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FOCUS

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Somalia: Binding the Wounds of a Nation

With his inauguration, Bill Clinton has inherited several foreign crises. Prominent among them is Somalia, where U.S. military forces have been sent to support the United Nations' humanitarian efforts. Somalia is deserving of the assistance being provided by international aid programs. The country is in the throes of a continuing famine and still has not recovered from a brutal civil war; together these events have claimed tens of thousands of lives. The war has left the political infrastructure in ruins and the economy in shambles. Civil institutions have been replaced with warring factions. Anarchy and chaos reign where starving millions have been left to the mercy of roving gunmen who snatch food from the mouths of dying children.

Troops from the U.S. and other countries are in Somalia as part of a force to guarantee the transportation of food to those who need it. While laudable in its intent, this role is too limited. Recently, I had the privilege of joining Dr. Joseph Lowery, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and president of the National Black Leadership Forum, and the Rev. Leon H. Sullivan, chairman of the African-African American Summit, in urging the U.N. secretary general to join with the Organization of African Unity in bringing together representatives from Somalia's competing political groups. The goal would be to achieve long-term peace presided over by a viable indigenous government. This is the text of our statement:

The desperate and sad plight of the Somalian people, devastated by violence and starvation, has brought thousands of troops from the U.S. and other nations to "secure humanitarian operations." Without question, the critical needs related to starvation, the protection of relief workers and innocent Somalis demand extraordinary measures by the United Nations. While military intervention seems essential for the moment, we are painfully aware that military intervention will not resolve the long-term problems of anarchy, heavily armed and warring factions, and the need for a stable governmental structure.

A long-term solution to Somalia's crisis must be addressed through a civilian structure and force under the aegis of the United Nations. Such a force must include representatives of the political and ethnic factions of Somalia and should, in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, include statesmen from other African nations who enjoy the trust of Somalis.

Such a U.N. sponsored structure and force could:

1. Monitor the events guaranteeing the distribution of food and relief supplies, encourage restraint in the use of military force, and keep paramount the non-military character of the operation.

2. Bring together the competing factions for negotiations leading to transitional government and conflict resolution through peaceful means. (This might include an international peace conference.)

3. Seek ways and means of disarming the warring factions and dangerous bands through buy-back of weapons and other means, including the training of a Somalian police force.

4. Facilitate the expeditious withdrawal of military forces, save a U.N. peace-keeping force.

5. Enlist the participation of governmental and nongovernmental agencies in Somalia, other parts of Africa, and other nations to assist in conflict resolution education, technological and agricultural development, and the restructuring of a governmental and economic environment that works for the good of the Somali people.

We urge African Americans to offer their resources, skills, and talents both individually and organizationally to our brothers and sisters in Somalia. ■

Eddie N. Williams

PRESIDENT

FOCUS
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Wounded Killers

For Many Young People Trapped in Brutal Environments, Turning to Drug Dealing and Violence Becomes a Rite of Passage

by Claire Johnson

Marc (not his real name), an 18-year-old District of Columbia youth, says he started selling drugs when he was 12 to get the money he needed for a school field trip. A husky boy who then looked older than his age, Marc felt honored when an older drug dealer asked him to be an enforcer. In this new job, Marc employed his fists as well as bats and pipes on his victims. When he reached age 13, the dealer gave him a gun, which he admits he was a little scared to use at first. But after a few experiences shooting people, he adds, it became easy.

Marc has been convicted of one homicide and has had charges dropped for another, and he is periodically sought by police as a possible suspect in still others. Although he confesses to having shot at dozens of people, he does not know how many people he has actually killed. After he shot at them, he didn't wait around. Having spent several years in and out of juvenile detention and two years at the District's secure juvenile detention facility, the Oak Hill Youth Center, Marc says he does not want to be locked up again, and declares that he has changed his ways and no longer kills people. Now, he says, he pays others to do it for him.

