essence, tells us is that both races used in that study tend to victimize members of their respective races considerably more frequently than did they members of the opposite race. This information should serve to allay the long-standing myth (one of many) that African

Americans, unlike other races of people, select members of their own race to victimize. And just think, these findings were made without having to use either the standard deviation or any of the more esoteric functions found on my calculator.

Now, let's take a closer look at the frequency issue. This takes us back to the aforementioned statement that blacks are responsible for approximately 53.2 percent of all violent

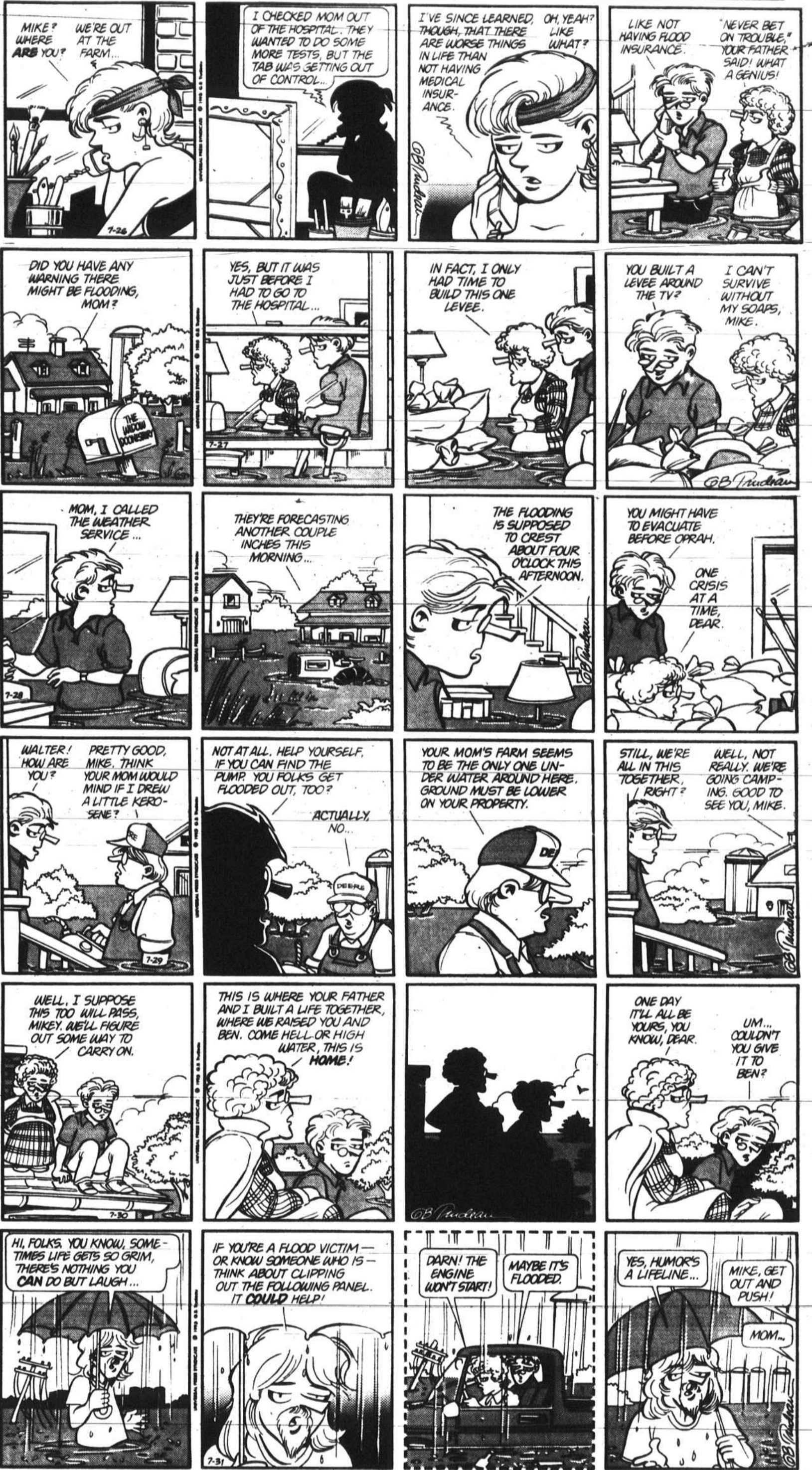
crimes committed in the United States. This is, to a great extent, a result of rage due to the incessant oppression, deprivation and abuse experienced by African Americans. This exposure has fueled frustration, desperation and the resultant hostility which leads to criminal activity.