Marc's story is not an isolated case. Across the nation, the incidence of homicide and the involvement of youth as both perpetrators and victims have increased dramatically in recent years, driven by the drug trade and widening access to handguns. Violent youths often come from dysfunctional families or dangerous neighborhoods, and many are sent at an early age to high-cost detention facilities where they are exposed to experienced criminals. It costs about $20,000 a year to incarcerate one inmate at Oak Hill. Ironically, being sent there is viewed by some young people as a rite of passage and a way of achieving greater prestige among one's peers. Often these youths return to the streets to commit more dangerous crimes than they previously committed.

The environment outside of detention centers can be hardening as well. A District of Columbia study reveals that many young people have been left disturbed and dehumanized by their frequent experiences as witnesses to or victims of violence—sometimes they become immune to the brutality or moral consequences of their own violent acts. Too many today live by a street code where murder is a common way to resolve conflicts. The great tragedy is that life for many District youths is a closed circle holding no prospects for a healthy, productive future.

Ms. Johnson is the director of the District of Columbia Criminal Justice Research Center.

Younger Killers, Younger Victims

As in other urban centers, homicides among youths in the nation's capital have steadily increased over the last two decades, climbing to 369 in 1988. For that year and each of the three years that followed, the District's homicide rate was the highest in the nation. However, the 452 homicides in 1992 were a slight decrease from 1991.

But as the rate of homicides has gone up, the average age of assailants and victims has gone down. According to Metropolitan Police Department data, in 1986, 38 percent of those arrested for homicide in the District were younger than age 25. By 1990, their proportion had nearly doubled—reaching 64 percent. The most dramatic change in these statistics was observed among assailants younger than age 18, who increased during the same period from a mere 6 percent of homicide arrests to 20 percent. A similar trend is evident among victims. In 1986, approximately 44 percent of victims were younger than age 30. By 1991, 65 percent were in this age range. The proportion of victims ages 18 to 20 also rose steadily during this period, from 6 percent to 19 percent.

The majority of homicides committed by youth today are drug-related. A decade ago the most frequent offenses for which youths were committed to Oak Hill were burglary, robbery, and unauthorized use of motor vehicles. There were few homicides and, of those, the motive was typically robbery. The role of drugs in altering the nature of youth crime cannot be overestimated.

A profile of some of the youths incarcerated at Oak Hill is part of a primarily statistical study of homicide in the District conducted by the District's Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Analysis. In order to get a non-statistical picture of this problem and better understand the changing dynamics of juvenile crime, interviews of some of the offenders were conducted in an attempt to learn more about their backgrounds and motivations.

The findings of the study are alarming. Most of the youthful offenders seem to have little awareness that there may be alternatives to their criminal actions and show no interest in changing their lifestyles or behavior. Most show no sense of remorse for the murders they have committed and accept the certainty of dismal and limited futures.

(Continued on page 4)

Killers

(Continued from page 3)

The 17 individuals interviewed were all black male youths sentenced to terms at Oak Hill for homicides. All of them had been involved in the juvenile justice system prior to their arrests for homicide—eight were first arrested at age 12 or 13 and four at age 14 or 15 for offenses ranging from drug possession to attempted murder. When they were arrested for homicide, seven were age 15, five were only 14. About half of them said they were attending school at the time, though not regularly, while half were not in school at all when arrested. None of them has graduated from high school—nine had completed seventh or eighth grade, six completed ninth or tenth grade and only one got as far as completing eleventh grade. Of the group, 13 said they were raised by their mothers or grandmothers—two said they raised themselves. Five of them have children of their own. And 13 of them said they have relatives in prison.

Violence is a regular part of the environments in which they live, and all have witnessed robberies, brutal beatings, and murder. Most said they themselves have been victims of parental "discipline," or beatings, as well as stabbings and shootings at the hands of others. A startling fact is that several of these youths were committed for more than one homicide and many claim that they have committed more than the one(s) for which they were convicted. Common among all of these youths was their involvement with drugs and carrying guns for "protection." All of the youths mentioned their involvement with drugs as if it were a foregone conclusion for their lives.

Kill or Be Killed

The apparent inability to conceive of alternatives to their way of life is an essential component of these youths' violent behavior. When asked why they killed, all but one answered simply that they did what they had to do, implying that they had no alternatives other than to kill or be killed. The motives for most of their murders involved conflicts over drug dealers' territories, stealing or protecting drugs or drug profits, revenge, or retaliation. Almost every youth interviewed believes that had he let his victim live, that person would have returned to kill him at another time. Rather than take that gamble, they brought an end to the uncertainty with their own weapons.

After killing a man to avenge the attempted murder of a friend, one youth said he went home to change his clothes and planned to go out to kill the two partners of his victim. He had concluded that his victims' associates would want to kill him, and sought to preempt their anticipated attack. He was arrested on his way to find them.

Another tenet in this subculture of drug dealing and violence is the concept of "having to kill" someone to preserve one's reputation. Several of those interviewed had killed to retaliate for the theft of drugs or drug money or for the failure to pay for drugs. There is an understanding among them that allowing a robbery or unpaid debt to go unchallenged shows weakness and is the same as announcing that you can be robbed or taken advantage of in the future.

One young man, who shot someone for attempting to rob him, said that he "had to kill him or people would have thought I was soft." He carefully explained that he believed robbery is wrong so he could not rob his victim for revenge and, even if he had robbed in revenge, this would have started a volley of retaliations until someone got killed. So, he said, he "just ended it before it started." When asked if they wanted to kill their victims or felt they had to, each invariably responded that he did not want to kill, but felt he had no choice.

Without Guilt or Remorse

The pervasiveness of violence in their lives seems to have numbed these youths to the moral implications of their acts. While most of them acknowledged openly that they killed one or more people, they considered themselves guilty only because the court adjudicated them as such, not because killing was wrong or they saw their murders as a violation of a moral code or criminal law. Several believed they should have been found not guilty because there were no credible witnesses or the evidence was not strong enough, in their estimation.

One youth had fatally stabbed a man who would not return his drugs to him, and had been sentenced to two years at Oak Hill after being convicted of second degree murder. He felt that his trial and sentence were not fair, claiming that he should have been found not guilty because no one saw the stabbing and, therefore, his trial was based on hearsay testimony.

Another concept these youths did not seem to grasp is that of premeditated murder. All but one youth considered their situations to be self-defense. Although all of these youths carried guns, they contend they did not have any particular plan to use them and, therefore, did not see their crime as premeditated. They carried guns "in case" they might need them.

Those interviewed had no sense of remorse for their crimes or sympathy for their victims. They regretted having killed someone insofar as their convictions and subsequent incarcerations had inconvenienced them. One youth was concerned that people might forget him while he was committed and another was "upset" that he was incarcerated "because it took a lot of my life."

When asked how they felt about killing or if they thought about the victims' families, most responded that they felt nothing and have no thoughts about the families. One youth said that he did not care about his victim because if he were the one who had gotten killed, his killer would not think about him. Another said he felt nothing when he killed and went out to eat afterwards. Several said that their only thought about the victims' families was to be prepared for the families' revenge. One youth said that he went to the funerals of his victims to certify that they were indeed dead.

(Continued on back page)

POLITICAL TRENDLETTER

The CBC—More Power and Influence

The clout of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has increased as a result of the November electoral bonanza which expanded its membership by more than 50 percent in the 103rd Congress. The placement of some black members of Congress on strategic House committees and the accession to important leadership positions by others, have also led to greater Caucus influence. One prominent example is the election of eleven-term Rep. **RONALD DELLUMS** of California to chair the powerful House Armed Services Committee left vacant by Wisconsin Democrat **LES ASPIN** who resigned to become Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration. During this Congress, the Committee will have to deal with such difficult post-Cold War issues as reducing the Pentagon budget, personnel downsizing, and the economic conversion of weapons plants, as well as deciding whether gays should be admitted into the armed forces. While a great deal of media attention has been paid to Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman **SAM NUNN**'s opposition to gays in the military, Dellums supports the decision of President **BILL CLINTON** to lift the ban on gays in the uniformed services.