Given the fact that there is a direct relationship to be found between the level of deterrence to the commission of an offense and the frequency of its commission, the additional ingredient of having the courts practice more leniency toward that individual who violates the rights of an African American than they do that individual who does same of a white person serves to explain the somewhat higher prosperity of African Americans to victimize other African Americans.

Additionally, the rationale behind the fact that a member of a given race who commits an offense is much more likely to victimize a member of his/her race is that we still live, to a great extent, in a racially segregated society. This translates into more social contact with one's own race. It is much more convenient to unleash one's anger or frustrations in one's own neighborhood than it is to drive across town.

In conclusion, the logic behind the statistics is not that African Americans concertedly seek out their own to kill or otherwise offend. We must work toward eradicating our gullibility to ideas and suggestions that we find difficulty in socializing and cooperating with each other. This gullibility serves as a never-fail schism which inhibits our ability to function more efficiently as a group. Subject any race of people to such abominations as those experienced by African Americans and note the results.

Because the bulk of statistical research that has been conducted on African Americans was not conducted by us, we need to be ever-vigilant and astute in our assessment of the published findings. We certainly should carefully evaluate any supposed findings which suggest that we as a people manifest perverted behavior, which the act of concerted selected of one's own kind to victimize certainly suggests.



Consider Race to Move Beyond Race

America seems to have trouble understanding that if it wants to move beyond racial considerations, it first must be race-conscious.

The reason is that race-based disadvantage is so pervasive and so much a part of our societal institutions that only by taking such race-conscious steps as affirmative action can we hope to level the playing field and create a society in which race can actually disappear as a factor that determines one's life-chances.



TO BE EQUAL

John E. Jacob

But adopting such a position takes a willingness to act on today's reality and not on theoretical suppositions.

The Supreme Court turned a blind eye to that reality in a recent decision challenging a North Carolina congressional election district designed to assure the election of a black representative.

By a slim 5-4 majority, the court sent the case back to the lower courts to determine whether the creation of a black-majority district to fulfill the mandates of the Voting Rights Act violated the constitutional rights of white voters.

That's about as strange an argument as I've ever heard from a court that consistently comes up with strange ones.

If white rights are violated by creating a district designed to send an African American to Congress, are not black rights violated in the overwhelming majority of districts that are designed to send a white Congress?

And although two districts in the state had black majorities, and other 10 had white majorities. So the 76 percent of the state's population that is white was in the majority in 83 percent of the districts.

The court was also exercised about the district's odd shape, although it has allowed such districts designed to elect Republicans or Democrats or farmers.

Shape only became an issue when it was designed to assure minority representation. Justice Stevens, in his dissent, was right to remind the court that the equal protection clause it

invoked to defend supposed white rights was framed to protect the rights of African Americans.

An irony in the North Carolina case is that

the conservatives who are against creating black-majority districts are the same ones who stuck daggers in Lani Guinier's nomination as head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

Yet it was Guinier who expressed doubts about such districts and sought to find other means of assuring minority participation in government.

I've never been enamored of such "safe" districts myself, since it is likely that African Americans would have more, not less, electoral influence if our votes were significant in several districts. That would give us more leverage in more districts, strengthen our ability to lead coalitions, and force candidates to campaign for our votes instead of ignoring us.

In fact, the push for black-majority districts came from the Reagan-Bush Justice Department, which sought to create safe seats for Republicans by eliminating likely Democratic voters from those districts.

Given America's history and its present discriminatory patterns, it is absurd for the court to make the case turn on supposed violations of white rights. Writing for the majority, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor argued that race-consciousness "threatens to carry us further from the goal of a political system in which race no longer matters..." That goal is one we all share, but unless society takes race-conscious remedies to correct for minority under-representation and for the efforts of discrimination, we will never achieve a society that moves beyond today's racial divisions.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

The Chronicle asked city residents whether they thought the judicial system treated equally blacks and whites in dispensing sentences. Here are their responses:



Jamestris Gaddy, 25
Hofheimer's

"I believe a lot of cases are weighed on (other cases) like [the Stoner case] when the D.A. was looking for the death penalty and didn't get it so they knew the next case there was heavy pressure on the community."



Walter Preston, 17
Burger King

"No, because look what they did to Rodney King. That wasn't right, so I think there should be more black people on the jury when they have black trials. If you have a lot of white people you're going to be guilty."



Charles Lee, 48
A & T State University

"No. As a police officer, I have been dealing with it for 13 years. You have a double standard, blacks deal with black-on-black prejudice and prejudice between blacks and whites."



Brenda Cain, 41
Life of Virginia

"No. Just from reading the paper you can see that they're not. I don't think people have changed as much as they say they have."