Another member of the CBC who has ascended to a powerful leadership post is **LOUIS STOKES,** who takes over the Appropriations Subcommittee that writes spending bills for the Veterans Administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Independent agencies. For FY93, the appropriations bill for the agencies covered by this subcommittee totals $86.6 billion. Stokes joins California Rep. **JULIAN DIXON**, chair of the subcommittee on the District of Columbia, as one of the 13 Appropriations Subcommittee chairs known as the "College of Cardinals," who have jurisdiction over all federal spending bills. With the defeat or retirement of 110 incumbents, other black veteran legislators have taken advantage of massive vacancies to win assignments to important committees. **JOHN LEWIS** from Georgia and **WILLIAM JEFFERSON** from Louisiana have been assigned to the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee. And **LUCIEN BLACKWELL** from Pennsylvania has moved to the Budget Committee. Newly elected black representatives have also contributed to the expanded clout of the CBC. **CARRIE MEEK** of Florida has won a seat on the Appropriations Committee and **MEL REYNOLDS** from Illinois goes to Ways and Means. Both are considered prize assignments for freshmen. The CBC has already used its influence to block the elimination of the Africa subcommittee after the Foreign Affairs Committee attempted to reduce the number of its subcommittees to six, to comply with a directive from the congressional leadership. The Caucus will have to deal with many more substantive matters once President Clinton sends his budget plan, health care, welfare reform, and tax proposals to Congress.

The following is a list of CBC members of the 103rd Congress and their committee assignments:

Sen. Carol Moseley Braun (Ill)
Committee on Judiciary
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Committee on Small Business

Rep. Earl Hilliard (Ala-7)
Committee on Agriculture
Committee on Small Business

Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (Cal-9)
Chair, Committee on Armed Services
Committee on District of Columbia

Rep. Julian C. Dixon (Cal-32)
Committee on Appropriations

Rep. Maxine Waters (Cal-35)
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Rep. Walter Tucker (Cal-37)
Committee on Public Works and Transportation
Committee on Small Business

Rep. Gary A. Franks (Conn-5)
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Eleanor H. Norton (Delegate, District of Columbia)
Committee on Public Works and Transportation

Rep. Corrine Brown (Fla-3)
Committee on Public Works and Transportation
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Rep. Carrie Meek (Fla-17)
Committee on Appropriations

Rep. Alcee Hastings (Fla-23)
Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries
Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rep. Sanford Bishop (Ga-2)
Committee on Agriculture
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Rep. John Lewis (Ga-5)
Committee on Ways and Means

Rep. Cynthia McKinney (Ga-11)
Committee on Agriculture
Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rep. Bobby Rush (Ill-1)
Committee on Government Operations
Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs

Rep. Mel Reynolds (Ill-2)
Committee on Ways and Means

Rep. Cardiss Collins (Ill-7)
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Committee on Government Operations

Rep. William Jefferson (La-2)
Committee on Ways and Means

Rep. Cleo Fields (La-4)
Committee on Small Business
Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs

Rep. Albert Wynn (Md-4)
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs

Rep. Kweisi Mfume (Md-7)
Committee on Small Business
Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs

Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (Mich-14)
Chair, Committee on Government Operations
Committee on Judiciary
Committee on Small Business

Rep. Barbara-Rose Collins (Mich-15)
Committee on Public Works and Transportation

Rep. William Clay (Mo-1)
Chair, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service

Rep. Alan Wheat (Mo-5)
Committee on Rules

Rep. Donald M. Payne (NJ-10)
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Committee on Education and Labor

Rep. Floyd Flake (NY-6)
Committee on Small Business
Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs

Rep. Edolphus Towns (NY-10)
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Committee on Government Operations

Rep. Major R. Owens (NY-11)
Committee on Government Operations
Committee on Education and Labor

Rep. Charles B. Rangel (NY-15)
Committee on Ways and Means

Rep. Eva Clayton (NC-1)
Committee on Agriculture
Committee on Small Business

Rep. Melvin Watt (NC-12)
Committee on Judiciary
Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs

Rep. Louis Stokes (Ohio-11)
Chair, Committee on Standards of Official Conduct
Committee on Appropriations

Rep. Lucien Blackwell (Pa-2)
Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries
Committee on Public Works and Transportation
Committee on the Budget

Rep. Jim Clyburn (SC-6)
Committee on Public Works and Transportation
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Rep. Harold Ford (Tenn-9)
Committee on Ways and Means

Rep. Craig A. Washington (Tex-18)
Committee on Judiciary
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (Tex-30)
Committee on Public Works and Transportation
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Rep. Robert C. Scott (Va-3)
Committee on Judiciary
Committee on Education and Labor

CORRECTION. We would like to correct the error in last month's issue of *FOCUS* regarding former U.S. Senator Herman Talmadge from Georgia. Mr. Talmadge lives in Atlanta and spends his time, as he says, "hunting and fishing and reading."

◆◆ Celebrate Black History Month ◆◆
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Saving Our Children Through Love

Joint Center Conference Highlights Community-Based Programs Seeking to Reclaim Black Youth

by John G. Clemons

Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith vividly recalls one incident that occurred during her days as a surgery intern at Brigham Hospital in Boston: "I was learning how to do stitches, and a young man was admitted to the hospital at 3 a.m. This was one of the first times I would put stitches in someone who was awake. He started talking to me and I explained to him that it might take a little while. He was quite gracious in explaining what happened to him. It turned out he was at a party and danced with another's girlfriend and got into an argument, and the crowd egged them on. It turned into a fight and he was cut. At the time he was leaving, he turned to me and said, 'Now don't go to bed because the person who did this to me is going to be in this emergency room in about an hour and you're going to get all the practice that you need.'" It was a defining moment for Prothrow-Stith who then began developing the concept of adolescent violence as a public health issue.

This was one of several topics addressed at last month's Joint Center conference, "Reclaiming Our Youth: Challenges to Black Male Development," which focused on innovative approaches to solving the problems confronting our young people. "With the proliferation of community-based organizations, whose sole purpose is to address the problems peculiar to young black males, models of effective intervention need to be developed," Joint Center President Eddie Williams said. The directors and founders of a number of such programs were featured speakers during the day-long conference.

In her opening address, Prothrow-Stith, assistant dean of government and community programs at the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Harvard University School of Public Health, stressed the need for preventive measures to stem the rising tide of youth violence. "If that young patient were admitted as a suicide attempt, treated, and later said he would return for the same reason, we (doctors) would have responded very, very differently," she said. "Except for this issue of violence, prevention is very much a part of health care. Young Americans are killing each other in unprecedented numbers. This is a tragedy that is literally killing us."

According to Prothrow-Stith, the United States has the highest reported homicide rate among industrialized countries which have stable governments and are not at war. Most of the victims are young men, and at least 20 percent of these homicides are between family members and acquaintances, with drug use and handguns as associated factors. "A concealed gun or knife has become as common an accessory as a pocket comb. In no other country do teens kill each other for such trivial reasons—a jacket, a pair of sneakers, a misconstrued glance." Television and movies also compound the problem, she said, by presenting "superheroes who are always successful, always rewarded, and always winning. They never lose, show guilt, remorse, or shame." These nearly constant images have raised Americans' level of tolerance and, quite often, acceptance of violence as a societal norm in this country.

Prothrow-Stith noted that her research comparing the U.S. and other countries' crime statistics reveals that violence is more an issue of poverty than race. However, in the United States, black male youth tend to bear the brunt of this swelling wave of violence. "We've got a problem, and it's a big problem that is currently not being addressed by our criminal justice strategies.

"More police, more street lights, and stiffer sentences will not have an impact on two people who know each other, who get into an argument while drinking or using other drugs, and who have a handgun. We need some other strategies to add to that equation...Even in communication with our own children, we are ambivalent or actively promoting this issue of violence." She noted that to a child who has had his toys taken from him by another child, we say, "'You go out and get those marbles. I don't care how you get them, but you get them.'"

Addressing this issue of violence, suggests Prothrow-Stith, requires looking at violence as a public health problem, one involving strategies which have been useful in preventing heart disease, drunk driving, or smoking. These strategies, she explained, encompass education, information, behavior modification, community intervention, and participation, and, in particular, a movement encouraging nonviolence in interpersonal relationships. "We'll get there because there are so many grassroots efforts that eventually they will coalesce, and the intellectual leadership and the programmatic activity will be there. But it won't be easy," she said.

Eye-to-Eye, Child-to-Man

Dealing with the paucity of black male role models has been the basis for establishing several community

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Mr. Clemons is vice president for communications at the Joint Center.

Black Youth

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programs. Dr. Spencer Holland, director of the Center for Educating African American Males at Morgan State University in Baltimore, is the developer of Project 2000, which he called a "stop-gap measure for male-to-male instruction." It provides black role models in first, second, and third grades through volunteer instruction. The program is currently available in one school in southeast Washington, D.C., and three inner-city schools in Baltimore.

"It doesn't take a Ph.D. to know our young boys are dying from a lack of attention. That's what they need, unconditionally," said Holland, a developmental psychologist, explaining why the program was created in 1990. "The first thing I tell these boys," explained Holland, a Project 2000 volunteer himself, "is I'm here because I love you. I tell other volunteers to get to their (boys') level. They need to see that there are loving, caring men out there. These children are impressed—'These men are here to help me, to teach me to read and write.' Eye-to-eye, child-to-man contact is what's missing."

He explained that, in grades one to three, black boys are hesitant or won't respond to a female teacher who may ask them to follow their example during games, exercises, or group activities. Holland claimed some black boys cannot identify with the feminine gestures or movements associated with such classroom activities. "Then Miss Jones has to decide, 'Is he not doing it because he can't do it, or won't do it?'" It is a lose-lose situation that can have an adverse impact on black boys as they grow older. Since its beginnings, Project 2000 has been under scrutiny from educators and critics alike who question the program's effectiveness and its exclusive focus on black boys. But early results from a 1991-92 school year evaluation conducted by the Institute for Urban Research at Morgan State University indicate that Project 2000 is making a significant, positive difference toward strengthening the bonds among black males—young and old.

Rites of Passage

Black male-to-male relationships are also key to a structured program called SIMBA (Inc.), based in Oakland, California and founded in 1988 by its president and chief executive officer Roland J. Gilbert. He said SIMBA, a Swahili term that means "young lion," provides boys with leadership, role models, and specific training in what it means to be an African American man. According to Gilbert, SIMBA's purpose is "to empower them to take responsibility for how they think, feel, and act." The adult volunteers commit to work with children for the 12-year period from ages 6 through 18, and they must complete 66 hours of rigorous training in program planning, leadership skills, and how to effectively communicate with black youth. At 12 years old, the boys begin a specialized one-year "rites of passage," leading to what Gilbert believes to be the start of manhood.

Joseph E. Marshall's approach to achieving the same results might best be characterized as "tough love." The co-founder and co-director of the Omega Boys Club of San Francisco explained that his organization is in the trenches with hardened, disillusioned teenagers who live in communities where drugs, crime, and joblessness leave little room for hope. "Omega wants to deliver brothers from mental slavery," he stated. "Once you've got them to think, you've got a chance." That chance is realized through a programmatic core of daily group sessions, one-on-one discussions, and reality-based goal-setting.

In a presentation that served as a warning, a call for public support, and a case study on law enforcement, newly appointed Washington, D.C., Police Chief Fred Thomas said, "We need to change our perspective. We are on the verge of losing one or maybe two generations of young people. Parents have to take more interest in their children. They have abdicated this responsibility. I don't think for one minute that we have mobilized ourselves to help our young people."

Positive Beginnings

Thomas offered several recommendations to help and possibly save black youth—putting federally-funded Head Start and other early learning programs in every public housing complex. "It's in the beginning that children feel good about themselves," Thomas said. "As soon as they can read, flood them with books!" He also called for pooling existing community resources and programs such as YMCAs and Boys' and Girls' Clubs; more proactive outreach by churches, and colleges and universities; and national gun control ("We must teach our children to resolve differences without resorting to violence.").

Thomas said the District's police department is currently being sensitized to meet the needs of its largely black constituency. "We want to recruit and hire those who want to be community servants so everyone will be treated with respect. If not, we should fire them. We need to teach our officers not to be violent themselves because a lot of them come from violent environments." He suggested a move toward "community empowered policing"—an officer is assigned to a regular neighborhood beat where he can use positive intervention to curb violence among youth. In addition, Thomas said the police department has hired an outside consultant to counsel and train officers on non-threatening, positive methods of working with and assisting black youth.

The majority of the programs designed to help youth, particularly black males, are relatively new but early analysis of them are encouraging. The Joint Center's conference shed light on a variety of grassroots, community-based approaches to a growing problem. Still, more strategies must be developed and more programs put in place. Children's issues are expected to move to center stage through the influence of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, but the conference speakers agree that the solutions must first come from the African American community itself. Said Spencer Holland: "It takes the village to raise the child." ■

Food Security and U.S. Aid to Africa

U.S. Food Aid Is Only a Short-Term Response to the More Serious Problems of Poverty and Decreased Agricultural Production in Africa

by Winston J. Allen

Today, in a continent plagued with extreme poverty, more and more Africans are finding it difficult to satisfy their basic human needs, including food consumption. The Food and Agricultural Organization estimates that 44 percent of all Africans do not consume enough calories to sustain an active working life, including 25 percent who do not have enough food to prevent malnutrition and stunted growth among children.

The World Bank estimates that 25 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa in both urban and rural households is "food insecure" where the "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life" is insufficient. The World Bank and the United Nations World Food Program have reported that the need for food aid to Africa will become critical in the 1990s. Citing Africa's limited ability to finance the commercial importation of food, the organizations have stated that without further aid the number of undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa will increase from 142 million in 1983-85 to 200 million by the year 2000.

The fundamental cause of hunger on the continent is poverty—the poor simply do not have access to land or employment. The number of poor in Africa was estimated in 1991 by the United Nations Development Program to be about 360 million people. Their poverty is exacerbated by their countries' inability to either produce or import adequate stocks of food for their populations. Rapid population growth, drought, civil wars, and misguided economic policies have resulted in stagnating or declining agricultural output in sub-Saharan Africa where per-capita production has dropped during the last decade. And few African nations can provide rehabilitation support or safety nets during or after catastrophic events such as drought and war.

Responding to Crisis

The drought of 1968-1974 in the Sahel region of West Africa dramatized sub-Saharan Africa's poverty to Americans. Established private relief organizations were flooded with donations and new organizations were formed to both encourage and channel the flow of funds to drought-stricken areas. In general, however, sub-Saharan Africa has not received a high priority in the development assistance policy of the United States. In 1992, the entire region received $878 million in U.S. foreign aid obligations, compared to $815 million received by Egypt and $1.2 billion received by Israel. By contrast, France, Germany, and Japan contributed a much larger proportion of their development assistance to African countries.

Moreover, foreign aid from the United States over the years has been tied to diverse and sometimes conflicting objectives, including opposition to Marxist or leftist governments. However, now that Soviet expansionism is no longer a threat in Africa, U.S. foreign aid should once again focus on basic human needs. Attention need no longer be limited to political allies, as it was during much of the Cold War era. If the U.S. were to reduce support for Africa, it would be unwise strategically as well as morally. As John W. Sewell, president of the Overseas Development Council, pointed out, "The continuation of poverty in the developing world is not only a humanitarian concern, [but] also poses a serious threat to the long-term economic and physical security of the post-cold war world."

Over the years, the U.S. government has responded to Africa's food crisis through the "Food for Peace" program, Public Law 480 (PL-480), enacted in 1954, America's largest foreign food assistance program. The program is administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development which channels assistance to needy countries through several private voluntary organizations based in the U.S. In 1990, out of $956 million these organizations received from the agency, 27 percent was from Food for Peace.

While this program may alleviate the short-term food crises, a long-term solution must be achieved through other means. Sharon Pauling, policy analyst for Bread for the World, a private food assistance program based in Washington, D.C., says, "In the long run, Africa needs to base food security much more on the resources of the continent itself, and much less on imports and food aid." Several U.S. voluntary organizations provide development aid to sub-Saharan Africa, but their efforts are likely to be more effective if they work in partnership with indigenous African voluntary groups toward the goal of sustainable human-centered development.

Responding to the need to redirect American policy, President Bill Clinton said in a speech during his election campaign that he "will reorganize and redirect [U.S.] foreign assistance programs...stress[ing] not only sustainable development but also the development of skills, of values, and the institutions of free societies." Fulfilling these objectives could be a prescription for improved food security in sub-Saharan Africa, and for achieving the goal of sustained development. ■

Dr. Allen is a research associate at the Joint Center.

Killers
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The Future Is Past

The majority of the young men interviewed seem unable to visualize changing the circumstances of their lives—few even want to. They appear to have little understanding of the concept of the future. When asked, "What are your thoughts about the future?," several youths asked for an explanation of the question. Most seem to understand how their past behavior and the environments where they were raised related to their present circumstances. But few are able to project what their lives will be like in the future. More importantly, they seem unwilling or uninterested in changing the direction of their lives.

Almost all planned to return to their original neighborhoods and friends. Most said they would carry a gun again for protection. Most of them seem resigned to futures that are reenactments of their pasts even though they recognize that this will almost inevitably lead them to prison or death. Even among those few who expressed regret for having killed someone and those who said they had learned at Oak Hill how to be positive, responsible, and productive, there was a consensus that they would commit the same murders if faced with the same situations. Their hope for the future is that they will not get into the same situation again, as if deferring to fate rather than self-determination.

The most decisive of the youths interviewed consciously accepted the fact that his future would mirror his past. He said that when he leaves Oak Hill he will return to a life of crime "because there is too much money out there to make." He said he will sell drugs or rob to make enough money to take care of himself, and then added, "I'll be OK until I die."

Prevention Not Detention

The original crime was not committed by these youths, but against them in their earliest years. All of them are victims who were wounded—physically, emotionally and spiritually—by overexposure to atrocities and brutal experiences that most people can only imagine. They were left unprotected from abuse and neglect, without healthy adult guidance or role models to steer them past the snares and perils of the streets. Each of them is in desperate need of healing. Yet too often the way our society deals with youths like these is soley through the juvenile justice system, which commonly incarcerates them at great expense when they are as young as 13 or 14, rather than by supporting more child development and delinquency prevention programs or other forms of intervention.

Youths like the ones interviewed require a commitment of resources, time, and energy that is extensive, comprehensive, and long-term at every juncture in their lives. When families fail, community organizations, government agencies, and an improved juvenile justice system must operate in their stead—to provide what is missing, attempt to repair what has been damaged, and redirect what has gone astray. Those working to respond to this crisis must not overlook the critical insight to be gained from the youths themselves. We have much to learn from them. For those tempted to write them off, it should not be forgotten that for every youth released from Oak Hill and similar institutions today, there are at least two more on the street ready to replace him tomorrow. ■

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